

Calling for a Global Turn to Inform Digital Literacies Education

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As the world heals from collective traumas, how might educators, researchers, and students from the north, south, east, and west learn in dialogue with one another to deepen global connectedness?

Literacy researchers have long argued that the new literacies made possible by the internet facilitate global connectedness (e.g., Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008). However, digital literacies research typically has centered the experiences of participants and researchers from the United States, Canada, Western Europe, and Australia (Mills, 2010). Thus, the critique Tierney (2018) leveled against literacy research for not recognizing perspectives from *all* parts of the world also limits educators' and researchers' understanding of digital literacy. In particular, he called out the privileging of Western ways of knowing and exclusion of non-Western, Indigenous, and Global South (a sociopolitical term referring to newly industrialized or industrializing countries with colonial histories, such as Indonesia) voices.

We, a U.S.-based English teacher educator and digital literacy researcher (Jayne) and an Indonesian English as a Foreign Language teacher educator and researcher (Puji), argue that embracing a more inclusive understanding of global, by seeking out, including, and learning alongside people in the Global South, will allow literacy practitioners to tap into digital literacies as they prepare students to be global meaning makers (Tierney, 2018). This agentic-oriented framework relies on "a mix of participatory literacy promoting approaches that are cooperative, collaborative, and contrastive but respectful and reciprocal" (Tierney, 2018, p. 413), which can be facilitated by technology. As the world's classrooms become ever more diverse, ensuring that truly global perspectives inform curricular recommendations becomes increasingly vital. We need to learn from *all* the world's meaning makers to design literacy pedagogy that meets learners' needs in contexts with varied cultural values, structural

considerations, curricular mandates, and community practices and leads to more humanizing instruction.

As our contribution, we offer insights from our study of Indonesian students' perspectives about technology. In this commentary, we review how literacy research's digital turn has helped the field understand connectedness in particular ways. We critique how a narrow global gaze limits the recommendations that digital literacies work can offer for practice. Then, we highlight stories from our project and end with our call for a global turn in digital literacy research and pedagogy. To begin, we articulate the importance of seizing the current moment as an opportunity to make this needed shift.

Why Now?

We wrote this commentary as people around the world grappled with the COVID-19 pandemic and rallied in support of the #BlackLivesMatter movement. This context provides powerful illustrations about the interconnected nature of humanity and the importance of digital literacies for facilitating connectedness and enacting agency, which have profound implications for

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literacy education. As the virus sent students and teachers home from their classrooms, technology facilitated how literacy practitioners around the globe connected with colleagues, students, and experts during remote instruction and physical distancing. Through webinars, virtual professional gatherings, Facebook and Instagram live sessions, and discussions happening across many different online platforms, educators shared resources and supported one another in keeping learners engaged through technology. By mid-2020, these same technologies became sites for unlearning and relearning as educators dug into the necessary work of reckoning with the implications that racism and calls for anti-racist practices have for schools (e.g., Haymarket Books, 2020).

At this global inflection point, we recognize an opportunity to advocate for digital literacies education that empowers people throughout the world to realize the connection that many have argued the internet makes possible (e.g., Ito et al., 2013). As the world heals from collective traumas and educators imagine new possibilities for digital literacy instruction, we hope to encourage commitments to deepening global connectedness by including and honoring experiences from less privileged parts of the world in research and instruction.

Connectedness Within Literacy's Digital Turn

The orientations that frame literacies research and pedagogy have consequences for understanding the connectedness made possible through digital literacies. In reviewing *New Literacy Studies* research, Mills (2010) called the increased attention to studying technology-mediated literacy practices the field's digital turn. She charted a significant shift in research focus that stemmed from globalization and the growing ubiquity of technology-mediated communication. Others have similarly argued that widespread internet adoption and the increased availability of social networking and mobile communication devices have had profound consequences (Coiro et al., 2008) on literacy and the ways people connect. Here, we discuss how connectedness gets framed by a few influential theories.

