Media literacies: a critical introduction, by Michael Hoechsmann and Stuart R. Poyntz

Rebecca Zak

Faculty of Education, Brock University, St. Catharines, ON, Canada


To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1554480X.2012.685799

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.
mention Grenfell’s concluding summary of the three general characteristics of classroom language ethnography because it can serve as a useful and practical metric for researchers who wish to gauge their work by this standard. The three characteristics are given below.

(1) The research must be empirical and clearly embedded in a specific time and place.
(2) The research must be reflexive: in other words, a researcher must consider and reveal how his or her own interests and experiences relate to the language classroom.
(3) The analysis must be relational: it must consider the relationship between habitus and field; between large scale economic, cultural and political contexts and the language used in an educational setting; between the agent and the institution; and among the individual participants in the field.

Language, ethnography, and education: bridging new literacy studies and Bourdieu is a rich and challenging work that presents a detailed examination of the shifting perspectives within the academic literacy community over the past 50 years while at the same time pointing out a way forward for literacy scholars. Despite the multiple authors and divergent theoretical positions that it brings together, the book as a whole manages to feel cohesive and singularly focused. It is an important resource for all those who believe that in order to research the spaces in which literacy and schooling intersect, one must be willing to enter fully into the tangled ecology of classroom literacies and be fully cognisant of the ways that entry reshapes the very ecology under study.

References

Anne J. Peel

*Graduate School of Education, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, USA*
apeel@eden.rutgers.edu
© 2012, Anne J. Peel

http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1554480X.2012.685798


*Media literacies: a critical introduction* (hereafter referred to as *Media literacies*) offers a timely analysis of the pertinent issues that arise in what can by now be described as our daily digital lives. Authors Hoechsmann and Poyntz look deeply into the popular assumptions, debates and areas of critical importance related to media practice and pedagogy, particularly with respect to youth. The overarching argument presented is that media does
not occur in a vacuum – it is both shaped by real life as it asserts its own influence on real life. And because it is now more ubiquitous than ever, it is necessary that learners develop the competencies required to engage with it: through engagement (as a consumer and/or a producer) comes agency. Throughout the text, a fine balance is struck between the arguably more obvious aspects of media literacy and the lesser known; familiar territory of television and video gaming is covered before delving into more recent participatory media trends, such as social networking and remixing. Given this genealogy, the reader can appreciate how knowledge production itself (including how we identify with ourselves, others and the world) is in constant flux, in correlation with technological evolution.

Educators, administrators and post-secondary students especially will find that Media literacies provides a comprehensive and informative view in a somewhat dense but nonetheless extremely well-articulated and coherent manner. Each of the eight chapters is edited in a way so that it could stand alone; reference information in the footer of each new chapter suggests that the text may be read in chunks; however, topics have been organized with a sense of flow so that the book also reads smoothly from cover to cover. Also, excerpts of several additional authors’ scholarly writings are placed in strategic places throughout the book to allow for multiple perspectives to be heard (e.g. Bragg, Campbell, Cucinelli, Grimes, among others). Finally, illustrative examples are cited continuously from chapter to chapter to contextualize the points raised and provide clarity. Media literacies is an academic and accessible read.

Chapter 1 begins with a general discussion of what media literacy is, situating its relevance and importance in twenty-first century education. Recognition is paid to the difference between what students are currently able to learn and utilize with regard to media at home, compared with their generally less-equipped classrooms. Students growing up today are referred to as “digital natives”, whereas their elder teachers who have not always grown up in a digitally advanced world are referred to as “digital immigrants” (p. 7). As Hoechsmann and Poyntz discuss, the ideas and concepts that constitute literacy at present are indeed so radically different than even just a decade ago, they suggest that new terminology may be in order: they offer the term “mediacy” (p. 15) instead.

