

## **Introduction to the Special Issue of The Journal of Literacy and Technology**

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The idea for this issue arose when Dr. Noemi Marin, the editor of *The Journal of Literacy and Technology*, asked if April was interested in editing a Special Issue for the journal, and invited suggestions regarding theme and a co-editor. Having been a follower of Dr. Ian O’Byrne, and his scholarship of literacy practices in digital, hybrid spaces for several years, it was a coup when he accepted the offer to co-create this issue. We were inspired by a question posed by Jerome Harte, “What insights into literacy does art afford?” (Harste, 2014). April’s literacy research had evolved into a broader query inclusive of visual texts based on findings that reluctant readers transmogrified into eager learners when given digital means to create visual demonstrations of understanding across content areas. Ian’s research into digital identity construction converged with this area of inquiry into the intersection between art and communication through media literacy.

Together we agreed that percolating through much of the recent literacy research has been an array of investigations trying to make sense of the intersection of art and communication in this digital age of ubiquitous visual information. The time was right to provide a forum to invite an exploration of emerging theory and research which would grapple with the opportunities and tensions of educating connected global citizens. We also understood that this intersection of the field was very new, and uncharted. We had no understanding of knowing who might like to explore these ideas, what the perspectives might be, and whether there would be a cohesive issue in this at all. Much to our surprise and delight, an eclectic collection of scholars from across varied fields and areas of research agreed to submit manuscripts for inclusion in this collection.

David Reinking, Professor Emeritus, whose piece, “Shattering the Crystal Goblet: Seeking a Pedagogy of Visuality in Post-Typographic Expository Texts”, grounds this investigation with theory and historical perspective, contributes suggestions for seeding his and others’ ideas by into practice using examples from his research. His article serves as an entrée that contextualizes and anchors all the thinking from the other authors. Best said using his words, he “...synthesizes diverse theoretical perspectives toward developing a pedagogy that addresses the visual aspects of informational texts in digital media.” Reinking considers visual representation to derive meaning, and wonders about the complexities that exist within. This piece inspired us to consider the changes to text, design, and meaning in the present post-typographical era. In a world where new possibilities exist that we could only previously imagine, what new understandings should be created? And how can they be taught? Specific insight into developing a pedagogy for teaching visual elements as literacy is offered to begin the process of translating curricular and instructional goals into instructional activities to achieve those goals.

Contributors to this issue include an article by Albers, Vasquez, Harste, and Janks, a team of eminent researchers including Professor Emeritus Jerome Harste, whose question initiated the focus for this issue in the first place. In their paper, “Art as a Critical Response to Social Issues”, Albers et.al share annual workshops with teachers in which they explore, “... the relationship of power between and among image, language, and technology in professionally/publicly-generated texts to influence the actions of viewers”. Leading a hands-on summer institute for 80 teachers and administrators in which participants created artifacts that expressed issues of social importance, and which educators could then transfer to their practice, “...opening up spaces for critical making and reflection”. It is a most timely topic given the widespread issue of media

validity, reliability, and intentions. The authors discuss how art and technology contribute significant communicative modes to “bring to the surface a text maker’s ideologies and how the viewer is implicated in these texts to act and believe in particular ways”.

In her paper, “Emergently Digital in Grade Two: Another case of 3.6 Minutes Per Day?”, Paciga shares her observation of a second grade classroom teacher as she teaches students to utilize digital tools and take notes as they research a culminating google slides project for which they research online, and evaluate validity and reliability of their resources. She explains that, “ It is important to remember that students require much collaborative practice with complex literacies in early childhood before they will be able to demonstrate proficiency in such skills independently in later grades.” These words make the heart of a secondary literacy teacher and coach sing at the thought of students eventually entering high school with such skills already activated. Imagine being able to start where students with this kind of learning have left off in eighth grade when they arrive in high school, much less college, and face the typical literature 101 where basic writing skills are still being taught. We were left with questions about the balance and agility needed by the educator as they strive to make all of this content creation happen in the classroom.