Connecting Technical Stuff and Ethos Stuff

Lankshear and Knobel (2011) directed attention to connection by exploring the technical and ethos aspects of digital literacies. With the new technical stuff—the

design of tools, the multimodality of texts, and the changing mechanics of literacy in digital formats—the digital turn has given us insights into technology's role in mediating reading, writing, language learning, and a range of other literacy practices. We coauthored this commentary by making productive use of suggesting and commenting features in Google Docs. We rely on the technical stuff afforded by WhatsApp to communicate through voice calls and multimodal messages, and we conduct weekly virtual writing sessions with some Indonesian lecturers. The technical stuff matters in literacy, although rapid changes to devices, platforms, and apps can make it daunting to stay current on the myriad ways to connect and make meaning.

Although technologies come and go, “the new ethos stuff” persists and reflects a new set of “values, sensibilities, norms and procedures” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011, p. 287) made possible by technologies. Ethos that engender participation, collaboration, and distribution thrive in today's social networking spaces, online forums, and interactive platforms, fostering greater connectedness between people and ideas. Literacy researchers have documented rich examples of online spaces and their ethos being leveraged in community spaces for youth activism (e.g., Haddix, Everson, & Hodge, 2015) and teachers' professional learning (e.g., Tour, 2017).

As COVID-19 closed schools in Indonesia, Puji witnessed the transformation of the WhatsApp group she is in with other parents at her daughter's school. Their conversations evolved from frequent, casual posts with little substance to less frequent but more meaningful exchanges as parents sought support for their kids' learning. Crisis schooling gave parents a chance to watch their children participate in productive digital learning as they created multimodal, technology-mediated responses to assignments. Also, the WhatsApp group allowed parents to experience technology's affordance for distributed support. Watching this group gave Puji hope that these important education stakeholders got firsthand experience with technology's participatory ethos.

Connecting Contexts

Another prominent research thread since the digital turn blurs contextual boundaries by exploring how literacies traverse and connect as people move across physical and virtual worlds. Frameworks such as transliteracies (Stornaiuolo, Smith, & Phillips, 2017) draw attention to flexibility, mobility, and spreadability of digital literacies and help researchers uncover and trace connections. Jayne's research has contributed to this line of inquiry. Studying online fanfiction and its authors helped her see

how sharing their work online connects writers to passionate global audiences (e.g., Lammers & Marsh, 2015) and to distributed expertise and resources necessary for participating in these affinity spaces (Lammers, 2016).

Literacy educators have also explored the connections between digital contexts and classroom instruction. For example, Harvey and Palese's (2018) work with political memes illustrated critical digital literacies in action and modeled connective instructional practice. Some Indonesian educators leveraged students' interests in technology to design digital literacies activities responsive to the pandemic. A visual studies lecturer in Puji's faculty asked students to combat the spread of misinformation about COVID-19 by creating multimodal artifacts shared via Instagram (see Figure 1). Similarly, for her English subject, Puji's daughter translated Indonesian text her teacher provided, and then recorded and edited a video of herself reading nine tips to stay healthy during the pandemic.

We recognize how the digital turn has led to widespread acceptance that technologies continually reshape the ways we use language (New London Group, 1996), as the use of hashtags, including #BlackLivesMatter,

Figure 1
COVID-Related Digital Literacies Assignment



Note. This is the cover image of a multimodal artifact, a remix of information from the Indonesian news source Kompas.com with original illustrations, that Marchya Lidya S created and posted to her Instagram account for the assignment. Reprinted with her permission. The color figure can be viewed in the online version of this article at <http://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com>.

organize people and messages on social media, for example. However, as will be discussed below, we see opportunities to reframe how literacy researchers and educators attend to the implications of increasing local diversity and global connectedness.

Reorienting the Global Gaze

When he introduced global meaning making, Tierney (2018) highlighted the unequal distribution of publications in top literacy journals, illustrating how voices of Western scholars and their participants' perspectives get privileged. His analyses revealed inequity within the global knowledge base as literacy research from Asian, Latin American, African, and other non-Western countries gets ignored and silenced in scholarly communities. He argued that the inequity "extends...to what occurs in schools...standardizing education while sidelining cultural considerations" (p. 403). In reorienting the global gaze of digital literacies research and instruction, we aim to push back against such sidelining.

