Mass Media and Schooling /
Mass Mediatization of Schooling

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This special issue of WPEL is devoted to exploring the relationship between mass media and schooling. These working papers emerged from a doctoral seminar, *Mass Media and Schooling*, which I facilitated in Spring 2011. In that seminar, our goal was to explore the relationship between mass media and schooling by reading an emerging literature on hip-hop and digital literacies and their role in education. Each member of the seminar also shared thoughts on how the mass media had an impact on her or his own educational research. The result is, in part, the papers you see here. The papers—on content ranging from *Harry Potter* museum exhibits to online math tutorials to hip-hop for English language learners—represent a spectrum of how educational projects and the mass media intersect through everyday practice.

These papers also represent a turn we took in the seminar from thinking about "mass media *and* schooling"—which conceptualizes mass media and schooling as two distinct entities—to "mass mediatization *of* schooling"—which, in contrast, addresses the profound infusion of mass media into everyday schooling and educational projects in general. Until working through these papers, I admit, I did not fully understand the value of a new term like *mediatization* (Krotz, 2009). So, in this brief introduction, I will trace the gap this word fills by briefly summarizing the problems encountered with the initial, simpler conceptualization, "mass media *and* schooling."

Mass Media AND Schooling

The conjunction "and" suggests that mass media and schooling are two separable projects. In reading about hip-hop, digital literacies, YouTube, fan fiction, online gaming and other new media, we found that educational researchers who study such mass media tend to focus on one or the other side of the conjunction. On the mass media side, researchers focus on understanding how youth engage with the mass media. We came to call these *youthy* or *ethnographic* responses—totally engaged with the media themselves and the youth practices that contextualize and propagate that media. Youthy approaches document the practices youth engage in as fans of hip-hop or online gaming, as writers of fan fiction or producers of YouTube videos. They are concerned with the do-it-yourself nature of youth engagements with mass media, and the participatory cultures fostered by mass media.

On the schooling side of the conjunction, researchers conduct their work primarily within educational institutions, looking at how the entity of mass media

can facilitate traditional curricular perspectives. We came to call these *educationy* responses to that media—responses that are primarily concerned with how mass mediated youth culture can be usefully put to work in the context of school and society. These researchers are interested not as much in how youth engage with hip-hop or gaming or YouTube, but in what these media are "good for" in the classroom. Their research addressed questions like, "How can we use hip-hop to make kids appreciate Shakespeare?" "How can gaming be used as an incentive for reading?" Or, more critically, "How can we *teach* students how to consume media as critical intellectuals?"

In sum, educationy perspectives rarely investigated how youth engage with mass media with their peers, while Youthy perspectives rarely concerned themselves with how these media may serve more traditional and/or critical educational goals. While the phrase "mass media and schooling" suggests a connection between these two concepts, in the research there is rarely room for youthy perspectives in the classroom, or educationy perspectives in the ethnographic study of youth practices. There are probably entrenched institutional reasons for this—schools and educational researchers often have far different goals. However, in our seminar, we decided not to simply throw up our hands and lament the complexity. Instead, we pushed to understand how connections might be usefully made.

Mass Mediatization *OF* Schooling

The phrase "mediatization *of* schooling" highlights two important features not captured in the phrase "mass media *and* schooling." First, the word "mediatization," rather than "media," emphasizes that media consumption is a process, not simply a static entity. Media may be anything from a few blobs of paint to a YouTube video or a major motion picture. To circulate on a mass scale and to become meaningful, those media need already existent communicative processes—social and institutional infrastructures like languages, peer groups and schools, for example. The word "mediatization" captures this process. Thus, our everyday encounters with people do not simply include references to mass media now and then; rather our everyday interactions are *infused* with mass media, or *mediatized.* We may unwittingly find ourselves speaking like characters in a TV show, or wearing the clothes of a popular artist. As Marshall McLuhan pointed out decades ago, new media are not simply an entity, but a cultural force (one he called "mediafication") (McLuhan, 1964).

