

Editorial

Dra. Sara OSUNA-ACEDO

Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia. Spain. sosuna@edu.uned.es.
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5454-6215>

Dr. Michael HOECHSMANN

Lakehead University. Canada. mhoechsm@lakeheadu.ca. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6515-8488>

Dr. Nolan HIGDON

University of California Santa Cruz. USA. nhigdon@ucsc.edu. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8989-3244>

Critical media literacy [Editorial]

Alfabetización crítica mediática [Editorial]

While we continue to wait for the educational establishment, on the one hand, and practicing educators on the other to integrate media literacy across the curriculum, the outside world continues to get more and more saturated with 24/7, ubiquitous, mobile and artificial intelligence driven media. If it can be said that art imitates life and life imitates art, we have come full circle into a science fiction future predicted in 1960s television. Given the international audience of this publication, we are wary to use too many examples, but we would like to point to the animation (or cartoon) called *The Jetsons* which ran from 1962-63 on ABC in the US. *The Jetsons* embraced a techno-optimism and futurism that we can now see as naïve, but it predicted many of today's domestic and communication technology breakthroughs. There are flat screen TVs mounted on walls, newspapers include video components, voice-controlled computing, wireless telephones, video conferencing, video-phone checkups with doctors and group exercise over live video links (Downs, 2022).

Living in someone else's future is not a problem for those who are growing up digital. The new normal is more normal than new. The problem is that the world is beset by a series of overlapping crises, and too often the tendency is to attribute changes to the social fabric to changes in technology. There is no doubt that there has been a sea change, particularly in our fetish and love affair with our smartphones. We are "amusing ourselves to death" in ways that the US author Neil Postman could not have predicted when he wrote those words (Postman, 1985). Postman's commentary on television and its impact on social and political life seems almost quaint today, though it remains a potent reminder of how media can shape attitudes and behavior. Postman has been criticized over the decades as a technological determinist and there is no doubt that he may have overstated some of his case to make his points. For our purposes, however, it is the anecdote in the introduction about people's willingness to self-pacify that most interests us. Drawing on Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, Postman describes a social and political order where people willingly fall in step with the interests of the dominant groups and classes. Almost every one of us today that is on the privileged side of the digital divide has a personalized portal where we design and curate our own virtual universe in dialogue with Big-Tech who organizes, orchestrates and oversees our interactions with our personal gadgets.

In the 21st century, the dominance of neoliberal governance has unleashed and normalized the hegemony of Big-Tech, giving rise to what is known as the post-digital era. The post-digital era refers to the complicated and messy state of media after the advent of digital media. Indeed, in the 21st century, the instrumentation power of Big-Tech has disrupted governance, journalism, home life, human connection, war, and education in profound ways. The leaders of Big-Tech pride themselves on taking responsibility for these disturbances by referring to themselves with the laudatory label of "disrupters."

The COVID-19 response dramatically expanded Big-Tech's disruptive power especially in education. The pandemic safety measures marked a social turning point that asked societies to quickly confront, accept, and navigate changes to schooling. Existing educational plans and strategies were challenged, as concerns from parents, students, lawmakers, and activists forced educators to confront the utility and effectiveness of learning modalities; school surveillance and tracking; and artificial intelligence technology such as ChatGPT.

On a superficial level, the post-digital era signals that Big-Tech has smashed collective people power. After all, it is Big-Tech who often sets the community standards not the community, delineates the boundaries of appropriate speech and values, demarcates truth, and decides whose communications are worthy of being received and whose should be ignored. However, critical media literacy reminds us that Big-Tech is not all media, and Big-Tech does not have a monopoly on power. Users have power, and they have the ability to use, reimagine, and transform their relationship to media. Critical media literacy education is necessary for users to alter the grim trajectory of democracy, the environment, social justice, and collective power. A critical media literacy classroom is a democratized space that not only addresses the disruptions that Big-Tech has wrought, but empowers students to consider the power, ideologies, and politics of representation that inform the post-digital era.

The call for papers on this topic, which is so representative of today's society, has been very well received by members of the academic community throughout the Americas. Many high quality proposals have been received, from which the six most representative ones have been selected with regard to innovative educational and social strategies and studies that promote critical media literacy. Here we will include both theoretical and practical proposals for understanding the role of education in the so-called post-digital society. Carlos Escaño's article precisely defines this new social framework and all its particular conditioning factors that demand, with increasing intensity, the deployment of a transformative critical pedagogy. In the same direction, the article by Antonia Nogales offers an interesting methodology to evaluate the possibilities of critical literacy that helps to understand the diverse influences of media and messages in the construction of the individual's identity. The articles by Gil, García and Marzal, on the one hand, and Collado, Picazo, López and García-Matilla, on the other, explore specific aspects of critical media literacy. The former focuses on institutional initiatives to promote it in educational centers, and the latter on the opposite, that is, on the knowledge that young people acquire through social networks and its content creators, as well as the role of these interactions as a means of informal education.

The monograph's following articles focus on the construction of educational strategies and open digital resources for the promotion of critical thinking and the development of digital and media competences. The article by Mellado and Bernal offers an innovative evaluative model to categorize and understand such educational initiatives, while the article by Feltrero, Hernando and Acosta analyze the results of an interesting European experience on the dissemination of critical media literacy through innovative open and massive educational models (fMOOC and sMOOC).

The reader of this monograph will be able to learn about the latest research in the field of critical media literacy through this selection. Furthermore, they will become aware of the significance and the necessity of a new critical spirit in education as a response to the demands that the post-digital society poses to educational institutions in general, and to educational policies in particular.

References

Downs, S. (2022). The Jetsons, now 60 years old, is iconic. That's a problem. Slate, Sept. 23. <https://slate.com/technology/2022/09/jetsons-60th-anniversary-prophetic-future.html>

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