Limited Global View

From efforts that explicitly study global contexts, literacy practitioners know more about digital translanguaging among migrant youth (e.g., Kim, 2018) and the potential for literacy instruction to foster cosmopolitanism when enriched by online social networking (Hull & Stornaiuolo, 2010). Although key theorists have noted the importance of inviting everyone into the conversation (Coiro et al., 2008), Latin American literacies, for example, remain "mostly invisible in North America" (Trigos-Carrillo & Rogers, 2017, p. 383). The dominance of Global North perspectives in literacy research contributes to the critique that digital literacies represent "exotic practices" that require technology, access, and leisure time "simply not available to most people" (Walton, 2007, p. 197). As such, recommendations for practice may not resonate with educators working in contexts with learners representing the Global South.

When digital literacies research centers Westerners' experiences, this narrow perspective limits the claims research can make about the global reach and connections made possible by technology. Jayne's research has previously invoked claims about global participation in online fanfiction spaces based on a study including only young people in the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada (Lammers, 2016). By coming together to study digital literacies in Indonesia, we continually engage in complex negotiations (Tierney, 2018) as Jayne brings Westernized theories into respectful conversation with

the local meaning-making practices of Puji and our participants.

Expansive Global View

We believe that literacy educators and researchers must learn more about the digital literacies of the majority of the world's internet users. As of March 2020, the internet reaches 58.7% of the world's population, and the greatest rates of increase in internet penetration over the last decade have occurred in Africa (11,559%), the Middle East (5,395%), Latin America/Carribbean (2,411%), and Asia (1,913%), with Asia being home to over half of the world's internet users (Miniwatts Marketing Group, 2020). Learning from the perspectives and digital practices in these regions will lead to more inclusive instruction for global meaning making in the world's classrooms.

Our work brings Global South voices into digital literacies research and practice as a matter of justice because continuing to ignore their perspectives “reinforce[s] hierarchies of thought, knowledge, and belief systems” (Trigos-Carrillo & Rogers, 2017, p. 384). We take up Mora's (2016) charge to not simply translate digital literacy theories and instructional practices from English-speaking countries into Indonesia. Rather, as he advocated, we collaborate to honor local culture and ways of knowing.

Our Project

Our brief overview of the project begins with an explanation of the educational context in which it occurred. The Republic of Indonesia, an archipelago of thousands of islands inhabited by people from various religious, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds, declared independence in 1945 after a long history of Dutch colonization and a brief Japanese occupation during World War II. The official national motto “*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*,” which gets translated as “Unity in Diversity” and literally means “many, yet one,” illustrates the importance Indonesia places on collectivism and unity. According to Law No. 20/2003, national education has stated goals “to develop students' potential/capacity to become human beings who have faith and devotion to God the Almighty, who are noble, healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, and to become democratic and responsible citizens.” This historical, cultural, religious, and political context shapes Indonesian students' experiences with global meaning making, in and out of schools.

The Ministry of Education and Culture issues mandates that provide curricular guidance and requires use of government-published textbooks. The Ministry

standardizes Indonesian literacy (in the national and local languages and English) and information and communications technologies instruction in public schools. In our collaboration, we sought insights to support Indonesian teachers facing increasing demands from mandates requiring them to incorporate technology that they feel ill prepared to use for instruction (Harendita, 2013). We began by learning from students because, as Alvermann (2008) noted, young people generate their own reasons for pursuing literacy, and educators would do well to remain open to inviting and extending their online literacies in classrooms. Before offering recommendations or support to Indonesian educators, we needed to know what young people did online and how they perceived and used technology.

Therefore, we designed an exploratory mixed-methods study to learn from students in Central Java, Indonesia. We developed our survey from a review of digital literacy-related studies conducted in non-Western countries (e.g., Park, Kim, & Na, 2015) and with input from a focus group discussion with four Indonesian youth. Our survey asked closed- and open-ended questions about how, when, and for what purposes students use technology for their school-based and interest-driven learning (see Table 1). We recruited 618 participants from seven schools that cooperate with Puji's university and teacher preparation programs (three junior high schools, grades 7–9, and four senior high schools, grades 10–12). Finally, we conducted one focus group discussion at each school with a small group of respondents (four to six students each) to ask follow-up questions about intriguing findings from the surveys and to learn more individuals' stories about their technology use. We share the following to add our participants' perspectives to conversations about digital global meaning making.

