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Scaffolding Curation: Developing Digital Competencies in Media Literacy Education

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Abstract

This chapter focuses on the concept of curation as a student- and creation-driven pedagogical tool to enhance digital and media literacy education. Specifically, it will unpack the phenomenon of curation as a pedagogical model for enhancing civic engagement, community, and purpose within social media platforms. Online curation—an increasingly common way to refer to the act of organizing various content into cohesive online stories—has taken numerous forms in recent years. Media organizations are increasingly integrating such tools into their web presence, most recently seen by the *New York Times*, *NPR* and the *Washington Post* utilizing *Storify* curation software for multimedia stories; and *Al Jazeera*, *CNN* and others integrating Twitter into their regular online programming. Curation is also being explored through remix—the sharing, repurposing, or re-appropriating of content online—as a function of creative commons and copyright, and in terms of cultural production and social structure. This chapter will build a framework for curation as it builds on existing models for digital and media education and remix culture. It will develop curation as a foundational media education competence to teach students about responsibility, purpose, and participation in social media spaces.

Introduction

In 2010, the Knight Foundation published a report entitled *The Needs of Information Communities*. The report explored how public communities function in information societies and recommended a series of methods for enhancing communities with online tools that enable dialog, interaction, and action-oriented behavior. More than a year later, media literacy scholar Renee Hobbs (2010) published a report titled *Digital and Media Literacy*, which explored the needs of educational bodies to integrate more structured approaches toward teaching and learning with digital and mobile media technologies.

These new reports are largely a response to a growing shift in how individuals are using information to suit their personal, political, and community needs. In light of this new information landscape, there has been much scholarship exploring how social media platforms and mobile media technologies are shifting collaboration (Shirky, 2008; 2010), participation (Jenkins, 2006, 2008; Bennett, 2008), and learning (Buckingham, 2007; Hobbs, 2010; Ito, 2010). As youth embrace participatory and collaborative technologies to facilitate a majority of their

information and communication needs, how educators create dynamic approaches to teaching and learning about information online can have significant influence on the participatory culture of youth. Most notably, because today's media and communication landscape is saturated with an abundance of facts, sources, and perspectives, teaching youth a critical approach to managing—or curating—this wealth of content is paramount. Both the Knight Foundation and Hobbs's reports innovatively examine the changing communication habits of a digital culture, but sometimes to move forward we must look to the past. In this case, the longstanding art of curating serves as a tool for anchoring contemporary media literacy models, re-envisioning media education, and engendering youth participation in the digital age.

This chapter focuses on the concept of curation as a student-centered pedagogical tool to enhance digital and media literacy education. Specifically, it will reimagine curation as a pedagogical model for enhancing engagement, community, and purpose within social media platforms. Online curation—an increasingly common way to refer to the act of organizing various content into cohesive online stories—has taken numerous forms in recent years. Curation is also being explored through remix—the sharing, repurposing, or re-appropriating of content online—as a function of creative commons and copyright (Lessig, 2008; Benkler, 2005), and in terms of cultural production and social structure (Cheliotis & Yew, 2009; Dybwad, 2005; Diakopoulos, 2008).

This chapter will conclude by presenting a scaffolding approach to curation pedagogy that adds to existing models for digital and media education and remix culture (Mihailidis, 2011). It will develop curation as a foundational media education competency to teach students about responsibility, purpose, and participation in social media spaces.

Curation, engagement and digital culture

Curating—both as an art and organization method—allows the curator to tell a story across mediums. The art of curating generally refers to the selection and maintenance of records or items into a related collection, but in the case of visual communication, this often means gathering information across a multitude of mediums. In a digital culture, curation occurs when consumers scour digital media for the best or most relevant content, collecting it for their own personal and social use. As Bergdoll (1998) explains, curation happens when “arguments and insights are made with objects and images rather than primarily with words but also because collaboration is an inherent aspect of the process from conception

to installation” (p. 257). Just as the museum curator addresses the negotiation between content and display, so, too, must the digital curator navigate the aggregation, presentation, and stylistic display of online content (Bergdoll, 1998). Recently, prolific use of online aggregation software has put the task of curation into the hands of the everyday digital citizen. Storify, Reddit, and other online tools allow users to make sense of a multitude of information sources in a flexible, personal manner. In doing so, we see how online curation is now, in the digital age, an ongoing endeavor that is constantly recreated, remixed, and re-appropriated (Lessig, 2008).

