REPORT

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New media literacies in after-school settings: Three curricula from the program ‘Explore Locally, Excel Digitally’ at Robert F. Kennedy Community Schools in Los Angeles

ABSTRACT

‘Explore Locally, Excel Digitally’ is an after-school program based on new media literacies and participatory learning conducted in a Los Angeles high school during spring 2011. The current article offers a comprehensive report of three sessions of the program with detailed descriptions of their creative curricula developed by members of the research team and graduate students. The article contains a detailed examination of how each session’s lesson plan connects with the broader theoretical debate on media literacy.
new media literacies, following Henry Jenkins’ new media literacies and participatory culture concepts. The article is addressed both to educators who seek inspiration for future projects, and to students and scholars working in the arena of new media literacy and media education interested in links between theory and practice.

INTRODUCTION

This article examines how USC’s Project New Media Literacies (Project NML) developed and implemented three lesson plans for a pilot after-school program at Robert F. Kennedy Community Schools (RFK).

Project NML is a research group based at the University of Southern California, led by Professor Henry Jenkins and Erin Reilly. Its goal is to investigate how learning and pedagogy should change in the current cultural and multimedia context. The major research questions that motivate Project NML activities are the following: How should we address the gap between informal learning outside school (especially interest-driven practices that take place in participatory culture) and standard education? How is it possible to integrate skills, tools and insights of participatory culture into US public education? And how can we deal with youths’ and adults’ unequal access to the opportunities, skills and attitudes that facilitate cultural and civic participation in society? To address these questions, Project NML has begun identifying and creating educational practices that will prepare teachers and students to become full and active participants in the new digital culture (see Stephens, 2010). Working with the RFK after-school program serves this research agenda.

The Robert F. Kennedy Community Schools is a consortium of six public primary and secondary schools that share a campus and ascribe to a common mission statement. This campus is located in central Los Angeles on the former site of the Ambassador Hotel, where, in 1968, US Senator Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated. RFK’s mission statement embodies Kennedy’s social justice legacy. The Wilshire Center/Koreatown neighbourhood where RFK is situated is very densely populated. The school-age population in this area is predominantly Latino (84 per cent) and low-income (89 per cent), with 50 per cent classified as English Language Learners. In February 2011, Project NML’s research group came into RFK and started an after-school program called ‘Explore Locally, Excel Digitally’ (ELED). The program ran from February to May 2011, meeting on Fridays between 3:35 and 5:30 p.m. (and offering Thursdays as optional, open lab days).

This article analyses three creative curricula from the after-school program, all of which focused on new media literacies. Since this after-school program was a pilot, and the sessions were developed and put into practice by graduate students and members of research team, they should be considered experimental in nature (for more about the design and result of the ELED program, see Felt et al. 2012). The three curricula that will be analysed in detail were developed and implemented by three graduate students enrolled in Professor Henry Jenkins’ seminar on New Media Literacies at the University of Southern California’s Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. As a visiting Ph.D. student, the author had the opportunity to attend the after-school sessions in which these curricula were piloted, and took ethnographic notes as well as interviewed each of the graduate students involved.

The purpose of this article is twofold: first, to document the process of introducing new media literacies skills in an after-school setting; second,
to share resources and strategies for educators who want to integrate new media literacies skills into their teaching practices and create a participatory learning environment. More specifically, this article first examines how the ELED program is framed within the broader media literacy movement. Then it analyses three lesson plans, reviewing the significance of each lesson’s themes and describing their activities. Finally, it demonstrates how each lesson plan is theoretically informed by current debate on new media literacies and participatory culture.4

THEORETICAL CONTEXT: MEDIA LITERACY AND PARTICIPATORY CULTURE

The ELED after-school program is an innovative media education initiative belonging to the wide and multifaceted media literacy movement. It embodies many of the stances raised in the field after the massive adoption of digital media by youth. Originally, scholars defined media literacy as the ability to read and understand mass media messages and language – focusing especially on television. Recently, the term has gained renewed interest in the context of digital media, and it is used both by scholars and policy-makers. In one of the most common explanations, outlined in 1992 at the United States’ National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy, media literacy is defined as the ability ‘to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate messages in a variety of forms’ (Aufderheide 1993). The UK media regulator Ofcom (2004) – drawing on the previous definition – set media literacy as ‘the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts’ (Buckingham 2007a). The notion encompasses both digital and analog media and stresses the relationship between audience (or users) and media industries and producers. However, beyond the comprehensive definition, media literacy is pursued from different perspectives and acquires different meanings.

