Title: Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century

Subject:
In this white paper, Henry Jenkins discusses the importance of promoting learning activities that support the development of skills needed for students to engage in a participatory culture.

Main point or thesis:
The author main point in this paper is to reinforce the importance of embracing an emerging participatory culture in schools as a way to better prepare students as learners and as citizens. He also presents a practical approach to why we should teach media literacy and how.

Why We Should Teach Media Literacy
Henry Jenkins presents arguments to justify the importance of having this skills learned in school against the idea “that children and youth acquire these key skills and competencies on their own by interacting with popular culture”. He present 3 major concerns, suggesting the need for a policy of pedagogical interventions:

1. The Participation Gap — “the unequal access to the opportunities, experiences, skills, and knowledge” (p.3)
2. The Transparency Problem — “The challenges young people face in learning to see clearly the ways that media shape perceptions of the world.” (p.3)
3. The Ethics Challenge — “The breakdown of traditional forms of professional training and socialization that might prepare young people for their increasingly public roles as media makers and community participants” (p.3).

To promote participatory culture in school Jenkins believes “[s]chools as institutions have been slow to react to the emergence of this new participatory culture” (p.4) and presents several examples of how to promote the most necessary skills for a new literacy that now is required.
Artistic expression and civic engagement

Creative work and sharing one’s creations with others is key factor for a participatory culture where people develop a sense of self and learn to respect other’s forms of expression.

"Historically, we have valued creative writing or art classes because they help to identify and train future writers and artists, but also because the creative process is valuable on its own; every child deserves the chance to express him- or herself through words, sounds, and images, even if most will never write, perform, or draw professionally. Having these experiences, we believe, changes the way youth think about themselves and alters the way they look at work created by others." p.7

Peer-to-peer in affinity Spaces

Jenkins presents some thriving online learning environments that he believes have great potential for developing several skills in a peer-to-peer participatory and playful approach. As he says:

“We suspect that young people who spend more time playing within these new media environments will feel greater comfort interacting with one another via electronic channels, will have greater fluidity in navigating information landscapes, will be better able to multitask and make rapid decisions about the quality of information they are receiving, and will be able to collaborate better with people from diverse cultural backgrounds." (p.10).

Jenkins believes that these quite informal environments should be promoted in school instead of being expelled. He thinks that activities should promote the use of new technologies allowing all students to have some kind of access to these forms of participatory cultures. He supports that promoting activities using these new technologies will help to bridge the digital divide allowing some students to have their first contact with these new kinds of participatory cultures while allowing others to take advantage of their own devices and develop their own skills.

Rethinking Literacy

While redefining literacy, Jenkins present research skills as one of the most important skills people should have. He presents some essential capacities people should have to develop search skills:

• access books and articles through a library;

Other references:


The Transparency Problem —Turkle, 1995; Squire, 2004; Shrier, 2005; As Hobbs, 1999.


Affinity spaces — are distinct from formal educational systems in several ways:

“We While formal education is often conservative, the informal learning within popular culture is often experimental." (p.9)

While formal education is static, the informal learning within popular culture is innovative.” (p.9)

Other authors support this belief:

“Beck and Wade (2004) conclude that gamers were more open to taking risks and engaging in competition but also more open to collaborating with others and more willing to revise earlier assumptions.” (p.11).
Book Review Essays - Complementary Bibliography

- take notes on and integrate secondary sources;
- assess the reliability of data;
- read maps and charts;
- make sense of scientific visualizations;
- grasp what kinds of information are being conveyed by various systems of representation;
- distinguish between fact and fiction, fact and opinion;
- construct arguments and marshal evidence.

Jenkins also makes reference to the importance of technical skills and the capacity to:

- log online;
- find and use various programs;
- focus a camera;
- edit footage;
- do some basic programming.

Jenkins also considers critical thinking skills as essential, and he finds that students should acquire basic understanding of:

- the ways media representations structure our perceptions of the world;
- the ways economic and cultural contexts within which mass media is produced and circulated;
- the motives and goals that shape the media they consume;
- alternative practices that operate outside the commercial mainstream.

Core Media Literacy Skills

Jenkins presents a list of 11 skills that he considers of most importance for preparing students to this new social context:

1. **Play** — For Jenkins playing in a learning context is not just a way to motivate or further enthusiasm students for learning activities. Jenkins present one further value of play in learning and problem solving that is the contribution to lower the emotional stakes of failing. He argues that by lowering emotional distress related to failure situations, people take risks and deal better with their own errors, increasing their learning outcomes through trial and error.