While the digital age makes curation an exciting and potentially endless exercise, the abundance of data from news and social media requires users to internalize their own story narrative before communicating online. This mimics responsible forms of literacy, as Hobbs explains (2010): “[P]eople need to have a good understanding of how knowledge is constructed and how it represents reality and articulates a point of view” (p. viii). Curators, just like journalists, must juggle audience expectations and demands with obligations regarding the authenticity and accuracy of content. In doing so, “the act of curating creates not only the narrative, but also the conversation” (Mihailidis & Cohen, 2013).

Online participation, whether as digital curator or consumer, facilitates increased awareness and civic voice. As social media becomes a more significant part of daily information and communication needs, educators at all levels are tasked with helping students negotiate their digital and real time efforts so that traditional skills of critical inquiry, evaluation, and analysis are applied across all mediums (Jenkins, et. al., 2009). Similarly, as media use increasingly requires exploration and organization of myriad data across websites and platforms, the task of curating information is paramount to learning.

Why curation matters for digital and media education?

Youth today enter the classroom with a heightened sense of digital familiarity (Prensky, 2001; Rosen, 2010). While this familiarity has been challenged in terms of its value for youth (Thomas, 2011; Bayne & Ross, 2007; Bennett et al., 2008; Bowman et al., 2010; Brown & Czerniewicz (2010), and does not necessarily mean that youth will be more competent media users, (Hargittai, 2005; Jones et al., 2010; Kennedy et al., 2008), it does reflect a shifting approach to how we think about teaching and learning in a digital age. At the same time, as digital media increasingly grow central to learning competencies of contemporary society,

models for teaching and learning must now incorporate more diverse, integrated, and dynamic models for social and digital media platforms. These models, placed in the context of media literacy, can enhance the value of curation for youth empowerment in a digital culture (Kuiper & Volman, 2008; Sanchez et al., 2006; Taboada & Guthrie, 2006). By emphasizing thoughtful selection and circulation of information, curation supports a higher order of media consumption that embraces media literacy's basic ideals while also predicating the overall experience on an expectation for significant citizen engagement. Put more simply, when curating becomes a central focus in media literacy education, the impetus for citizen action and response is reinforced.

The emerging media literacy landscape is one that is more fully integrated into the competencies needed for digital learners of an information age. Media literacy is premised on promoting critical thinking skills through the ability to access, evaluate, analyze, and produce information. (Aufderheide & Firestone, 1993; OFCOM, 2005; Potter, 2010; Silverblatt, 2001; Thoman & Jolls, 2005). Media literacy outcomes alternate between and among informed decision-making, individual and social agency, critical analysis of mediated messages, savvy consumption and production skills, and participation in local, national and global dialogue (Frechette, 2002; Gaines, 2010; Hobbs, 2010, 2011; Livingstone, 2004; Tisdell, 2008). Media literacy scholar David Buckingham (2003) writes:

[Media Literacy is] A critical literacy that involves analysis, evaluation, and critical reflection, that is possible only through the 'acquisition of a metalanguage—that is, a means of describing the forms and structures of different modes of communication; and it involves a broader understanding of the social, economic and institutional contexts of communication, and how these affect people's experiences and practices (Luke, 2000). Media literacy certainly includes the ability to use and interpret media; but it also involves a much broader analytical understanding. (38)

Media literacy, in this context, applies a series of core competencies around critical inquiry and analysis of media messages. These abilities are rooted in a need to make sense of the world around us as portrayed through media systems. To approach media literacy education in a digital age, Henry Jenkins identifies "a set of core social skills and cultural competencies that young people should acquire if they are to be full, active, creative, and ethical participants in this emerging participatory culture" (Jenkins, 2006b).

1. **Play** — the capacity to experiment with your surroundings as a form of problem-solving
2. **Performance** — the ability to adopt alternative identities for the purpose of improvisation and discovery
3. **Simulation** — the ability to interpret and construct dynamic models of real world processes
4. **Appropriation** — the ability to meaningfully sample and remix media content
5. **Multitasking** — the ability to scan one's environment and shift focus as needed to salient details.
6. **Distributed Cognition** — the ability to interact meaningfully with tools that expand mental capacities
7. **Collective Intelligence** — the ability to pool knowledge and compare notes with others toward a common goal
8. **Judgment** — the ability to evaluate the reliability and credibility of different information sources
9. **Transmedia Navigation** — the ability to follow the flow of stories and information across multiple modalities
10. **Networking** — the ability to search for, synthesize, and disseminate information
11. **Negotiation** — the ability to travel across diverse communities, discerning and respecting multiple perspectives, and grasping and following alternative norms.