As stated years ago by Hobbs (1998: 16), media literacy ‘is a concept whose broad definition and range of applications lead to diverse approaches, creating some intriguing conflicts and tensions’. In the literature, dissimilarities within media literacy theories and practices are set along the lines of protectionist versus empowering approaches. The protectionist stance, often associated with the media effects paradigm, originates from moral panics related to youths’ media consumption habits: it ‘posits media audiences as passive victims’ and it often ‘values traditional print culture over media culture’ (Kellner and Share 2007). Overall, the protectionist approach ‘justifies media literacy by noting its power to reduce the negative impact of media on youth’ (Hobbs 1998: 19). These programs focus exclusively on the negative sides of media content such as violence, commercialization, deception, materialism and related (supposedly risky) behaviors. In order to protect children and young people from the harmful effects of media, educators explain the risks and problems situated in media messages to the students. These defensive goals figure prominently in media literacy research agendas and ‘are most likely to be funded and meet with broader approval’ (Martens 2010: 5).

However, scholars have widely criticized this protectionist approach. For example, Buckingham (2007b) states that ‘effective practice in media education […] is not a matter of protecting children from the allegedly harmful influences of the media’; rather, it should encourage ‘more active and critical participation in the media culture that surrounds them’ (Buckingham 2007b). Hence, media literacy scholars who champion the empowering
approach have ‘enthusiastically marginalized the media effects paradigm’ and have positioned media literacy ‘within a cultural/critical studies paradigm’ (Hobbs 2005: 871). The approach is based on the belief that media literacy should develop from audiences’ (or users’) experiences and practices: its purpose is not to teach how to defend from media messages or how to use the media, but ‘how to think about them critically and proactively’ (2005: 871). Media practitioners are interested in the everyday contexts of media use, and define their activities according to what is relevant for children and youth. Generally their programs encourage all youth to be critical consumers and citizens, and especially minority or low-income students to make their voices heard through media production activities. A progressive political agenda, although pursued in different ways, is at the core of empowering media literacy programs. For instance, according to some educators, media literacy programs could challenge traditional classroom power relations using topics that are significant to students, drawing from popular culture and implementing non-hierarchical learning contexts. Additionally many educators stress how media literacy could produce social change addressing race, gender and class stereotypes present in mass media messages and helping students to recognize and respond to them. Another important issue is participation in society thanks to a conscious and proactive media use; as Silverstone (2004: 448) put it, ‘[media literacy] is a prerequisite for full participation in late modern society, involving as it does the critical skills of analysis and appreciation of the social dynamics and social centrality of media as framing the cultures of the everyday’.

Beyond differences between protectionist and empowering approaches, at the center of media literacy education lies a ‘pedagogy of inquiry’ based on the act of ‘asking questions about media texts’ (Hobbs 1998). While some media literacy initiatives are held for elementary and secondary students during regular school hours, more often they occur in out-of-school contexts such as after-school, summer camps, libraries and community-based centers. Activities include media analysis, critical reflection and media production. The latter – corresponding to the fourth element in the definition of media literacy (‘communicate messages in a variety of forms’) – became particularly meaningful after the emergence of digital media. Before that, media production was exclusively used to teach the logics and languages of film-making, photography, journalism and similar subjects. It was a strategy to teach media aesthetics or media industry organizations. Students were expected to be more capable of understanding, critiquing and challenging professional media texts after having created their own media content (Gauntlett 1997). In the last decade, with the Internet and the World Wide Web media production has acquired even more relevance in media literacy programs. Scholars and educators also consider media production meaningful because it facilitates self-expression and social, cultural and civic participation.

In the current media landscape, grass-roots and mainstream media, as well as digital and analog media, are increasingly interrelated. Social media and relatively cheap digital technologies enhance possibilities for producing and sharing non-professional content. Moreover, the so-called Web 2.0 platforms support cooperative work and collect resources generated by users. In this technological scenario, many youths and adults engage in ‘affinity spaces’ (Gee 2004), both online and offline, where they pursue an interest, learn from mentors, share knowledge with peers and, in certain cases, cooperate on a bigger project. Usually these communities are centered on popular culture, hobbies and fandom, but
they can also involve civic and political engagement. Media production, hence, stems from the encounter of specific cultures and the enabling technologies: ‘participatory cultures’ are the result of the interrelationship between ‘the different communication technologies, the cultural communities that grow up around them and the activities they support’ (Jenkins et al., 2006: 8). Jenkins and co-authors agree that, in order to participate in twenty-first-century society, citizens should be able to take part in ‘participatory cultures’. Consequently they propose a set of ‘new media literacies’ that should be taught in addition to traditional print literacy and inquiry-based media literacy. New media literacies are social skills and cultural competencies developed through collaboration and networking, especially (but not only) with digital media. From a review on informal learning through digital media and participatory cultures, Jenkins and colleagues (2006: 4) defined the following new media literacies:

- **play** – the capacity to experiment with one’s surroundings as a form of problem-solving
- **performance** – the ability to adopt alternative identities for the purpose of improvisation and discovery
- **simulation** – the ability to interpret and construct dynamic models of real-world processes
- **appropriation** – the ability to meaningfully sample and remix media content
- **multitasking** – the ability to scan one’s environment and shift focus as needed to salient details.
- **distributed cognition** – the ability to interact meaningfully with tools that expand mental capacities
- **collective intelligence** – the ability to pool knowledge and compare notes with others toward a common goal
- **judgment** – the ability to evaluate the reliability and credibility of different information sources
- **transmedia navigation** – the ability to follow the flow of stories and information across multiple modalities
- **networking** – the ability to search for, synthesize, and disseminate information
- **negotiation** – the ability to travel across diverse communities, discerning and respecting multiple perspectives, and grasping and following alternative norms (2006: 4).

Current media literacy initiatives, such as the ELED after-school program, address existing inequalities in participation. In this regard, scholars have identified disparities in digital media use by children and youths from different social backgrounds and named them ‘participation gap’ (Jenkins et al. 2006), ‘participation divide’ (Hargittai and Walejko 2008) or ‘gradations in digital inclusion’ (Livingstone and Helsper 2007). On one side, there are young people for whom digital media fit in their daily routine and help them to satisfy personal or social objectives; on the other side, there are youths who
use technology only for specific tasks or for entertainment, in a limited, not exploratory and sometimes frustrated way (Jenkins et al. 2006; Livingstone and Helsper 2007; Robinson 2009). In order to address the ‘participation gap’, the ELED after-school program incorporated new media literacies in its curricula design. This was done in two ways. First as a goal: educators designed their lesson plans precisely to help students gain confidence with at least one new media literacy skill. Second as a means: new media literacies skills were used as a strategy to conduct more effective and fruitful after-school sessions.

LESSON PLANS REVIEW: TRANSMEDIA MUSIC COMPOSITION: FROM EMOTIONS TO TEXTS, TO IMAGES, TO SOUND. LESSON DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION BY STEFANI RELLES

Relles’ after-school activity, titled ‘MP3 Citizenship: The School Anthem Project’, consists of a two-day project about music – writing, playing and recording it, both collaboratively and unconventionally. No previous music skills are required by the student for this activity. The focus of the session is to reflect on how emotions can be translated through diverse ‘modes of representation’ (Kress 2003). It challenges students to convert their feeling(s) about the RFK schools into text, images and, in the final moment when they all collectively perform the anthem, sound. Instead of adopting traditional music notation, this curriculum embraced graphic notation. Graphic notation is a peculiar form of music notation that replaces traditional music symbols with graphic elements, pictures or texts to communicate information on how to perform a piece of music. This is often used in experimental music, where standard notation can be less effective (Figure 1).

Besides creating a moment of collective engagement, in which students have opportunities to play and try different musical instruments, the School Anthem Project offers at least three main learning opportunities. First, it fosters self-expression because it stimulates students to translate their emotions into different media forms. The experience of translating feelings into texts, images and sounds encourages the students to think about the connection between music, emotions and creativity, and the particular affordances of different creative and artistic media. Furthermore, the School Anthem Project educates students about music composition. They directly experience the process of producing music from inspiration to song recording, and they get insights about how the performance of some music genres, like rock ‘n’ roll, punk and certain experimental music, does not necessarily require extensive musical knowledge. Finally, this curriculum provides all students with the opportunity to be in a (rock) band, even if just for a short span of time; being in the band is probably the most challenging and, at the same time, engaging aspect of the School Anthem Project. Forming a band, rehearsing, playing together and experiencing a creative flow simultaneously promote participatory community skills and group cohesion.

Figure 1: Hans-Christoph Steiner’s score for Solitude as an example of graphic notation (source http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Graphic_notation).
**Creative curriculum activities**

The activities are split between two days. Day one is dedicated to writing music, while day two is about performing it.

*Writing and drawing music*

On the first day, key concepts behind the School Anthem Project are introduced through a mini-lesson. The educator explains and discusses with the students the concepts of anthems, rock ‘n’ roll anthems and graphic notation. She uses YouTube videos, especially examples from pop culture, such as Beyoncé singing the American national anthem at the Super Bowl in 2004 or Queen performing live ‘We Are the Champions’. She also shares a video of Beck’s ‘Clap Hands’, which depicts unconventional ways of playing music, to exemplify the types of experimental songs that the students will perform the following day. Otherwise, it is possible to ask students to find YouTube videos with interesting interpretations of anthems and to comment on them for their classmates.

After the brief lesson, students begin to work on their graphic notation. First, they explore their feelings about their own RFK school and the whole RFK campus. They are asked to use a theme/emotion worksheet as a tool to help them translate these feelings into three verses of text and a repeating chorus.