2. **Simulation** — As in a game, in a simulation, people lower their emotional distress allowing better learning outcomes through
trial and error. Simulations though can provide environments more controllable by the student and allow the definition of models and scenarios completely customized by the student. Dealing with simulations also provides students with better consciousness of how limited a simulation can be representing reality. In this way, critical thinking can be enhanced as one may be allowed to compare competing simulations that may present different perspectives of the world around us.

3. **Performance** — Presenting Gee’s coined term of **projective identity**, Jenkins values the fact that through enacting other in such “an immersive experience” one can “use the character as a mirror to reflect on his or her own values and choices”.

4. ** Appropriation** — One of the most interesting remarks Jenkins does in what concerns appropriation is that by “building on existing stories [one] attracts wider interest in their work, allowing it to circulate far beyond the community of family and friends. In turn, because they are working with a shared narrative and many others have a stake in what happens to these characters, they receive more feedback on their writing.” (p.33) Also, by dealing with others work one can learn to identify “core properties of the original work” and learn “important skills at narrative and formal analysis while the development of an alternative version of the story in another medium emphasizes the creative expansion of the original content.” (p.33)

5. **Multitasking** — It is a new form of paying attention to several things at the same time. **Managing attention** is considered as a very important cognitive ability. Presenting an example of a game that can be running a browser while the student can be doing several other things. Jenkins believes that some learning games can take advantage of this characteristic as to develop the ability to be aware of several actions that should interconnect at different times.

6. **Distributed Cognition** — Following several authors’ studies Jenkins believes that intelligence is **not an attribute** of individuals but rather “distributed across “brain, body, and world” (Clark, 1997), looping through an extended technological and sociocultural environment (Clark, 2003)”. Explaining this idea, Pea (1997) notes, “When I say that intelligence is distributed, I mean that the resources that shape and enable activity are distributed in configurations across people, environments, and situations.” (p.37). According with an example given by Bell and Winn, using distributed knowledge systems that manage content “such as databases, websites, wikis, and so forth,” will allow teacher to focus the curricular activities “on learning how to generate, evaluate, interpret, and deploy data.” (p.39)
7. **Collective Intelligence** — Having Levy as reference, Jenkins uses the term collective intelligence as the communications skills needed for engaging in teamwork and collaboration, taking advantage of networks and knowledge communities.

8. **Judgment** — “We all must learn how to read one source of information against another; to understand the contexts within which information is produced and circulated; to identify the mechanisms that ensure the accuracy of information as well as realizing under which circumstances those mechanisms work best.” (p.44).

9. **Transmedia Navigation** — Using Kress arguments Jenkins says that “this tendency toward multimodality changes how we teach composition, because students must learn to sort through a range of different possible modes of expression, determine which is most effective in reaching their audience and communicating their message, and to grasp which techniques work best in conveying information through this channel.” (p.44).

10. **Networking** — For Jenkins networking has a lot to do with the skills necessary to take advantage of social networking platforms where the information is likely to be worth not through the recommendation of a given expert or gatekeeper of knowledge, but through the validation of a crowd of people participating online. So networking involves the ability to navigate across different social communities in order to acquire and recognize the value of information. Providing Surowiecki as reference, Jenkins elects the capacity to synthesis as the most important for combining multiple resources to produce new knowledge. So in a way is the capacity to identify, use and participate in a smart way in network systems that allow great amount of people to provide valid information or intelligent solutions to problems. Jenkins provides Surowiecki four key qualities that make a crowd smart. “It needs to be diverse, so that people are bringing different pieces of information to the table. It needs to be decentralized, so that no one at the top is dictating the crowd’s answer. It needs a way of summarizing people’s opinions into one collective verdict. And the people in the crowd need to be independent, so that they pay attention mostly to their own information, and not worrying about what everyone around them thinks.” (p.51).

11. **Negotiation** — Jenkins believes there is an increasing risk of communities and individuals to accentuate extreme stances and generate great conflicts and misunderstanding based in “race, class, sex, ethnic, religious, and other forms of cultural differences” (p.53). As Jenkins puts it, negotiation skills, are increasingly necessary to provide students with the capacity to...
interpret and understand the “contexts within which these different cultural communities operate” (p.52). Providing examples, Jenkins suggests that educators “can foster negotiation skills when they bring together groups from diverse backgrounds and provide them with resources and processes that insure careful listening and deeper communication.”

The last two chapters of this book Jenkins focus the opportunity to reverse the tendency of a growing digital divide. Jenkins highlights that the challenge is to have a systemic approach to ensure the incorporation of these core principles across the curricula in-school and out of school activities. For Jenkins, schools, museums, libraries, churches, social organizations and parents, all share the responsibility to promote these skills in young people. He concludes expressing his growing concerns related to the increasing unbalance between “haves” and “have-nots” that for him is very likely to generate unwanted “consequences for democracy, civility, community, and quality of life”.