Fig. 1: Jenkins's Core Media Literacy Skills for Participatory Culture

Jenkins's media literacy skills emerge from his development of a participatory culture that promotes active, inclusive, and collaborative social and online behaviors. The abundance of new platforms that foster collaborative production, social advocacy, and interactive dialog necessitates a new look at how young citizens today learn to not only critically analyze information, but also to critically express and socialize as public participants. Yochai Benkler (2005) develops this need in his formulation of a networked information economy:

The Internet allows individuals to abandon the idea of the public sphere as primarily constructed of finished statements uttered by a small set of actors socially understood to be "the media" (whether state owned or commercial) and separated from society, and to move toward a set of social practices that see individuals as participating in a debate. Statements in the public sphere can now be seen as invitations for a conversation, not as finished goods (p. 180).

What Benkler, in his vision of a participatory media conversation, and Jenkins, in his construction of transmedia navigation in the model above, both imply but fail to articulate is exactly how that communication unfolds across a digital spectrum. That is, while new approaches to media literacy must "make sure that digital citizens are well-informed citizens in both understanding information and in their

ability to evaluate and analyze what they are seeing” (Swiggum, 2008, p. 16), they must also centralize the user within this experience. Curation does exactly this, requiring with almost every media interaction the application of a broad range of the media literacy skills Jenkins outlines. This approach reflects the need for youth to understand how to effectively analyze and critique media messages, but also to build participatory, expressive, and collaborative competencies for mindful online contributions to daily life: connections that are increasingly present in contemporary media literacy scholarship (Rheingold, 2012; Hobbs, 2011; Hobbs & Cooper Moore, 2013; Share, 2009; Schiebe & Rogow, 2011).

Curation, in this sense, can provide a way to approach teaching and learning about information in digital contexts that incorporates active audiences, integrated information landscapes, and the fast-paced media environment (Hobbs, 2011). Using curation to improve digital competency and goal-oriented online learning has the potential to create more analytical, participatory, engaged, and interactive youth in both online and offline life. (Kahne et al., 2012; Rheingold, 2008; Ito, 2009).

These learning competencies are now just emerging, but they must be implemented with proper learning processes and goals attached. If the focus around new digital tools in the classroom is primarily about the tools themselves and not about the human capacities to create, critique, share and express with these tools, they may not fulfill the potential of these tools to enact strong and lasting engagement and learning in youth. Civic media scholar Eric Gordon (2013) writes about the risks associated with technological determinism in digital culture:

The digital tools we have available to us can be used to demonstrate that we *have* digital tools; but that is a short-lived thrill. Digital tools are a means to an end. If they are treated as an end in themselves, they threaten to subvert the community engagement process, sublimating the potential human connections and learning to the flashy functionality of a digital billboard.

To mitigate these risks, this chapter proposes a set of competencies for curation as a digital and media literacy outcome. We utilize scaffolded learning to approach four curation competencies—critique, contribute, collaborate, create—that collectively offer a path to digital and media literacy education competencies. This approach is positioned as an efficient framework for teaching about multimedia consumption, intertextual analysis, framing and perspective, agenda setting and bias, sources, voices, and credibility online (Leu et al., 2011). It also positions the classroom as a space that can integrate “the media habits and networks that students use outside of the classroom within a formal setting...to better engage a generation of digital learners” (Mihailidis & Cohen, 2013).

Scaffolding for curation

By providing incremental instruction and tools for further development, scaffolding provides students with structured learning design while at the same time propelling them on their own journeys of self-edification. While scaffolding is often conceptualized via rote skills development (vocabulary, math computation, etc.), we use the construct here to better understand the learning implications of online curation presented in our model (see Figure Two).

Scaffolding any concept or skill demands students approach learning in graduated intervals—they start with the basic idea and move deliberately through a layered process until they have mastered not only the skills but also the critical disposition to meaningfully execute those skills. This is not unlike the process of developing media literacy. However, while core concepts of media literacy are often learned and practiced simultaneously, students should master individual processes before practicing the holistic exercise so that the overwhelming nature of the end task—curating potentially infinite data—is a cumulative and practiced effort.