According to Indonesian Youth

Listening to the Indonesian youth in our study, we uncovered their fears about being victims of technology's ill effects, their use of technology to support their personal power, and the mismatch between their desire to learn and the way digital literacy education gets framed in Indonesia.

Uncovering Fears

When asked what they liked least about technology and social media, our participants overwhelmingly noted their concerns about “hoaxes” and the spread of misinformation. Survey responses revealed that some had experienced a hoax themselves and/or witnessed how

Table 1
Select Survey Questions

Survey section	Sample items
About You	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What grade are you in? ■ What languages do you use at home? ■ When you want to learn how to do something new, how do you go about learning it? Where (or to whom) do you go first?
Technology Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Which devices do you have access to at home? (Belongs to you and/or shared by others)^a ■ Which devices do you have access to at school?^a ■ How often do you use a computer or laptop at school?
Learning About Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Where, how, or from whom do you learn how to use technology? ■ What do you wish you knew more about when it comes to technology?
Ideas About Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What do you like most/least about technology? ■ What do you like most/least about social media? ■ Do you consider social media sites as places where young people can learn?
Purposes for Technology Use (School)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What are you learning about in computer class this year? ■ In school, do you use computers to do any of the following?^a ■ Is there anything else you want to learn about in your computer class?
Purposes for Technology Use (Out of School)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Why do you use technology when you are not at school?^a ■ Do you use any of the following sites to learn more about something that interests you?^a ■ Which of the following apps do you use on your mobile phone?^a
Final Thoughts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Is there anything else you would like to tell us about technology, social media, or websites?

^aThese items provided checkboxes with a list of possible answers and a place to indicate others.

their loved ones fell victim to misinformation, especially during Indonesia's heated 2019 presidential campaign. In relation to current events, our focus group participant

Wingky (a female in grade 12; all names are participant-selected pseudonyms) mentioned her desire to actively fight against the hoax that the coronavirus was developed in China (“*Itu bikin hoaknya bahwa corona itu dibikin dari China. Kaya emang sengaja dan sebagainya, kaya gitu kan membuat, pasti yang pertama ujaran kebencian kan*”). She recognized how such misinformation perpetuated hatred for this ethnic minority group in Indonesia.

More than other concerns shared, these young people expressed fears about the damage that can be done when technology's affordance for easily sharing content gets used for spreading untruths. They recognized many harmful motives behind hoaxes, including attacking individuals' reputations, driving others' opinions, and tearing down their nation's unity.

None of the schools we visited offered explicit anti-hoax instruction or interventions to educate students about evaluating truthfulness of online information, although a few students mentioned teachers talking about hoaxes. That said, Wingky and other students recognized the importance of what we might call critical media literacy, telling us their strategies for stopping the spread of misinformation by reading multiple trustworthy sources describing the same event, engaging in dialogues with their parents and other adults about what they see shared online, fact-checking information, and even renouncing misinformation by commenting on posts or sharing alternative, repudiating stories.

To a lesser degree, our participants expressed fears about how technology might not support Indonesian values of unity and collectivism. A few survey respondents indicated that technology makes people become “individualists” (“*membuat orang menjadi individualis*”), and one linked this fear to worries about consumerism (“*Semakin individualis, konsumtif*”). Many participants shared stories about technology keeping people separate from one another, such as when people spend more time at a family gathering looking at a handphone (how Indonesians refer to cell phones, the most popular device among our participants) than they spend socializing with people in the room. Our discussions with Indonesian students revealed that these and other fears (i.e., becoming addicted to technology, wasting time) negatively influenced some students' perceptions of technology, social media, and online spaces as tools for learning.