Then the group comes together to discuss their respective worksheets. This is a moment of particular interest because it gives teachers a chance to listen to students’ voices about their school. For example, RFK students came up with concepts such as ‘tidy’, ‘the mall’, ‘overwhelming’ and ‘skateboarding’ that stand for very different perceptions of the RFK schools. Then the students venture into the Computer Lab and use Microsoft Paint or other software of their choice to create graphical notation ‘vision statements’ (Figure 2).

*A very special orchestra*

On the second day, some setting-up work for the recording room is needed. At RFK after school, two musicians came to help build a recording studio, with various musical instruments, such as electric guitars, pedals, a drum set and amps in a small soundproof classroom.

This can be tweaked depending on schools’ and educators’ possibilities, for example using only students’ made-up instruments (with random objects,
low-budget instruments, ringtones, voices). However, the presence of professional musicians and real musical instruments encourages students’ engagement and helps to produce a more convincing anthem.

Each student chooses an instrument and a single sound. Each sound can be connected to a specific anthem’s verse or emotion. Finally, when everybody is ready to play, a graphic notation is projected on the wall and a student (in turns) becomes the conductor for the whole orchestra. The conductor explains how she imagines her graphic notation should be played and then starts leading the band’s members. The conductor shows who should start/stop playing, part of the graphic notation, the intensity, etc. After some rehearsal, the band will record the definitive version on an mp3. These files can afterwards be uploaded on the Internet. It is advisable to have a medium-size group of students for this activity – probably six students would be a perfect number. They should feel free to experiment but not too free to totally go out of control (even if, of course, getting out of control and making noise is part of this curriculum).

A new media literacy skill in practice: Transmedia navigation

The School Anthem Project curriculum is based on the concept of transmedia navigation, one of the new media literacies skills identified by Jenkins and colleagues (2006). Transmedia navigation involves ‘the ability to deal with the flow of stories and information across multiple modalities’ (2006: 85), and it is especially meaningful in the current media environment where stories are told across multiple media. Famous examples in the movie industry include The Matrix (Wachowski and Wachowski 1999), The Blair Witch Project (Myrick and Sánchez 1999) and Lost (Abrams et al. 2004). Another successful example is Pokémon: TV serial, toys, card games, magazine, video games, Pokémon is even more then a set of texts across different media; it was defined as ‘Pokémon is something you do, not just something you watch or ‘consume’’ (see Buckingham and Sefton-Green 2003: 379). Transmedia stories introduce two main innovations in the way that pop culture is created, distributed and consumed. First, on the producer side, transmedia stories’ authors attentively employ not only one, but different media and modes of representation to create a narrative, and each media is chosen and used for its specific particular strengths and what it could add to the narrative. Second, on the audience side, transmedia stories create a new fruition experience that is based on social interactions and collective meaning-making. In fact, since information, stories, characters and worlds are dispersed across multiple modes of representation, the audience which wants to grasp the whole narrative needs to cooperate and share knowledge.

However, the concept of transmedia goes beyond the act of storytelling and can express a different set of ‘logics’ (Jenkins 2011) such as ‘transmedia branding, transmedia performance, transmedia ritual, transmedia play, transmedia activism, and transmedia spectacle’ (Jenkins 2011). The core idea of transmedia relies on the concept of multimodality in the account made by Gunther Kress (2003, 2010). Multimodality is a theoretical approach that studies the shift of literacy beyond the written mode after the diffusion of digital media. Literacy, according to this approach, is not based only on the alphabetic text, but on a mixture of texts, images and sounds that combine differently in each medium or mode of communication. In this regard, Kress (2003: 45) states: ‘in the era of new technologies of information and communication, mode and choice of mode is a significant issue. Mode is the
name for a culturally and socially fashioned resource for representation and communication.’ Every medium has its conventions, its grammar and syntax and therefore its limitations, in other words its affordances. In the multimodality framework, affordances refer to the potentialities and constraints of different media or modes, what it is possible to express, represent or communicate with the resources they have and what is difficult or impossible (Jewitt 2013). Kress suggests that modern literacy should include also the ability to choose and correctly employ different modes of representation according to their affordances: knowing limits and capabilities of different media, their materiality and logic of spaces are all crucial skills in our times (Kress 2003). Awareness of affordances could be developed with ‘transmedia experiences’, such as the School Anthem Project, that ‘invite children to draw upon multiple literacies, including digital, textual, visual, and media literacies, as well as social skills and cultural competencies’ (Alper and Herr-Stephenson 2013: 367). In fact, the School Anthem lesson plan is based on the concept of multimodality because it encourages participants to express ideas through different modes of representations. The students are asked to articulate a set of emotions about their school across different modes: texts, images and then sounds. For each one they have the opportunity to reflect on the affordances and limitations, according to their purposes. Furthermore they can examine what were the most successful transmedia anthems recorded, the more convincing graphic notations, songs and performances. Finally, they can ponder on the process as a whole and on the work of ‘transduction’ (Kress 2003) from one mode to another and how their concepts are reshaped based on the affordances of each medium and mode of representation.