The figure below presents a scaffolded approach to curation and media education. We offer four key competencies for developing a critical approach to curation in digital culture. First, students learn to *critique* the abundance of information available online. What is truthful? What is misleading? How do we know? This first step lays the critical foundation for both curation and media literacy. Second, students learn to *contribute* to online culture in meaningful and appropriate ways. Sharing information and personal experiences online should be a reflective but audience-based process. Third, students learn to *collaborate* in online spaces by developing cooperative skills that are both platform-specific and platform-agnostic. If Facebook is the dominant medium, students should understand what it means to curate and collaborate in this space while also applying those skills to new social media as they develop. Fourth, students learn to *create*. Creation fuels the collaborative culture of today’s online and social media, and our youth have tremendous creative capacity for producing and re-imagining media content.

The steps of this model prepare students to critically *curate* the multitude of online content for personally and socially engaging purposes. The act of curating on its own might simply imply collecting information across sources. However, curating in a media literacy context and within the scaffolded model here implies a critical, civically valuable activity that positions students to better engage in the world around them. Because “the web now mandates curation as a default for users navigating its exponential content, the ability to curate information is central to media literate competences in collaborative spaces” (Mihailidis & Cohen, 2013).

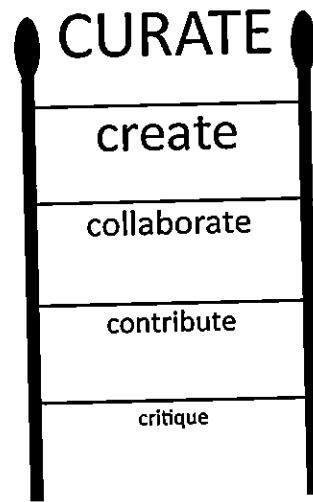


Fig. 2: A Scaffolded Approach to Curation

1. CRITIQUE – Media literacy education rests on the foundations of critical thinking (see Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; De Abreu & Mihailidis, 2014; Kellner & Share, 2005, 2007; Livingstone, 2004). The abundance of information online has made available more valuable, balanced, critical, and independent information. It has also brought the possibility for the uncritical consumer to collect mistakes, mistruths, and misinformation (Bartlett & Miller, 2011). Helping young citizens become critical thinkers empowers them to interact with traditional and new media in an increasingly productive, civic-minded way. The first step in the scaffolding approach to curation entails teaching students to think critically about the value of information they consume, and the manner and context of delivery establishes a foundation from which core media literacy competencies can flourish.

2. CONTRIBUTE – Youth primarily use social networks, aggregators, and mobile apps for information needs today. In turn, social networks have provided new functions that help users share information in meaningful and productive ways. Social networks, writes Shirky (2008),

...operate as both amplifiers and filters of information. Because information in the system is passed along by friends and friends and friends (or at least contacts and contacts of contacts), people tend to get information that is also of interest to their friends. The more friends you have who care about a particular piece of information—whether gossip or a job opening or a new song they like—the likelier you are to hear about it as well (p. 221).

Contributing, the second competency in the scaffolding model for curation, approaches the act of contribution as a self-reflective, audience-based experience, where individuals are able to “produce effective and responsible media messages” (Silverblatt, 2001, p. 120). In the digital age, producing messages is as simple as tweeting, posting, or sharing. For the networked crowd, contribution is a default—without contributions, the network will dissipate. Media literate crowds understand their contributions to public spaces as helping to define narratives, dialog, and topics of interest for a large group. They see the value of their contributions—whether humor, insight, or escape—as adding to a dynamic and eclectic group of voices collectively fueling the group’s position, connectivity, and vibrancy. They are also aware of the potential harms of filter bubbles (Pariser, 2011), monitoring behavior online, and location-based data tracking.

3. COLLABORATE – The third rung on the curation scaffold is collaboration, which involves the behavioral shift from simply contributing meaningful and valuable content to an *active* form of cooperation. Participatory approaches to media literacy can be seen in the rich examples of collaborative spaces that exist today. *Kickstarter*, *Groupon*, *Carrotmob*, *Charity Water*, and *Ushahidi* are only a few of the platforms that exist entirely around the collaborative capacities of citizens. Supporting great ideas, finding ways to benefit local organizations, or to voice opinions and track violence all take coordinated and collaborative effort between members of the network. Media literacy competencies must advocate for these “collaborationists,” a term Jenkins (2006) coins, because they represent the nexus of participation and media culture.

