The Role of Digital Text in School and Vernacular Literacies: Students Digital Practices at Cybercafés in Mexico

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Abstract : Students of all educational levels participate in literacy practices that may involve print or digital media. Scholars from the New Literacy Studies distinguish practices that fulfill institutional purposes such as those established at schools from literate practices aimed at doing other kinds of activities, such as reading instructions in order to play a video game; the first are known as institutional practices while the latter are considered vernacular literacies. When students perform these kinds of activities they engage with print and digital media according to the demands of the task. In this paper, it is aimed to discuss the results of a research project focusing on literacy practices of high school students at 10 urban cybercafés in Mexico. The main objective was to analyze the literacy practices of students performing both school tasks and vernacular literacies. The methodology included a focused ethnography with online and face to face observations of 10 high school students (5 male and 5 female) and interviews after performing each task. In the results, it is presented how students treat texts as open, dynamic and relational artifacts when engaging in vernacular literacies; while texts are conceived as closed, authoritarian and fixed documents when performing school activities. Samples of each type of activity are shown followed by a discussion of the pedagogical implications for improving school literacy.
Keywords : digital literacy, text, school literacy, vernacular practices
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