LESSON PLAN REVIEW: LET’S PLAY WITH ‘HOW TO’ VIDEOS.
LESSON DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION BY NETA Kligler-Vilenchik

A graduate student, Neta Kligler-Vilenchik, built her after-school lesson plan on the concept of ‘how to’ videos – a filmed version of the common ‘how to’ guides based on texts, numbered lists, diagrams, illustrations and so on. In the current media environment, users upload these kinds of videos online onto different websites, like the ones dedicated to this purpose (i.e. howcast.com and videojug.com, for example) or user-generated video services like YouTube. Topics are extremely varied, from make-up techniques to technology tricks, from homework to dancing lessons, and, very specific, from how to install a subwoofer to how to do light painting.

The World Wide Web is a source of potentially infinite information and knowledge; it offers users the possibility to learn more about things they are passionate about or need to know for problem-solving in their daily life. Kligler Vilenchik’s lesson plan starts from this recognition and relies on ‘how to’ videos to let students get acquainted with acquiring and sharing knowledge online. Its learning goal is twofold, since it places students in the positions both of learners and of potential teachers to others. Indeed, one purpose is to empower students by introducing them to the possibility of learning to do things they want or need to do using online ‘how to’ video guides. Most of the students will probably be already aware of the existence of these videos; nonetheless, the session will be an occasion to discuss about problems of content credibility and formal quality. The second aim of this session is to promote students’ own confidence in their abilities and their willingness to help others,
by creating their own ‘how to’ video guide, which they can upload onto the
Internet and share with family or friends. Students not only watch and analyze
different ‘how to’ videos, but they also produce one by the end of the session.

**Creative curriculum activities**
The how-to lesson plan is divided into three parts.

*How-to videos: dissecting a genre*
The educator starts broadcasting some selected examples and then discusses
the formal aspects of these. The educator should initiate a conversation
about the formal characteristics or visual and content quality of the videos:
it is advisable to also select some simple and low-tech examples in order to
motivate students to try to produce one on their own. It is a good idea to
broadcast ‘how to’ videos realized by young people or that do not need big
equipment to be produced; examples used at RFK were ‘how to do an equa-
tion’ and ‘how to tie a tie’. After watching these video, students collectively
discern the formal elements that make up a ‘how to’ video (e.g. announcement
of what the video is about, the step-by-step scripting) and what contributes
to making it better (e.g. filming from different angles, editing). Afterwards,
the educator could select an immediately reproducible ‘how to’ video and ask
students to follow its instructions. At RFK students followed the instructions
about ‘how to’ build a paper airplane; then they tested who did it better by
letting their airplanes fly around.

Even if the session’s first part is mainly about discussing formal aspects of
the video, it can be more engaging if students are involved in lesson design. It
is possible to organize the activity so that students should search online what
videos to broadcast (so that the examples used will be about issues that are more
relevant to them) or it is possible to ask them about their personal experience
with this genre: have they ever followed instructions from a ‘how to’ video
guide? Can they show these videos to their classmates? Have they ever done
their own ‘how to’ video? Can they show it and/or explain it to the class? At
RFK, five participants had already created their own video, some of them had a
really popular YouTube channel (one student with thousands of views and ‘how
to’ guides about video games), while other participants were more secretive
about their videos (‘Yes, I have done one, but I am not a professional’).

*Make your own how-to video at school*
Students make their own ‘how to’ video working in groups. They can be
divided into groups of two or three. The educator then gives each group a
video-recording device, a paper with a template to fill in with the ‘how to’
video storyline and an assignment. At RFK, the precise assignment was the
following: ‘creating a single-take one-minute video (or less) that teaches how
to do a certain skill’. Students had iPod Touches (which are part of the RFK
technology equipment) as video-recording devices. The kind of technology
used, together with the fact that the video is done in just 40 minutes, explains
the time constraints and ‘no editing’ recommendation. But there is a positive
element: such a low-tech video makes it easier for the students to send it by
e-mail to friends or family (Figure 3).

After a short brainstorming session, students decide the location (within
the school borders) and theme of their video. Then they write their script,
rehearse a little and then record it. An adult can be present in each group but from the RFK experience we see that it is not really mandatory.

RFK students dispersed in various spaces such as library, playground, conference room and office area. Themes of the ‘how to’ videos produced included ‘how to solve a Rubik’s cube’, ‘how to do yoga for beginners’, ‘how to do a headstand’, ‘how to use a Nintendo DS’, ‘how to draw a female face’ and ‘how to fold a T-shirt to make it into a ninja mask’. The last one was especially interesting: two boys, without adult supervision, recorded a video that explains how to fold a black T-shirt to make it look like a real ninja mask. Even if their video was funny, the boys took their task seriously and exhaustedly explain every step in details. They were actually reproducing a very popular sub-genre of ‘how to’ videos on YouTube.