4. CREATE – Lastly, the media literate curator must be able to create context to build a sense of connectedness and place in digital culture. We have to look no further than *YouTube* to see the creative potential for young citizens today. Over 100 hours of content are uploaded to this space every minute¹. Citizens can now compete with networks for creativity, creation, and appropriation. Uploading diverse content—some original, some remixed—shows the development of an ecosystem of civic creations that provide a collective narrative about any range of searchable issues. In *Remix*, Lawrence Lessig (2008) writes that “using the tools of digital technology—even the simplest tools, bundled into the most innovative modern operating systems—anyone can begin to “write” using images, or music, or video. And using the facilities of a free digital network, anyone can share that writing with anyone else” (p. 69).

¹ For Statistical details on YouTube, please see: <http://www.youtube.com/yt/press/statistics.html>.

Creation, in the context of media literacy, is about the capacity that youth have to produce, share, and appropriate “media” content in public spaces. Creation does not necessitate starting from scratch—as it may have been deemed in a pre-digital age—but includes the new ways in which media and information are repackaged, appropriated, and distributed. Creation also allows youth to take ownership of their capacity to produce and to understand foundations in critical message construction, distribution, and reception. “By creating their own productions,” writes media literacy scholar Belinha De Abreu (2011), “[students] must now learn to conceptualize and critically think while being reflective of how audiences view texts” (p. 37). From memes to remixing, the media literate citizen takes advantage of their ability to create and share contributions, and recognizes the power that such relationships have for civic voices online (Erstad et al., 2007).

Conclusion: curation and learning in digital culture

The future of digital culture—yours, mine, and ours—depends on how well we learn to use the media that have infiltrated, amplified, distracted, enriched, and complicated our lives. How you employ a search engine, stream video from your phonecam, or update your Facebook status matters to you and everyone, because the ways people use new media in the first years of an emerging communication regime can influence the way those media end up being used and misused for decades to come. — Howard Rheingold, *Net Smart*, 1.

In today’s digital culture, youth have greater autonomy of their information and communication habits. In turn, as Rheingold notes above, this will dictate how new social platforms, tools and technologies are used and misused for time to come. As mobile platforms and peer-to-peer technologies increasingly facilitate the daily information and communication needs of youth today, educators must incorporate new models for critical navigation, inquiry and expression online.

This chapter positions curation as a core competency for digital and media literacy education. The four specific steps in our framework that lead to meaningful curation are not meant to be prescriptive, but rather offer different entry points and ideas for teaching about curation in a media literacy context. Students may be skilled online organizers but struggle with ways to collaborate. Others may be savvy creators of information but less understanding of the avenues for sharing information in mindful or thoughtful ways. Curation, in this sense, is not an end to a means, but rather a structured, methodical entry point for real engagement with digital media and personalized content today. Past models for media education that were premised on critical thinking as a response mechanism to media

messages are no longer enough. In today’s digital culture, media literacy must necessarily incorporate critical navigation and expression as parallel to analysis and evaluation. Curation is one way to approach this new landscape, and one increasingly relevant to a generation that is creating, sharing, and expressing more than ever before.

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Journalist Education and Truth in the Digital Age: Why We Need Critical Digital Literacy

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Abstract

The chapter deals with the importance of the concept of digital literacy in media education. Under digital literacy we understand a skill necessary for survival in the digital era, cognitive skills needed for solving problems connected with digital media production and existence in the online environment. The digital era has brought a wide spectrum of potentially problematic areas for media consumers as well as media producers. Our text illustrates these topics on a wide range of examples from current media, visual and social landscape. We address the issues connected with digital media, topics related to usage of social networks, alternative and counter-culture practices, etc. We try to illustrate potentially problematic issues of digital environment on the side of media producers, such as copyright and authorship protection, sources of information, its gathering, etc. The aim of this chapter is to show how the things surrounding us have radically changed in the last two decades and why this issue of digital literacy is important for the ability to orientate oneself in everyday life and why it should become the integral part of (not only journalistic and media) education.

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the importance of the concept of digital literacy in media education. With the rapid development of digital technologies and media there is a rising need for each individual to be able to use these technologies, to understand a wide range of new practices and to continually adapt to new features and functions of these innovations. Digital literacy concerns not only the everyday use of computers, cell phones and other digital devices, but a far more significant and complex existence online within different social networks. Contemporary practice not only involves abilities such as the construction of knowledge from non-linear information, but also more complex and complicated skills.

This literacy is particularly important in the field of journalism where most of the production of news content is more or less digital. Working with information sources, the ways of gathering, retrieving, sorting and evaluating information has changed completely. Education in the area of digital literacy is one of the basic demands of people working in the news industry, including journalists, photojournalists as well as media scholars.

Within the term, digital literacy, we understand the skills necessary for survival in the digital era, cognitive skills essential to solving problems connected