This conceptualization of the role of media leads to new ways of studying how media work within social institutions like schools or other educational projects. We have drawn on the linguistic anthropological concept of *recontextualization* (Bauman & Briggs, 1990; Rymes, in press) as an empirical way to trace the path of mediatization. From this perspective, widely circulating media take on new and localized meanings and functions when used in different contexts. A hip-hop lyric, a *Harry Potter* reference, or a popular representation of indigenous people (to take examples from the papers in this volume), may be repeatedly used across very different communities, but may mean very differently in each instance. From this perspective, mediatization is not a one-way process, in which media invade people's worlds or take over their minds. Rather, people also infuse their media

references with the communicative goals and values that already exist in their community, peer group, or institution. Studying this process involves being reflexive—aware of how media function differently when deployed in different contexts—not merely critical (as discussed in Siegel, this volume).

Once we understand mediatization as a process of recontextualization, the connection between new media and the goals of schooling becomes less ephemeral. Now the more tangible question is: How are new media recontextualized within the context of schooling? In other words, how do students and teachers socially negotiate the meaning and relevance of widely circulating media? No matter how much a teacher may want to use media (say, a YouTube video on the quadratic equation, or a hip-hop lyric on refugees) to teach math concepts or broaden students' minds, until students weave this material into their own communicative goals, their engagement will be tenuous. When they do weave this material into their own complex sets of concerns and desires, student engagement can skyrocket.

The social negotiation of relevance and the affordances of new media for this process has been discussed in literature on *participatory culture* (Jenkins, Purushotma, Clinton, Weigel & Robison, 2009). This useful concept articulates the symbiotic relationship between knowledge and social interaction: especially in the age of new media, knowledge and expertise are no longer exclusively located in a single individual (like a teacher) and fostered through a culture of individualism. Rather, knowledge and relevance are created through interaction between people who have access to widely distributed networks. What counts as knowledge emerges as a result of social negotiation. As the papers in this volume suggest, the degrees to which participatory culture is fostered within educational projects is a significant indicator of the efficacy and productive futures of those projects.

This brings us back to the reformulation of "mass media *and* schooling" to "mass mediatization *of* schooling." When we stick mass media *and* schooling together with that simple conjunction, mass media will always be seen as either distinct from, or, at best, a tool in service of *a priori* educational goals. Once we consider mass media as a potential vehicle for participatory culture and knowledge production, however, the dichotomy between schooling and mass media breaks down. The concept of mass mediatitization *of* schooling accounts for the always already socially negotiated, and media-driven, nature of knowledge. Those *a priori* views about what counts as knowledge, are themselves mediatized. Presupposed educational values are often simply the educational formulations that make sense within our own, adult, privledged, communicative, mediatized context. Explicitly articulating the value and impact of participatory culture allows for the massive inclusion of new voices in those processes of mediatization.

The Papers: Making Useful Connections

To recap, our collective goal in the seminar was, originally, to make useful connections between mass media and schooling. This required blending youthy perspectives with educationy goals. This meant in turn that, rather than finding how media are used in service of free-standing, *a priori*, educational goals, we would be investigating the processes through which new media may liberate schooling from entrenched educational norms and provide spaces for new voices and approaches. Each of these working papers illustrates those tensions between

entrenched norms and new media-driven participatory approaches, and each paper describes the complicated communicative processes involved in pushing educational culture to be more inclusive, engaging, and productive.

The papers in this volume illustrate the varying degrees to which participatory culture imbues educational practices. The first paper, by **Joshua A. Taton**, discusses the Khan Academy, an online repository of tutorials that has been hailed as a revolutionary use of technology in the service of educational goals. The Khan Academy (KA) establishes an arguably traditional epistemological viewpoint on mathematical knowledge, and the teaching and learning of mathematics. This viewpoint, in tandem with features of the KA website, simultaneously promotes engagement in a learning community. Taton's detailed analysis of the interactions on the KA website illustrates, however, that rather than fully embracing the tenets of participatory culture, the website limits the depth of users' participatory capacities.