Learning from doing and discussing

Finally students’ videos are projected on the wall. Every projection is followed by a discussion to reflect on the process and outcomes. Afterwards students e-mailed their videos to friends using their iPod Touch. Some advice from fieldwork about this final activity: alert students before they start working that all the videos produced during the afternoon will be broadcast and discussed collectively. It will help to make them work more seriously and also to consider what they want to show to their school mates and what not. The final discussions about each group’s ‘how to’ video were good moments of reflection at the RFK schools. Students shared opinions and spontaneously gave advice to their friends about how they could improve their videos (i.e. ‘make a proper introduction’). A video was criticized because the matter taught was too advanced (it showed how to make a headstand yoga posture), another one was valued because it looked professional (‘thanks to good lighting,
complete sentences and proper vocabulary’) and finally the ninja mask video was a success because it amused everyone in the class.

**A new media literacy skill in practice: Play**

The ‘how to’ after-school session is not based only on one particular new media literacy skill, but it is related with a few of them. In the session’s first part, when students define formal aspects and content reliability of ‘how to’ videos, the ability to judge is crucial. Jenkins and co-authors (2006: 79) define judgement as ‘the ability to evaluate the reliability and credibility of different information sources’. It is one of the basic skills and is entangled with other more sophisticated forms of engagement in participatory cultures, like collective intelligence and transmedia navigation. During the session at RFK, students collectively commented and judged numerous videos, whether they were the ones found online on different websites or the ones produced by the students themselves during the afternoon. Comments and observations did not focus only on issues of content reliability; formal features and visual aesthetics were also discussed. Themes of debate were, for example, how to better communicate a desired concept and the overall outcomes of students’ produced ‘how to’ videos.

Nevertheless, the students’ most challenging activity is surely the realization of their own video. In this regard, it is feasible to suggest another new media literacy skill mastered during the program: play. Play is intended broadly as ‘the capacity to experiment with one’s surroundings as a form of problem-solving’ (Jenkins et al. 2006: 35). Normally, play is used in reference to games and recreational activities; however, recently, it is also being rediscovered as an effective mode of learning (Felt 2011; Gee 2003). We could say that during this after-school session students engage in a particular form of play, that is playing with the ‘how to’ video genre. In fact, the whole after-school session can be interpreted as a game. As a first step, students start mastering the game rules – and that’s what happened when in the first part of the session they analyzed the ‘how to’ genre. Then they actually start playing when, divided into small groups, they worked and recorded their personal ‘how to’ guide. Finally, through public broadcasting of their productions in the classroom and follow-up discussions, students gained a sense of the quality of their works from their pals’ enjoyment and opinions. To be more like a game, the session should have given students other opportunities to record videos and broadcast them in front of their pals (like in video games, where it is always possible to start again). Overall, playing with the ‘how to’ videos genre encourages students to experiment with a cultural resource, try roles, manipulate resources and explore their environment and skills – which are some of the main features of children’s play (Jenkins et al. 2006). While producing ‘how to’ videos, students are playing and engaging in different forms of learning at the same time. They learn skills and practices, gain knowledge and get a sense of themselves as both learners and experts in a specific field.

**LESSON PLAN REVIEW: PERFORMING FACEBOOK-RELATED AWKWARD SITUATIONS. LESSON DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION BY BLAKE ANDERSON**

Blake Anderson, an NML seminar student, developed his lesson plan on online identity and disclosure of personal information through social network sites (SNSs). His after-school session is an example of media education
applied to SNSs, a genre of social media that many teens embrace to manage their status and personal relationships. As a matter of fact, youths are earlier adopters of digital communications and ‘their exposure to new media is continuously growing in volume, complexity, and interactivity’ (Ito et al. 2010: 3). The fast and massive growth of SNSs’ relevance in teens’ everyday life is outstanding and supported by recent statistics. Anderson lesson plan acknowledges these facts and focuses on issues of online identity and privacy management – which are everyday burdens for online youth. SNSs are associated with a ‘culture of disclosure’ that carries both risks and opportunities for young people. On one side, a carefully managed online identity can inspire and empower youth, giving them the possibility to express themselves and get emotional support while maintaining a certain level of anonymity, at the same time developing an ethic of privacy. To gain these benefits though, young people have to learn to manage privacy: they can harm themselves or others if they do not consider the specific properties of Internet privacy (James et al. 2009). There are four properties of online data that should be taken into account when speaking about privacy; researcher danah boyd (2007) effectively states that online all information is persistent (what you post persists indefinitely), searchable (your online data can be searched by anyone), replicable (the content you wrote/post can be copied and pasted in another, different, context) and seen by an invisible audience (you do not have the opportunity to see your audience).

