Adults These Days: How Technology Subjugates All Generations

Sara Koziol

This vignette offers some reflections on a Grassroots Writing Research video, originally produced in May 2017. The original video, "Adults These Days: How Technology Subjugates All Generations," dealt with the question of whether different generations use technology differently. The video can be viewed here: *https://www.youtube .com/watch?v=38Zh9bDGioU.* The author, Sara Koziol, reflects on the process of doing the original research and discusses how some of her research questions (and possible conclusions) have changed over time.

About a year ago, I was assigned a project in a writing class that gave me free reign to research and write about anything I wanted, so long as it reflected on some aspect of literate activity. As a freshman in college, this was incredibly intimidating, since I'd never undertaken a task with so much freedom and so few boundaries. Daunting as it was at first, this "task" soon turned into an infatuation, and I became utterly immersed in the process. I knew from the beginning that I wanted to do a video because I truly enjoy the filmmaking/editing process (as minimal as my skills may

Figure 1: QR code for original video.

be), and also because the *Grassroots Journal* seemed to be lacking examples of this genre. I landed on the topic of technology and the different ways people use it and decided to interview people of different ages (including my family members and my boyfriend) to investigate if there truly are differences in the ways older and younger generations use technology. I felt certain of my ability to come up with a solid video, but what really shook my confidence was the idea of collecting my own data and analyzing it all by myself. I know that may sound pathetic, but I had never conducted my own research before,

and that's kinda scary for a new college student. Despite my initial research jitters, I found that, as the process continued, I was having more and more fun. I couldn't have picked a more perfect project—I got to talk to people I love *for fun*, do voice-overs, edit stuff, and (gasp!) engage my critical thinking skills! The most gratifying parts about the project were the epiphanies and revelations that made me go, "Ohhhhh! I understand this better, now that I have actually thought about it and engaged with it." By the end of the project, I was convinced that the conclusions I had drawn were concrete and unchanging, and that I had uncovered a profound secret truth: that all generations use technology the same way, despite what each may believe. However . . .

Writing-Research Remix

I recently sat down with one of the *Grassroots* editors to discuss potential publication of my project, and she presented a riveting idea to me: perhaps people do, in fact, differ in the ways they use technology, and maybe these variations are found not across different generations, but within individuals. Here's where I will throw a couple of useful **cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT)** terms at you: **representation** and **trajectory**. In a nutshell, representation is how the producer of a text engages with it (conceptualizing it, thinking about it, talking about it, etc.), while trajectory deals with what texts do and how they move around in the world. Just like all other CHAT terms for studying literate activity, these two connect because they typically result in some kind of *change*, and these changes can become interconnected. My representation of this project evolved drastically once I realized my data could be interpreted differently; there was a new take on my personal data, and that felt refreshing. This took my project in a whole new direction for me, subsequently altering its trajectory—it could now take on an entirely new meaning and could therefore affect how audiences interpret it. I also experienced this change in trajectory on a second level, as well: my project was now going to be officially published, and that idea changed how I felt about its future. Although I had hoped that my project would someday get published in the journal, my main priority at the time was meeting the class deadline, and the instructor was the main intended audience. Now that the audience has changed, it is slightly nerve-racking to imagine hundreds of readers watching my video and reading this article. But, hey, that's trajectory for ya.

To investigate the idea that technology is embedded in individuals' identities, I conducted a follow-up interview with my loved ones, consisting

of one single question: What types of texts do you read and write in a typical week? The results were illuminating. I found that their answers to this question alone could tie together the data I previously collected in the original interviews. Although the questions I had asked in the original interviews were important and maybe said a lot about human behavior on a sociological level, they were still not enough to come to significant conclusions about technology's role in literate activity. At the end of the day, I needed to find out what types of texts my subjects were reading and producing on a weekly basis. I found that their answers varied according to what was important in their lives. For instance, Jim, 67, uses a tablet just like Nick, 26, does; the difference is that Jim uses the tablet to read daily stock reports, whereas Nick uses the tablet for researching scientific projects. Both Sheree, 62, and Lili, 14, use their phones regularly; however, Sheree tends to use it for things like games and recipes, whereas Lili uses it for talking with friends. We can see that there are, indeed, differences in their habits and practices because *people are different* (I stress again that these differences are due to individuality and not age).

All generations think they are unique from the rest, and based on my data, I don't see that notion changing any time soon. Although I initially concluded that all generations use the same technologies, it is now, a whole year later, that I am realizing that people use these same technologies in different ways, which is actually based on their own individual identities—not generational identities. This is not to say that the way one person uses technology defines them as a person, but the texts they generate and the tools they use can speak to their values, which affects the way they interact in the world. There will always be differences in identity and, therefore, differences in the types of literate activity people engage in and produce.

Sara Koziol is a junior studying History Education. It is her goal to demonstrate to her future students that reading and writing are embedded not only in historical thinking, but also in our everyday world. When she is not taking pictures of her pets, you can find her taking pictures of someone else's.