In the next research paper, **Catrice Barrett** looks at hip-hop in a class of high school English language learners. In contrast to the tightly controlled curricular focus of the KA website, Barrett's study explores what happens when mass mediated content like global hip-hop is used to invite greater participation and new forms of knowledge into a massively multilingual and multicultural classroom. Students' hesitations to embrace the non-standard linguistic practices in global hip-hop illustrate the already mediatized environment of the classroom—where, ironically, the instructor was the one introducing the non-standard practices. Rather than operating from an increasingly paralyzing state of panic over youth practices (a perspective articulated by some youth themselves), this curricular innovation encouraged a reflexive approach to media—having students consider their varied personal/mediatized reactions to forms of global English.

Taking another look at the global affordances of new media, **Shaina Adams El-Gubai**'s paper investigates the capacity of mass media technologies to bring together classroom communities through an online exchange between Constitution High School in Philadelphia and Marefat High School in Kabul, Afghanistan. The project fostered voluminous online writing, and culminated in a photo exhibit and actual face-to-face visit to Philadelphia from the Afghan partners. The effectiveness of this particular project was that it emphasized students' own experiences and encouraged participatory engagement in order to foster learning and build collective global intelligence. The eventual downfall of the project was that its participatory nature was highly orchestrated (and funded) by the institutions involved. Without this oversight, the project could never have existed, and as it tapered off, the participation lost the infrastructure it needed to sustain itself.

In these first three papers, schooling in a more traditional sense—from traditional math curricular demands to the literacy learning of English language learners to high school social studies objectives—drove the mass media connection. In all three cases, the internet fostered collaboration across time and space, but was used primarily in service of traditional school-based goals. In the last two papers, in contrast, mass media themselves (specifically the wildly popular phenomena of the book and movie sensations *Twilight* and *Harry Potter)* were the driving force behind knowledge production.

Joanna Luz Siegel's paper, on the participatory culture surrounding the *Twilight* book and movie series, shifts the focus away from schools and schooling to everyday youth engagements with mass media. As she points out, *Twilight*

fanship often can entail deep engagement in participatory cultures that create and organize vast repositories of information, shifting "the onus of producing and safekeeping knowledge away from the elite expert and toward the self-correcting crowd" (Siegel, this volume, p. 99). Her paper carefully articulates the distinction between a merely "critical" approach to media representations and a reflexive approach, which explores processes of recontextualization and the impact of mass media icons relative to the context in which they are used.

Like the *Twilight* sensation, *Harry Potter* has also propagated massive participatory fan cultures, and **Debora Lui**'s paper documents how curators have attempted to harness this creative energy to revitalize more stodgy and traditional museum projects. However, as she illustrates, museums rarely succeed in decentering the source of knowledge and expertise. Rather, the curators of the *Harry Potter* exhibits she discusses largely arranged the exhibits in educating, decidedly non-participatory formats—where the media of *Harry Potter* provided an excuse for museums to teach about a more standard, elite cannon of pre-ordained knowledge. "Harry Potter Day," at the Penn Museum of Anthropology and Archeology—a comparatively low-brow and low-budget event in which visitors were invited to show up in costume and literally create much of the activity of the exhibit themselves—was the only exhibit that captured the energy and interactional engagement of participatory fan culture.

Each of these papers illustrates a complicated nexus of educational goals and communicative pathways for student engagement. I would argue also that, collectively, they illustrate the stunning range and variety of forms of mediatization that always occur within educational activity. Mass media are inseparable from schooling. Most importantly, these papers illustrate how an educational linguistic perspective on mass media can point us to more nuanced understandings of those communicative processes that can shut down learning and participation, and those participatory cultures that lead to intense student engagements with knowledge. This is an exciting and new realm of educational exploration and I look forward to expanding our own participatory culture as we learn more about it.

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