In their piece, “Reading, Writing, Cheetahs, Oh My!: Literacy, Collaborative Learning, and Making Movies”, Reaves and Kamberelis delve into the interactions of a teacher and her elementary student turning the growth of learning itself as well as the resulting artifact into art processes. In some classrooms, children negotiate despair, frustration, and hopelessness as they engage in literacy practices. This piece examines the interplay between teacher and student that exists within an interest-based, literacy activity mediated by digital technology tools. This work benefited the teacher and student. The student was able to focus on “micro-productions” and

“aesthetic play” to reflect on literacy activities. The teacher was able to to experiment with literacy theory and put it into practice. We were most intrigued in the piece by the examination of interesting view of learning and apprenticeship as "attuning" or guiding youth by a "more knowledgeable other."

Theresa Redmond, author of “Unboxed: Expression as Inquiry”, contributes a study of how media production, by its nature visually creative, may serve to develop and extend students’ learning in an undergraduate media literacy course. Redmond posits that a fundamental failure of media production practice is a focus on products created via computational tools and devices. This emphasis on tools is illustrated by a recent history of analog and digital media and digital literacy in instruction. Her findings, “...suggest media making comprises a student-centered, democratic pedagogy that incorporates multimodality and critical framing as essential aspects of learning.” She expresses the nature of ideation as “image elicitation.” This makes us consider the elements of culture, diversity, and identity in the processes of producing and encoding meaning. Additionally, this makes us wonder about the role of identity as a literacy construction practice in these events.

In their rhetorical analysis Wallace and Katz consider massively multiplayer online role-playing games, (MMORPGs) as texts visual in nature which have become a part of and shape contemporary discourse. These authors delve into, “dream world diversions increasingly impacting society”, and analyze inherent artistic literacy in digital gaming which has been underrepresented in scholarly analyses. They suggest that this may be due to games not being perceived as art, or the fact that not many scholars have “ expertise in both digital gaming and other artistic narratives”. This perceived gap is addressed through close reading analysis of the film *Inception*, which illustrates the experiential encounters players enter into when immersed in

MMORPGs. Both the dangers of the addictive nature of this modality of communication, and advantages of the community that develop around the playing of these games are discussed. The authors of this piece made us consider the “reflective experiences” that authors and content creators should have as guided by rhetorical strategies. Put simply, should creators consider the “consumption” or “commonalities” as they design?

Diane Watt’s article, “Three Things You Should Know About My Hijab: The Art of Youth Media Activism on YouTube” is multimodal analysis of a serious yet comedic video by three female Muslim YouTubers from a Somali community in Canada. Watt highlights these women’s use of “... aesthetic elements to highlight how access to digital video technologies opens up powerful modes of meaning making to marginalized youth, with transformative possibilities for them, their communities, and global audience.” They developed their technical skills and honed their artistic practice outside of school. Watt points out that one of the points the video makes clear is that the time has come for both teachers and researchers to broaden their definitions of what counts as literacy. As April’s research has shown with concurring evidence, Watt tell us that “... one way to to do this is to invite children and youth to bring their out-of-school literacies practices into the classroom, and be willing to learn with and from them.” This video, filmed in a day, won three international awards, and was publicly screened in Times Square as well as at New York University. The questions ensuing from this article then, are how can we literacy researchers and practitioners incorporate the reality that technical skills and artistic practices learned outside of school have much to contribute to education?

As the reader of this special issue, *Through the Portal of Art and Culture: Media Literacy as the Art of Communication* will appreciate, more questions than answers have been surfaced, which is always a good outcome in any educational endeavor. The breadth and depth of the

thinking about this inquiry issue has proven to be illuminating for both of us, and we encourage the pursuit of these ideas in the many realms offered by the contributing authors. Both the questions and suggestions posed offer tempting new directions for inquiry. What is most rewarding about the opportunity offered by the journal's editor, Dr. Marin, is that indeed, many literacy researchers around the world are looking at these questions from separate yet related perspectives. We thank the researchers for their contributions, and remain open to ongoing collaborations between and among others for whom these questions resonate.