Supporting Personal Interests

Our focus group discussions allowed us to talk with Indonesian students who used technology to support their personal development in a variety of ways. Dixie

(a female in grade 11) got her first handphone in sixth grade. Unlike many of her peers who reported getting phones from parents as gifts or rewards for good grades, Dixie earned the money for her handphone from selling skin care products and cosmetics through a multilevel marketing company headquartered in Switzerland. She justified the purchase to her parents as necessary to support her business.

Dixie found technology essential to her success because it allowed her to cultivate a client base, learn more about the products, and serve her customers. She primarily used WhatsApp to share status updates with product information to friends, who then spread the posts to others. She even had teachers as clients. Dixie also watched YouTube videos about makeup application and skin care regimes. She studied product information available on the company's website. She indicated that technology helped her provide service that made her clients happy and encouraged them to come back for future purchases.

In addition to facilitating financial gain, other Indonesian students shared stories of how technology helped them develop hobbies and talents. Chanyeol (a male in grade 9) received his handphone during the previous year as a reward for winning second place in a national martial arts competition. He appreciated how technology allowed him to access information "not from just one point but...from all over the world." Chanyeol repeatedly watched YouTube videos to study self-defense techniques. His friend introduced him to an Indonesian martial arts app that he liked because it could help him "become a good fighter." These examples illustrate how some Indonesian youth tap into technology's affordances to develop their personal interests.

Recognizing Educational Mismatch

Our survey data revealed that when it comes to what students wish they knew more about technology, a popular theme was how to make the best use of technology for a better life. Some expressed lofty desires, such as wanting to learn "how technology can be used to improve transportation." Others' desires revealed an understanding of the complexities faced in the digital age, such as the girl who wanted to "find new technologies that can help life in the world but do not harm humans." Most of the students we surveyed expressed concrete desires to learn how to use technology as producers. They wanted schools to teach them how to write blogs; edit videos and photos; write code; create software, apps, video games, websites, and comics; and produce a variety of digital media.

Unfortunately, students' desires to learn do not match the Indonesian curriculum's goals. In its 2020 rebranding of the National Literacy Movement, the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture published a definition of digital literacy (see Figure 2). The text translates as "[It is] very important to have digital literacy abilities in the digital age like this. Digital literacy is needed to obtain/filter the unstoppable/overflowing information that comes [to us]." This definition reveals a narrow focus on consuming and filtering online information, rather than supporting youth in their desires of becoming producers and problem solvers with technology. Our participants yearn for this educational mismatch to be addressed as they seek to leverage digital literacies for their own and Indonesia's future.

Inviting a Global Turn

As literacy educators continue to grapple with how best to prepare youth to make the most of digital literacies for global meaning making, we see opportunities for more international classroom exchanges and connect- edness. Fostering cosmopolitanism through globally

Figure 2
"Literasi Digital" in Indonesia



Note. This is one of seven graphics posted to the Ministry's Facebook page on January 23, 2020. They outline the "literacy skills that must be mastered" as part of the launch of the new National Literacy Movement (see <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=2593183604124397&set=a.566012863508158>). The color figure can be viewed in the online version of this article at <http://ila.onlinelibrary.wiley.com>.

oriented education initiatives such as Space2Cre8 (Hull & Stornaiuolo, 2010) and Project-Based Inquiry Global (Spires, Himes, Paul, & Kerckhoff, 2019) offers inspiration for collaborations that strengthen global connectedness. The Global Read Aloud initiative also provides a platform that connects readers around the world in common literacy endeavors.

We hope our commentary and the voices of Indonesian students spark dialogue about how literacy educators' understanding of digital literacies might need to shift as we invite participants from the Global South into the conversation. Our ongoing research collaboration remains rooted in a strong commitment to work toward more inclusive notions of digital literacies by centering the experiences of learners typically absent from or silenced by research. In doing so, we band together with others studying and advocating for more recognition of less heard from parts of the world (e.g., Mora & Cañas, 2020; Tierney, 2018; Trigos-Carrillo & Rogers, 2017). We invite others to join us as we create a significant shift, *a global turn*, in digital literacies research as educators, researchers, and students from the north, south, east, and west learn in dialogue with one another to deepen global connectedness.

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