The after-school session is designed to encourage students to think about all these facets of privacy online, with special attention to the idea of ‘invisible audiences’ (boyd 2007). The main aim is to help students understand the consequences of publishing different kinds of personal information online and thinking about how their online identities can be seen by different people from various perspectives. The learning goals of this session are twofold. First, students have an opportunity to think about their online identity and the blurred borders between public and private life. Second, through a performative activity, they will be able to reflect on invisible audiences and the consequences of over-sharing behaviour. The ‘Performing Facebook’ after-school session will hopefully encourage kids to be more critical and self-aware about what they disclose online. An overall main purpose is to promote the ethic of privacy (James et al. 2009) and responsible decision-making in teens’ digital practices.

**Creative curriculum activities**

Ironically – besides the small fraction of time dedicated to helping students with their privacy setting at the end of the session – all activities planned for Performing Facebook do not require a computer or any kind of technology. It is very consistent with the participatory culture framework that stresses how the focus should be not on technology but on the social aspects of participation.

The session’s main activities can be separated into three moments.

**Rating profiles and giving names**

This after-school session requires some preliminary work by the educator to produce three special worksheets. Three young people’s Facebook profiles should be selected and saved as images (screenshots); afterwards, with a photo-retouching software, last names and other personal information should be deleted. Then, three checkboxes should be placed next to each Facebook wall entry with the following labels: positive, neutral, negative. The person
8. In order to not create an ethical dilemma, it is essential to use fictional Facebook profiles or render them anonymous.

from whose point of view the Facebook activities will be evaluated can be placed at the document’s head. That person can be a parent, a potential date or a potential boss. These three handouts should be printed and brought to the lesson (Figure 4).

Each student reviews the three Facebook profiles’ worksheets and assesses them from different perspectives: parent, potential date, potential boss. After individually rating their worksheets, students gather in small groups to identify and write down adjectives that best describe Facebook profiles’ owners. Finally, a student from each group writes the adjectives his group comes up with on a whiteboard and shares them with all the class. Later, the educator starts a discussion about those adjectives in order to collectively comprehend which kind of interpretations can arise from different information shared online. RFK students were generally quite harsh in judging their peers’ behaviour on Facebook. Students come out with adjectives like desperate, loner,
introverted, *stalkerish*, heart-broken, obsessive, bored, belligerent, immature, poser, *emo*, rebellious, crazy and intense. Overall, this first activity is very structured: one RFK student looking at the checkboxes in the handout asked if it was a test. Therefore, the educator should be careful to explain that there are no right answers and foster a relaxed atmosphere.

*Improvising on Facebook-related situations*

At the RFK after-school session students engagement visibly increased when during the second activity they in turn became actor or actress and improvised a sketch related to the just-analysed Facebook profiles. During the activity, each group’s volunteers performed a short *improv* of what a conversation between the profiled person and the prospective identity may look like if the profile were seen. Volunteers perform with three given scenarios, drawing on their assessments and group adjectives. While two students *improv* a scenario, the others become the audience. At RFK, this activity was very enjoyable and offered students interesting new perspectives about adult/youth relationships and SNSs. Here are the scenarios – created by Anderson – that were used to start the *improv*. To give an idea about each character’s Facebook profile, we report the adjectives assigned by the students.

*Potential date improv*

Characters: Kevin & Samantha

Place: Science Class

Scenario: Kevin and Samantha are lab partners. During yesterday’s lab, Kevin asked Samantha if she would like to go on a date this weekend. Samantha told him that she would have an answer for him today. Last night, Samantha discovered Kevin’s Facebook profile.

Kevin, as seen by students from his Facebook profile: desperate, loner, introverted, *stalkerish*, heart-broken, obsessive

*Parent improv*

Characters: Kaitlin & Mom/Dad

Place: Kaitlin’s room

Scenario: Kaitlin’s parents just got the family cell phone bill in the mail and noticed a significant increase in Kaitlin’s text and call activity from numbers they do not recognize. Kaitlin’s parents have just seen her Facebook profile.

Kaitlin, as seen by students from her Facebook profile: bored, belligerent, immature

*Potential boss improv*

Characters: Phillip & Mr./Mrs. Macintosh (CEO)

Place: CEO’s office at a major software company

Scenario: After weeks of intensive interviews with a major software company, Phillip has been called in for the final interview with the CEO. The CEO asks Phillip some questions after just seeing his Facebook profile.
Phillip, as seen by students from his Facebook profile: poser, emo, rebellious, crazy, intense

*What would you do if you were [...]*

The after-school session closes with a conversation about issues which emerged from previous *improvs*. Questions like ‘what would you do if you were’ the adult (parent or boss) or the potential date are particularly effective at producing deep reasoning. Therefore, discussions that follow the performances are useful for delving into reflective questions on identity and they serve to instil self-awareness of students’ online actions. Interestingly, at RFK, probably for cultural reasons, most students would act as very severe parents. They proposed radical punishment for Kaitlin, a girl that in her profile shares too personal matters (such as her cell phone number) and expresses the desire to skip class. Some students said that Kaitlin’s dad would ‘probably slap her and delete her Facebook account’, or that since she does not have self-awareness, ‘it’s okay to remove her page until she gets it’. However, another student, a girl, states that it is not really a good idea to erase someone’s profile without any warning. The students also tried to understand why the three characters acted like they did in their profiles.

