Fall 2011

Introduction: Digital Media and Community Literacy

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This special issue of the *Community Literacy Journal* assembles articles by scholars from around the country involved in fostering community literacy relationships through digital media. These authors and activists have served in a variety of research, scholarly, and volunteer roles, often merging all three. Their words advocate for and give voice to new university-community partnerships for community literacy that extend opportunities on both sides. While the authors recount and reflect on their community literacy work in different ways, they all see value in the formation of productive and mutually beneficial relationships. Unique to this special issue is the lens through which authors read their community literacy work.

Digital technologies both extend and, as you will read, complicate community relationships. Thus, we take this opportunity to think reflectively and critically about the role of digital technologies in the formation of community literacy work and the texts and technologies of community literacy.

This issue is being published on the heels of reports that digital divides are widening, not shrinking. This troubling trend seems to place more emphasis on the need for partnerships that link literacy initiatives with digital technologies in and beyond formal education settings. While many partnerships seek to place technology in the hands of community members, others attempt to enhance our understandings of digital literacies; that is, the ways we learn, understand, and use digital texts and technologies.

As recent events suggest, digital divides can be inspired by or aggravated by cultures, communities, politics, and even controversy. Community demonstrations, such as the 2011 Arab Spring, have highlighted the power of social media to organize and communicate in the face of censorship. Access to social media has greatly enhanced efforts to mobilize large groups of people. Digital video and visual technologies allow for the rapid proliferation of current information and events. Multiple literacies and burgeoning technologies collide in the moment this volume attempts to highlight.

The issue begins with an essay by David Dadurka and Stacey Pigg, which maps key literature and lines of inquiry in the intersection of community literacies and digital technologies. "Social Media, Community Literacies, and Literate Development: Mapping Intersections in a Complex

Terrain" explores the relationships between digital technologies, specifically social media, and community literacy through the available literature. Dadurka and Pigg challenge researchers to develop new connections between community literacy and digital technology, specifically social media.

We then turn to Brooke Hessler, in "Anatomy of a Digital Exhibit: Making the Most of Conventional Tools and Technologies in a Long-Term Museum-University Partnership," who explores the museum as a site of civic literacy and thus identification through the lens of the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum. Here Hessler describes her ten-year partnership with the Oklahoma City Memorial and Museum, which challenges her honors composition service-learning students at Oklahoma City University to work as digital curators for online exhibits showcasing artifacts from the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murah building. Hessler demonstrates how her students who come from around the world connect with their local community through their work on this project and how their visible participation in it is shaping the experiences of on-site and online visitors to the memorial as well as the students' own understanding of rhetorical power.

Thinking about the rhetorical power of digital technologies and community literacy, Tabetha Adkins takes us in a different direction in "Researching the 'Un-Digital': Methodological Reconsiderations for Community Literacy Research." In this article, Adkins explores digital technology challenges she has faced in her research on community literacy in Amish communities in Ohio, arguing that current models of human subject protections in research do not effectively account for cultural differences related to technology use and familiarity.

From this encouragement to conceive and interrogate community literacy in new ways in light of digital technologies, Kristen Hawley Turner and Troy Hicks point out the challenges of such a goal in their article "'That's Not Writing': Examining Novice Teachers' Perceptions of Digital Writing." Describing a study involving a small group of recent college graduates in a Teach for America program and their resistance to and difficulty to thinking of teaching writing with digital tools, Turner and Hicks remind us that age and experience with technology are not the only barriers to be faced when considering how best to think about literacy and new media.

We then shift our attention to digital tools as spaces of community development and support. D. Alexis Hart in "The Embodied Politics of the Academy Women eMentor Program: Military Women Using Private Virtual Communities to Promote Public Change" examines the role of place among military women, specifically describing how two online communities for military women provide a virtual space for community formation.

The volume continues with two reviews. The first is a look at community volunteer sites or spaces of virtual volunteerism. Ashley J. Holmes in "Virtual Volunteerism: Review of LibriVox and VolunteerMatch" examines two websites that stand to redefine community literacy in virtual environments. Holmes complicates the notion that virtual volunteer sites make volunteering easy, suggesting that building relationships that foster community partnerships—whether in physical or virtual spaces—always involves unique challenges.

Finally, Douglas Walls reviews Virginia Eubanks' *Digital Dead End: Fighting for Social Justice in the Information Age*. Walls summarizes critical findings that will interest *Community Literacy Journal* readers and identifies limitations of the book including ways in which it might have been improved through more engagement with scholarship from the field of rhetoric and composition. This review helps to solidify suggestions made throughout the volume on ways in which community literacy scholars might move forward with their research in a digitally saturated world and underscores the urgency of this endeavor.

Moving Forward

Through the experience of editing this special issue on community literacy and digital technologies, we have identified a number of ideas for future research that we hope to see taken up by *Community Literacy Journal* readers and writers. As the authors here suggest:

- Much research is needed that explores and expands the relationship between community literacy and digital technology, and we're only just beginning to identify the key questions related to this intersection.
- While mobile technologies may emphasize consumption over production, we haven't yet clearly articulated the questions we need consider about consumption.
- Digital divides may be closing in some ways, but in many ways they're just moving from one place to another.
- Methods of forming and researching community literacies that either involve or are formed by digital technologies stand to gain much from further research.

As evidenced in this special issue, developing successful community literacy initiatives is challenging. The questions and ideas posed through these essays have shaped and informed our own community literacy work.

The virtual public sphere has become a space of community literacy and service. While our universities will often serve as service points for literacy initiatives, websites and online repositories—like VolunteerMatch and LibriVox—have shown that virtual spaces are meaningful sites for

these efforts as well. Community literacy extends universities into their cities, states, and regions, while other efforts are broader reaching than that and enlist the collective support and energies of much larger and even international citizenries. Virtual spaces allow volunteers to congregate, collaborate, develop resources, and disseminate information to mass audiences across countries and nations. Community literacy initiatives are mobilized, at times quickly, based on opportunity and need rather than convenience. While funding and resources are always part of the ongoing dialogue, virtual sites can become spaces of activism.

The articles found in this special issue of the *Community Literacy Journal* span physical and virtual sites of community literacy, from research to practice. The sites and projects discussed in the pages that follow show the passion for literacy initiatives in different communities and the influence of digital technologies on these initiatives. We invite you to join this conversation through your own research and activism.

Acknowledgements

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