Digital Literacies

(see also Multimodality and Digital Media; Critical Literacy; Reading; Writing)

Children and young people need to engage confidently, creatively and critically in a wide range of digital media practices.

- Communication in everyday life continues to evolve and diversify and often involves digital media.

- Learners bring skills, interests and experiences generated through their own use of digital media with them to educational settings.

- New literacy experiences provide opportunities for personal fulfilment, creativity and collaboration as well as participation in social, civic, political and economic life.

- Confident, creative and critical participation in digital environments involves using different modes and media, and both on and off-screen activity.

- Digital technologies and digital media are not value free and uses may be unsafe - critical literacy is therefore essential.

UKLA recognises that literacies in everyday life are diversifying rapidly. They are increasingly multiple, multimodal, mediated by mobile devices and associated with participatory digital literacy practices that include the digital. In recent years for example, we have seen new literacy practices emerging around social media, gaming and other online activities. With this diversification come increased opportunities for children and young people to make and publish online texts, such as video material, given the ease with which digital material can produced, edited, re-mixed, posted and shared online.

UKLA Viewpoints

Such practices offer opportunities for personal fulfilment, creativity, collaboration, and increased agency, and can be regarded as central to social, civic, political and economic life. Confident, creative, cultural and critical participation in digital environments can involve the use of diverse modes and media (screen and print); it is commonplace to move between screen and paper as texts are composed, for example, or between browsing the internet, taking photos and using social media during different kinds of social, consumer or political activity. To understand digital literacies we need to focus on the interrelated and overlapping processes of design, production, dissemination and interpretation, not just the texts that are produced as part of this process. What people do on-screen can be linked in various ways to what they do off-screen and meaning making is often distributed across people, on/offline spaces and devices. It is misleading therefore to see digital literacies as separate from other reading and writing, or to approach digital literacy practices as solely individual endeavours.

It is important to recognise that digital practices can be iniquitous, unsafe and unethical. Digital technologies, their applications and the texts they mediate are not value free. Developments in machine learning and artificial intelligence also mean that the data generated through online activity may be harvested for commercial, political or other reasons. The need for learners to build the requisite critical digital literacy skills for navigating and contributing safely and responsibly to online spaces is, therefore, paramount

Many learners bring extensive skills, interests and experiences generated through digital media with them to school. However, the range and nature of these experiences vary, and the equity of experience cannot be assured. There is therefore a pressing need to build on children's repertoires of communicative practices in ways that support inclusive, confident, creative, collaborative and critical uses of digital media. This is necessary to ensure children's active participation in, and cultural understanding of, the world around them now and in the future.

In response to this changing communicative environment, a UKLA Task Group is currently developing a framework for digital literacies to support teachers as they extend children's creative, cultural and critical use of digital media. To date, the Task Group has drawn on a review of research and international frameworks relating to digital literacies to identify a series of skills, experiences and dispositions that underpin the development of a broad communicative repertoire. Members of the Group are currently conducting case studies to exemplify and refine the following statements, which identify key dimensions of a literacy curriculum for the 21st century:

A literacy curriculum for the 21st century should provide opportunities that foster:

- Collaboration, communication, creativity and critical engagement with text;

- The development of a diverse and flexible repertoire of communicative practices;

- A willingness to experiment with new forms and explore their potential for communication and creativity;

- Critical literacies and civic participation;

- Cultural dimensions of meaning making and an awareness that texts are interpreted and shaped by our experiences and understanding of the world;

- The skills (technical, expressive, rhetorical, etc.) needed to participate creatively in digital spaces and all communicative contexts;

- Engagement with the interrelated and overlapping processes of design, production, dissemination and interpretation;

- The capacity to make selections about choice of media and to move between media and modes (print and screen-based) in the course of communicative or creative events;

- An ethical awareness that acknowledges the personal, social and environmental impact of digital participation on the wider world;

- A meta-awareness of the ways in which digital architectures shape participation in digital spaces;

- An awareness that personal use is inflected by commercial and/or political interest;

- The skills and attitudes needed to navigate the internet and other digital content with safety and discernment;

- An awareness of the implications of digital activity on identity management and digital footprint;

- The interpersonal and exploratory skills needed to work effectively through collaboration, online and offline.

Through this case study research, the Task Group is exploring ways in which digital literacies can be integrated within current educational practice and in line with existing statutory curricular and assessment requirements. The Task Group aims to articulate the kinds of pedagogies and assessment behaviours that are most appropriate in supporting critical, collaborative and creative digital literacy practices as part of a balanced literacy curriculum.

[1] Including, but not confined to, critical engagement with digital media, e.g. fake news.

Sources

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Classroom example

Teachers can use digital technologies to support children's storytelling, story making and story reading. In so doing, traditional paper-based classroom practices are adapted to engage, inspire and scaffold children's reading and composition in ways that involve and take account of familiar screen-based resources and texts. The inclusion of digital technologies can alter the traditional literacy processes of reading and writing, making them into digital literacy practices - inclusive and exciting experiences for young learners and their teachers, that resonate with their daily screen-infused experience.

With her class of 5 and 6 year olds, a teacher uses a school edition of an app called *Puppet Pals* to scaffold the children as they learn to recount the well-loved story *Owl Babies*. Using a tablet, the teacher photographs and imports some key images from the picture book into the app, creating a silent cartoon-style version of the story. Having read and enjoyed the picture book in small teaching groups with their teacher, the children take it in turns to recount the story using the cartoon of images in the app to help them recall the events. As they take turns to narrate their own version of the story to accompany the screen-based images, they are recorded in the app, creating a new, collaborative multimodal and digital version of the story. The engagement and delight of the children is captured in the digital recording, as they take control of the composing practice. The app frees the children to focus on recalling the events and to enter the role of the narrator, without being hampered by the transcriptional demands that a paper-based composing activity would require.

The teacher explains how this activity promotes their children's independence and confidence as authors. Children experience success as story makers, using the original text from their memory of the shared reading from the story book – but also embellishing and adapting the text providing evidence of their sophisticated understandings of the story and the owl babies' characters. The children delight in watching their digital version back, providing opportunities for discussion and learning about many strands of their literacy: their understanding of the story; their vocabulary choices, the use of their spoken language, and performance. Their digital texts can be shared with parents, and also re-viewed by the teacher as they assess the children's development as readers and writers.

Jeannie Bulman, Cathy Burnett, Clare Dowdall, Angela Colvert, Kate Erricker, Anna Harrison, Becky Parry, Georgina Tarling, Louise Wheatcroft on behalf of UKLA

See also

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Power Up Literacy by Petula Bhojwani and Craig Wilkie

Using Technology to Improve Reading and Learning
by Bernadette Dwyer and Colin Harrison

iPads and Tablets in the Classroom: Personalising children's stories
by Natalia Kucirkova

Teaching Comprehension through Reading and Responding to Film
by Fiona Maine

Embedding media literacy across the secondary curriculum
by Julian McDougall and Helen Ward

Film Education, Literacy and Learning
by Becky Parry with Jeannie Bulman

English Language and Literacy 3-19: Media by Andrew Burn

Evaluating Online Information and Sources
by Andrew K. Shenton and Alison J. Pickard

The Digital Literacy Classroom by Glenn Stone

UKLA website   www.ukla.org/resources

Collection of resources on 21st century literacies:
https://ukla.org/resources/collection/21st-century-literacies