



Hong Kong and Canadian students experiencing a new participatory culture: A teacher professional training project undergirded by new media literacies

Zheng Zhang^{a,*}, Jia Li^b, Feifei Liu^c, Zhuang Miao^c

^a Faculty of Education, The University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, N6G 1G7, Canada

^b Faculty of Education, University of Ontario Institute of Technology, Oshawa, Ontario, L1H 7R7, Canada

^c Faculty of Education, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, N. T., Hong Kong

HIGHLIGHTS

- The project vested teacher candidates' agency in negotiating curriculum & pedagogy.
- It deepened their understanding of local and global educational challenges.
- It nurtured their skills to design new ways to address these challenges.

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ABSTRACT

This research linked 47 Hong Kong and 35 Canadian teacher candidates in a new participatory culture project within the theoretical framework of *new media literacies*. This paper reports the qualitative data with quantitative descriptions of participants' social interactivity within the cross-border communities of practice. Besides the constraints of the designated online forum, findings relate that participants' engagement in the new participatory culture contributed to their knowledge- and awareness-building of harnessing online participation, new media technologies, and cultural/linguistic diversity in education. The paper concludes with implications of cultivating communities of practice buttressed by new media literacies for teacher professional development.

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1. Introduction

Responding to the fast information technology changes in the new era, the [International Reading Association \(IRA\) \(2009\)](#) advocates a changed landscape for educators who now have responsibilities to integrate new information technologies into curriculum to “prepare students for successful civic participation in a global environment” (n.p.). Likewise, [Jenkins's \(2009\)](#) report on media education for the 21st century acknowledges the social dimension of *new media literacies*. It expands the notion of literacy from “individualized skills” for personal expression to “social skills” that nurture collective and creative meaning making (p. 32). New media literacies' concerns with participation, multimodality, and

cultural and linguistic diversity provided us with entry points into this *new participatory culture* project. In this project we provided Hong Kong and Canadian teacher candidates with potential opportunities to participate in globalized communities and develop “cultural competencies and social skills needed for full involvement” ([Jenkins, 2009](#), p. xiii). We also segued into the affordances of Open Education Resources (OERs) (e.g., [Jacobi & Woert, 2012](#)) to inform Hong Kong and Canadian students of the global movement of OER applications (e.g., the 2007 “Cape Town Open Education Declaration” and UNESCO's 2012 “Paris OER Declaration”) so as to enhance their awareness of harnessing OERs as free, multimodal, and high quality digital learning resources in their future teaching.

2. Theoretical framework: conceptual constructs of new media literacies

Building on an extended notion of literacy, the *new media*

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: zzhan58@uwo.ca (Z. Zhang), jia.li@uoit.ca (J. Li).

literacies framework has made connections between literacy and new information and technology. While referring to the *new literacies* literature (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, 2011), we particularly anchored our project in three major conceptual constructs under the new media literacies, namely, participation, multimodality, and cultural and linguistic diversity.

Participation: Jenkins (2009) defines *new media literacies* as a set of cultural competencies and social skills that young people develop through networking and collaboration in the new media landscape. Alluding to the social dimensions of literacy, Lankshear and Knobel (2003) also contend that education with new forms of literacies goes beyond the use of technology-mediated literacy practices in school settings. They propose that a changed “grammar” (p. 33) of curriculum in the new era of technological changes lies in the changed mind-sets from “outsiders” to “insiders” (p. 32). The “outsider” mind-set perceives literacy practices “as the same as before, only more technologized” (p. 32). In contrast, the “insider” mind-set subverts teachers’, schools’, and adults’ authoritative roles in curriculum and pedagogy and celebrates the new media knowledge that students bring to school settings. Lankshear and Knobel (2011) later refine the notion of *new literacies* and accentuate the “participatory” and “collaborative” nature of literacy practices in the new media culture (p. 141). Likewise, highlighting the focus shift of literacy from “individual expression” to “community involvement”, Jenkins argues that youth are actively involved in *participatory cultures* and develop their new literacies skills through participation and collaboration (p. xiii). Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) characterize a well-designed community of practice as allowing for participation in group discussion or one-on-one dialogues, exposure to new ideas, or observations of experts addressing cutting-edge issues. Similarly, addressing a knowledge-building community mediated by computer, Scardamalia and Bereiter (1994) accentuate the importance of engaging learners as legitimate partners in collective participation and social dynamics in scientific inquiry. Connecting teaching and learning in the new era of technological changes, new participatory cultures allow for: 1) low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, 2) strong support or informal mentorship for sharing new creative forms, 3) collaborative problem-solving to complete tasks and develop new knowledge, 4) strong member belief in the value of their contributions, and 5) strong sense of membership or social connections among members (Jenkins, 2009).

