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Professional Resource:

*Media Literacy, Social Networking, and  
Web 2.0 Environment for the K-12 Educator (2011)*

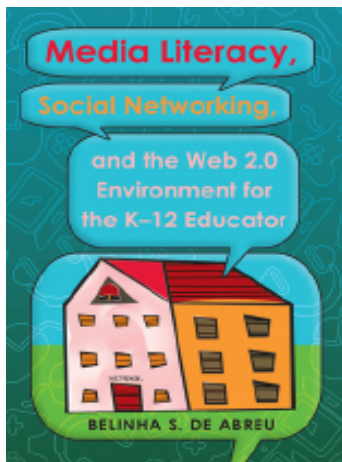
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*Media Literacy, Social Networking, and Web 2.0  
Environment for the K-12 Educator, 2011*

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It would seem that everywhere you look kids are tuned in and turned on to electronic devices. From Web 2.0 features to social networks to video games to iPhones, kids are using all sorts of digital technology for entertainment, learning, and connecting. What this means for the K-12 educator and the possibilities it provides for expanding the traditional notion of a classroom is the subject of De Abreu's book. What possibilities does this host of electronic communication devices hold to enhance the learning potential for the students we teach? Is there a place for social networking and Web 2.0 in the schools? De Abreu's answer is, "Yes!"

According to the research in De Abreu's book, a dizzying number of teens and youth are engaged with electronic media. Eighty-eight percent of teens ages 12-17 engage at least occasionally in some form of electronic personal communication, 73% of American

teens use social networking sites, and 83% have uploaded photos where others can see them (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, and Zickuhr 2010). The question is, if students are so interested in these electronic mediums why are schools shutting them out instead of embracing them? Why are schools taking the protectionist approach that media literacy educators have long abandoned? Why not embrace this activity as a way of turning education into something personal and relevant for the students? What De Abreu found was many teachers and administrators were afraid of the unknown surrounding how these technologies are used and what they can offer. There was fear among teachers and administrators of students knowing more about these technologies than teachers, fear of students interacting with people outside the schools during instructional time, fear of looking incompetent with new devices or teaching strategies and fear that students would be distracted from the *real* education of learning to read and write printed text that is measured by standardized tests.

With all the fear being spread by the mass media about online predators and sexual content on the internet, it is no wonder that parents, teachers, and school administrators worry about the safety and privacy of their children and students. However, merely censoring the technology, refusing to acknowledge its importance in children's lives, and forbidding them to use Web 2.0 technologies is the practice of avoidance. Why not embrace the change and learn how to facilitate the use of these technologies for educational goals? In her own words De Abreu states, "This book is written for teachers, media specialists, librarians, health teachers, curriculum advisors and principals who see the media as a necessary source for educating today's students..." De Abreu argues that with these new technologies we can restructure what schools look like. We can eliminate the

old industrial mentality of schooling where kids learn the skills to be a part of a greater world and give kids a chance to be the creators of this greater world. De Abreu's reason for writing the book is self-explanatory,

The goal of this book is to take on what we know about the media and review media literacy education as a foundation of thought, then extend it to the technological world to include social networks and Web 2.0. In essence, we are looking at the traditional school house and designing one that takes a multidimensional look at media literacy education and opening its doors to allow students to be creators and producers of the global society of transformational education... (4)

This book answers questions about what place Web 2.0 has in our schools and gives the educator a resource of tools to use within the classroom that can help connect them with their students and bring to life this idea of media literacy. Part A defines media literacy and highlights the Five Core Concepts and Key Questions for Consumers and Producers and answers questions about how to restructure school from a media literacy perspective. By placing media literacy as an umbrella skill set, the school allows every subject area to utilize the Five Core Concepts. Chapter 1 defines media literacy for the educator explaining that media literacy is more process than content. It is a method of teaching rather than a subject area. For this reason, it can be used across the curriculum in any subject area. Chapter 2 highlights the role and the importance of focusing on critical thinking as the foundation for media literacy and education in general. The chapter also introduces to the K-12 educator the concept of critical media literacy which is about change, transforming history, and challenging traditional discourse with the understanding that each point of view carries its own agenda. The implications for the K-12 educator are clear – you can either use media literacy to teach to the status quo or you can use it to help students unlock the mysteries of power, hegemony, and privilege in cultures around the world.

Part B explores the topic of social networking within schools. Chapter 3 explains what participatory culture is, how social networking works online, and some of the important outgrowths from this technology such as a new text-based language. Chapter 4 discusses how the educator can engage their students with these new technologies. She makes the case that parents and

educators should take the approach of learning about the technology to use it ethically and productively instead of allowing fear to be the main driving force behind censorship. It is the purpose of media literacy to tackle tough topics with students by exposing them to difficult issues on a developmentally appropriate level and teach them to think critically about their worlds instead of simply editing content in the name of protection.

Those who want to empower students realize that learning and teaching about media is about delving into that transformation and further engaging the pleasure principle, which determines how and what we choose to watch within the media. Those educators who carry this role are not interested in telling students that what they watch is wrong or inappropriate, but in understanding why these choices are made by young adults. (59)

Part C introduces the reader to a host of new technologies already in existence that educators can learn to use. Chapter 5 talks about the multitude of technologies that are not only out there but that the majority of teenagers are utilizing in their personal lives. At the end of the chapter she makes the strong statement that social networking belongs in schools if for no other reason than they are already there. Chapter 6 demonstrates the connection between media literacy, Web 2.0, social networking, and national standards in education. This is where she provides examples of how specific technology tools can be utilized during lessons on various subjects. For example, students can use Wikis to complete lab reports, Second Life for Algebra and Geometry assignments, and Survey Monkey for conducting real life surveys and analyzing the results thereby addressing math standards.

Part D delves into the controversial arena of ethics, privacy, and safety. Chapter 7 explores the concern that most parents have with internet technology and their children which is the exposure they will have to people who are on the internet with the intention of manipulating, harming, or exploiting children. Although this is a legitimate concern, restricting the internet and avoiding the Web 2.0 is a strategy based on fear of the unknown. Instead, what De Abreu argues is that parents need to teach their children how to interact appropriately with people they meet online and how to recognize danger. Learning to think independently and make responsible, ethical choices should be the goal

of internet use instead of isolation and avoidance. The appendices comprise the last section of the book. Appendix A and B seem to hold the most value for the K-12 educator. Appendix A provides a Glossary of terms that any teacher would be wise to read up on before utilizing Web 2.0 with students. The other appendix of particular use is Appendix B which provides information about resources and tools. Appendix B explains where to find tools and gives suggestions for how they are best utilized.

De Abreu combines theoretical knowledge about the foundations of literacy and the 21st century school house with practical resources for reaching students through the mediums they have come to know. Educators who use this book will find clear

explanations of why media literacy is important, how to teach it, and where to find resources to facilitate the process. Although this book may not alone teach the class for them, it can provide them with all the ammunition needed to take on an army of students waiting to tackle the most relevant topics of the day through a medium they are familiar with and motivated to use.

### References

- Lenhart, A., Purcell, K., Smith, A., and Zickuhr, K. 2010. *Social Media and Mobile Internet Use Among Teens and Young Adults*. Pew Internet & American Life Project. Retrieved <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2009/Teens-and-Sexting.aspx>