*A new media literacy skill in practice: Performance*

The session adopts a new media literacy skill as a means for creating a more powerful educational experience: performance. Jenkins and co-authors (2006: 47) defined performance as ‘the ability to adopt alternative identities for the purpose of improvisation and discovery’. ‘Projective identity’ is the term coined by James Paul Gee (2003) to refer to the fusion between game players and their avatars, their online personas. Game play is celebrated as ‘a form of youth popular culture that encourages young people to assume fictive identities and through this process develop a richer understanding of themselves and their social roles’ (Jenkins et al. 2006: 47). Identity play and performance does not necessarily occur only through gaming; indeed, one of the most known activities in which performance occurs is acting. In this regard, there are interesting examples of the use of dramatization to teach and to help students to reflect deeply about the relationship of their personal experiences to bigger stories, like novels or historical events (see for example Wallace 2007; Dyson 1997). A similar approach is adopted in the after-school session: students start within a shared frame of reference, regarding roles adopted and general rules of interactions (family, romance, workplace) and – based on that acknowledged scenario – they *perform* an identity. Performance allows them to better understand the problem, represented in every scenario from different points of view.

The kind of role-play that takes place during this after-school session is an improvisational performance. Students, throughout their short Facebook-related performances, put themselves in the shoes of somebody that has to manage an awkward situation due to excessive or delicate information published online. They master their performance skills; in fact, according to performance-distinctive qualities, students balance problem-solving and creative expression, imagine themselves in a different condition and examine problems from multiple perspectives (Jenkins et al. 2006). In particular, the latter quality is essential: youths perform a situation in which a young person like them has to face the consequences of over-sharing online. This
lesson plans offers the students an opportunity to collectively reflect about the collapsing of contexts that sometimes happens online and ponder on what can happen when online data are seen by unpredicted persons and what could be the effects on reputation (boyd and Herr 2006).

CONCLUSIONS

The three sessions analyzed in the paper represent only a fraction of the ELED after-school program. The complete program was a fifteen-week series of workshops and, while this article mainly focuses on new media literacies skills, other purposes guided ELED’s design and implementation. The program had multiple aims, such as instilling community consciousness, developing digital citizenship (especially through activities of community mapping and ethical thinking) and sustaining participatory learning. The other sessions varied in terms of focal themes and teaching styles. A few practical experiences, such as working on Tumblr, Twitter and VoiceThread accounts, usually came along with moments of discussion and reflection. Furthermore, there were lessons specifically designed to reflect on the community and the area of the city in which RFK students live. Participants employed different tools during these workshops – such as maps on paper, videos, iPod Touches, the Hipstamatic app, VUVOX, Google Maps and Google Earth – and took part in different activities, for example taking pictures of invisible borders in their school environment, coloring neighborhoods of Los Angeles according to how safe they felt in them (see Literat 2013), watching and discussing with the media artists of the Labyrinth Project (USC) an interactive video about the Ambassador Hotel and RFK, and so on.

To conclude, the ELED after-school program models two important processes: (1) how to develop a know-how useful for incorporating new media literacies into teaching and (2) how to provide students with the knowledge and attitudes needed to actively participate in the media creation and production process. This double configuration shows the relevance of this initiative. Educators who want to stop ‘avoiding’ new media and start thinking of effective ways to adopt them in their curricula, and who also wish to promote students’ civic participation, ethical reasoning and critical thinking can benefit from this model. Nevertheless, since this program was implemented in a small, after-school context, how the lesson plans could function in a traditional school setting is still not clear. Classroom teachers could implement some intuitive revisions, such as asking students to find YouTube videos with interesting interpretations of anthems (rather than preselecting them on students’ behalf), soliciting students to produce more articulated how-to videos or adopting improvs for different subjects rather than Facebook privacy management. However, because ELED has not yet been piloted in traditional school settings, its lack of documented success in those spaces is a serious limitation of this work.

On the other hand, researchers already working in the realm of media literacy might derive inspiration from the ELED pilot. Although this article focuses on a very specific after-school program, it contributes to widespread reflection on how to facilitate a dialogue between media literacy theory and curriculum design.

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New media literacies in after-school settings


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