Multimodality: Scholars in the new literacies camp take a “semiotic turn” (e.g., Sheridan & Rowsell, 2010, p. 8) and highlight the myriad forms of literacy practices pertinent to information and communications technology (Jenkins, 2009). Kress (2000) refers to this mode plurality as *multimodality*. The notion of “text” has thus extended to multimodal texts (Flewitt, Nind, & Payler, 2009). Acknowledging the meaningfulness of “extra-linguistic” phenomena (Kress & Jewitt, 2003, p. 2), scholars argue that ideas that can be represented in more traditional symbols (e.g., speech and writing) can also be communicated in symbols of image, music, and video (e.g., Kress, 2009; Stein, 2008). Jenkins particularly aligns new media literacies with an “ecological approach” that attends to the “interrelationship” among diverse communications technologies (p. 7). That said, meaning makers respond to the new communicative conditions and tend to orchestrate a combination of media in their social practices of “digital remixing” (Jenkins, p. 55). New media hitherto offer innovative and powerful ways of “appropriation”, that is, “a process by which students learn by taking culture apart and putting it back together” (p. 55). The emphasis on multimodal representations is in strong alignment with the emphasis on cognitive pluralism (Eisner, 2002), multiple intelligences (Gardner & Hatch, 1989), creative thinking (Wesch,

2008), and “collective intelligence” (i.e., the social production of knowledge [Jenkins, p. 68]). The notions of “media creator” (Jenkins, p. 3) and “active media producers” (Lange & Ito, 2010, p. 244) subvert the positioning of youth as “media consumers” (p. 244).

Cultural and linguistic diversity: The new media culture has shown a great capacity to break through the geographical, linguistic, and cultural boundaries. Closely related to new media literacies skills are students’ abilities to traverse diverse communities, negotiate and respect “multiple perspectives”, and grasp “alternative norms” (Jenkins, 2009, p. 97). Against the backdrop of globalization and technological advancement, scholars tend to conceive of 21st century literacy capacities as encompassing: 1) nurturing respectful imagining of foreign others and a genuine openness to the social and linguistic practices of foreign others (e.g., Saito, 2010), 2) negotiating meanings “across divergent cultural, linguistic, geographic, and ideological landscapes both on- and off line” (Hull & Stornaiuolo, 2010, p. 86), and 3) taking up local and global projects for individual transformation and societal changes (e.g., Zhang & Heydon, 2014).

The three conceptual constructs of participation, multimodality, and cultural and linguistic diversity offered us insightful lenses to view existent literature on participatory, cross-border inquiries enabled by new media and technologies within the teacher education arena. Empirical inquiries that investigated novel ways of leveraging participatory and technology-based learning in teacher education are prolific (e.g., Bonk, Malikowski, Angeli, & East, 1998; Caywood & Duckett, 2003; Cowham & Duggleby, 2005; Ertmer et al., 2011; Hou, 2014; Keller, Bonk, & Hew, 2005; King, 2002; Oner & Adadan, 2011; Reingold, Rimor, & Kalay, 2008); however, there are limited inquiries that harnessed virtual transnational connections in teacher professional training where in- and pre-service teachers are geographically separated.

Riel (1993) accentuates a notable involvement of teachers and students in collaborative problem-solving, particularly endeavors that can strengthen “teachers’ links to world events and to global issues” through participation in global networks (p. 222). In Wan’s (2014) research, she involved pre- and in-service teachers from Hong Kong, Canada, and Spain in an online discussion platform and solicited pre-service teachers’ views on the use of cross-border online discussion as a form of e-learning. Findings generally refer to how globally collaborative online interactions had potentials to facilitate participants’ ownership of discussion and sustain continuous interactive learning. Nonetheless, Wan’s paper does not specifically address implications for teacher training.

There are a few studies that explored the effects of online, cross-border communities on teacher candidates’ intercultural competence development. Belz’s (2003) telecollaborative language study examines the impacts of telecollaboration (i.e., the use of Internet communication tools such as e-mail, synchronous chat, and threaded discussions by geographically distant students to promote social interaction, cross-border dialogues, and intercultural exchanges) on foreign language linguistic competence and intercultural competence. The findings of this study relate the importance of teacher education programs’ roles in educating teacher candidates to “discern, identify, explain, and model culturally-contingent patterns of interaction in the absence of paralinguistic meaning signals” (p. 92). McCloskey’s (2012) literature review of empirical studies specifically addresses teachers’ intercultural competence-building via technologically-mediated intercultural learning communities, which the author claimed as under-researched in teacher education inquiries. Findings of examined literature (e.g., Celentin, 2007; Dooly, 2007; Lieberman & Wood, 2001; Müller-Hartmann, 2006) reveal “meaningful, durable impacts” of online, cross-border interaction on teachers’ intercultural competences and awareness-building of the “cultural dimensions of technologies and

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