

Chapter 13

Teacher Curatorship: Fostering Literacies With Kindergartners Using YouTube Videos

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ABSTRACT

Grounded in digital literacy and literacies research, the authors explore how a kindergarten teacher facilitated digital literacy in a science lesson using YouTube playlists and the YouTube Kids app. By curating videos and modeling how to “read” the video texts, the teacher prepared her students for their own guided searches using streaming video texts in the YouTube Kids app on iPads. The authors show how teacher curatorship can foster real, authentic learning experiences, even for young children, as a way for students to begin developing the complex new literacy practice(s) of curating videos across in and out of school spaces.

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INTRODUCTION

Beyond a textbook or basal, picture books are the most common form of informational texts in primary grade classrooms, including diverse sub-categories, such as expository nonfiction, narrative nonfiction, biography, and even poetry. However, in light of the rapidly changing nature of informational “texts,” this list of examples warrants updating. We argue that a “print-rich” classroom environment today might also include mobile apps, websites, virtual reality, interactive graphics, and online video.

But much remains to be discussed when it comes to learning from digital media. Some parents and teachers are resistant to technologies for learning, choosing to follow the American Pediatric Association’s suggestion to limit technology use for young children (Council on Communications and Media, 2016). If used, technologies are often utilized as a way to develop discrete skills, which Burnett (2010) calls “technology as a deliverer of literacy” (p. 254) rather than a “medium of meaning-making” (Davidson, Danby, Given, & Thorpe, 2014, p. 2). On the other hand, other educators have found that media can expand learning even with younger learners, for example by including digital manipulatives, i.e., programmable Lego bricks (Lieberman, Demartino, & So, 2009). The National Association for the Education of Young Children makes a critical distinction that it is not only the amount of time that is spent with technology that determines its value, but also what the content of the media is, the type of media, and the context around the enjoyment or learning from the media (NAEYC, 2012).

But even more importantly, there are issues of digital equity involved in teaching children, even younger children, how to read, interpret, and interact with a range of different texts. In the past, teachers and scholars thought that teachers and parents needed to focus either on protecting children from the perceived or real ill effects of media consumption or, on the flipside, whole-heartedly embracing media as an empowering tool (Hobbs, 2011). More currently, educators and scholars take a more middle-ground approach that focuses on ways to empower youth through their media consumption and/or production in ways that are less fearful and more equitable. There is a greater recognition now that it is “the larger structure that media literacy educators have created culturally and socially that determines the beliefs, practices, and identities as young people [read] or create media” (Gibbons, 2012). With this newer view, fostering a new literacies using non-print texts, even with young children, is seen as a way to provide knowledge and understandings from a social justice perspective through creating dance, dolls, or drawings representing the lived experiences of children in South Africa (Stein, 2007) to marginalized youth using online tools as a new form of civic activism (Stornaiuolo & Thomas, 2017) to toddlers learning from story-apps on iPads in collaboration with adults (Merchant, 2015). These perspectives value children as agentive in their readings of text and/or their media production, if adults work with them to foster these new literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2012).

For this chapter, we focus on how one teacher and her kindergarten students uses a specific nonprint text: YouTube and YouTube Kids. Created in 2005, YouTube has become a mainstay for both adults and children in the United States and beyond. In the U.S., beyond watching YouTube videos for entertainment, Pew Research Center found almost 35% of all adults use YouTube to figure out how to do things they have never done before, and approximately 81% of parents with children 11 or younger allow their children to watch YouTube videos. The YouTube interface also governs much of what people are watching as approximately 80% of people click on videos that are recommended to them by the algorithms within the YouTube system. On the flipside, over half of respondents have encountered material that they found to be false or offensive, including parents finding the same for the content their children watch

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