The discussion continues in Chapters 2–6 with an examination of the effects of media in socialization, acculturation and intellectual formation of young people. Considerations include children as a targeted consumer group, implications of class inequalities on media use and possible correlations between media consumption and behaviour. Attention is drawn to the fact that the media acts as a looking glass for sociological ideology, to which the argument is made that when youth have the ability to produce media, they come to understand how technology is manipulated to interface with the world, and it is this knowledge that fosters agency in young people. Rightly so, the authors advocate that youth be given opportunities to develop their skills through hands-on trial-and-error experimentation using a variety of media applications. They argue that because of the digital native/immigrant divide, it is illogical for teachers to dictate to students what and how they should learn. Instead, it is the teachers’ duty to foster explorations and to supplement what students know about media with a keen sense of how they can use it to engage with issues and concerns of their choosing. This way, Freirean educational ideals are attained: both student and teacher are positioned as co-learners in the re-creation of the world around them.

It should not come as a surprise that a book classified as a critical introduction to media literacies advocates moving beyond traditional reading and writing as the basis for teaching and learning. Media literacies expertly articulates how other modes (e.g. sound, image) that are inherent in many new media functions effectively communicate with and engage
It is ironic then that *Media literacies* itself is delivered solely through the printed word. The fact that the virtues of multi-modality and participatory culture are extolled within the mono-modal confines of the oldest “technology” (i.e. a book) suggests at least subliminally that for some audiences, the printed word is still champion. Considering that Hoechsmann and Poyntz demonstrate so well that literacy is evolving, and that learners typically lack the political voice to advocate for their media practice, the question then becomes, “Why not poise *Media literacies* for consumption by the digital natives themselves?” Perhaps a second edition of this book could assume a digital format geared towards the younger audience this text ultimately aims to serve.

The text goes on in the final two chapters to discuss the new affordances and complex competencies associated with remix culture, which Lessig (2008) describes as a “society which allows and encourages derivative works” (p. 56). Though remix (copy-pasting to create something new) is a relatively new phenomenon in a digital sense, and may at first be seen as counter-cultural because it defies traditional assumptions about copyright and intellectual property, there are various motions in place that rethink these issues so as to support new appropriated creative work. For example, Cucinelli (cited in Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 2012) discusses “Creative Commons, a non-profit organization devoted to promoting ‘copyleft’ licensing and building a community where people share and build upon the work of others” (p. 181). Again, it is ironic that although *Media literacies* recognizes the creative and intellectual advantages of a “copyleft” approach, its legal page explicitly admonishes against reproduction of any sort: “No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocoyping, recording, or otherwise, except as permitted by UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988” (p. iv). In their defence, the authors do point out that it takes approximately 12 years for systemic changes to really catch on and take effect, so perhaps this is an area in which the kinks have not yet been worked out.

Moving on, *Media literacies* provides teachers with a helpful framework for understanding what young learners are doing in their digital engagement. “The seven Cs of contemporary youth media practices” (p. 153) explains what guides and shapes the twenty-first century learners’ media experience. In summary, this includes: consciousness (performing online identities), communication (fostering plurality), consumption and surveillance (marketing to youth), convergence (combined use of media platforms), creativity (learning through play), copy-paste (remixing) and community (emphasizing collective intelligence). Perhaps an eighth “C” could also be added to the list: conciseness. Doyne and Epstein Ojalvo (2011) discuss how brevity (particularly in writing) is advantageous given how writing culture is changing because of technology. Text messages and Twitter feeds with limited character counts have made verbosity a thing of the past, so to ensure viewer engagement from start to finish, especially in a digital respect, conciseness is king. However many Cs one counts, the framework is a handy mnemonic device, either way.

Ultimately, *Media literacies* holds convincing arguments and weighty considerations that amount to major, important implications for education, now and in the future. That being the case, the authors’ primary recommendation is for media literacy to assume an increased role in school curricula worldwide. As Hoechsmann and Poyntz demonstrate, media practice is sufficiently academic and promotes critical citizenship, agency and empowerment – qualities that all teachers are sure to agree are highly laudable educational outcomes.
References


Rebecca Zak

*Faculty of Education, Brock University, St. Catharines, ON, Canada*

rebecca@rebeccazak.com

© 2012, Rebecca Zak

http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1554480X.2012.685799