

## **Developing Students' Critical Media Literacy and Researchers' Academic Writing: Co-Editors' Notes**

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Welcome to the Summer 2024 Issue in Volume 27 of the *Educational Research and Development Journal*. In this issue, we are bringing two articles to you. One examines the role, potential, and challenges in developing students' critical media literacy in higher education while the other exploring the influences of a writing retreat on the academic writing of researchers and faculty members in higher education.

Critical media literacy is the competence to critically analyze relationships between media and audiences and information and power (Robertson & Scheidler-Benns, 2016). It expanded literacy to include different forms of mass communication and popular culture (Kellner & Share, 2007). It is crucial for one to strengthen his or her civic engagement and participate in the democratic process as an informed and empowered citizen (Funk, Kellner, & Share, 2016). Consequently, higher education institutions need to support their students in understanding media and its influence, increase their ability to use it intelligently for personal gains and address political, social, economic, and cultural issues for democratic purposes (Mihailidis, 2008).

In a literature review study, Halpern examines the conceptual and empirical literature on critical media literacy in higher education. The article raised several critical issues in the rapid digitalization and globalization that intensified media dissemination, information authenticity, its societal impacts, and the challenges that higher education institutions face. Then, he introduces Stuart Hall's encoding and decoding theory and discusses the importance of equipping students in higher education with critical media literacy. Halpern argues that critical media literacy is central to dissecting the encoded messages, understanding the underlying intentions, and critically assessing the credibility and reliability of the information presented. It is also crucial for them to play an active role in interpreting media messages as intended by the encoder, accept and reject the messages partially and completely, and develop a more nuanced and critical engagement with media content and their agency in enabling marginalized groups to actively participate in the discourse and actions aimed at addressing the issues they face in the digital and media world. With the above discussion as a base, the review study presents the emerging approaches and technologies from the literature that are potentially useful in engaging higher education students in developing critical media literacy and discusses the issues related to implementing critical media literacy practices in higher education.

Academic writing plays an important role in demonstrating the quality and quantity of a scholar's scholarship output in the form of peer-refereed publications, which positions him or her for promotion and recognition in the field and, thus, contributes to the status and reputation of his or her institution in the field and shape its chances in obtaining resources for teaching and research (Milardo, 2014). However, junior faculty members and researchers, especially those from diverse and marginalized cultural and language backgrounds, often face challenges in developing academic writing as expected by professional journals and relevant peer-refereed venues (Kruse, 2013). Academic writing retreat has been used as an important approach to supporting faculty members and researchers in various fields in developing strong academic writing competence, in which participants are often thoroughly engaged in their writing, thinking, and research in quiet surroundings where they are also supported by experienced academic writer or mentor (Cable, Boyer, Colbert, & Boyer, 2013).

In their qualitative study addressing the above challenge of academic writing, Ceki, Adebayo, and Msiza conducted semi-structured interviews with sixteen researchers working in the writing retreat of an open-distance e-learning institution in South Africa. They analyzed the interview data to capture participants' experiences during the writing retreat, challenges, and recommendations for an effective writing retreat. The findings from the less experienced researchers often felt the retreat lacked daily writing objectives and focus, which led to no accountability for their writing. It was often a nosy environment, causing their writing anxiety and fatigue. The more experienced researchers felt that non-stop working demands in the retreat disturbed their writing. Participants recommended it was important to establish writing goals, plan the activities accordingly before the retreat, and generate sufficient organizational support. The retreat activities also need to be designed separately for less and more experienced researchers. Additionally, experts in the theory and methodology of the fields need to be involved in the retreat to offer content-based support for participants.

We hope the above two articles will help enrich your understanding of the critical media literacy of students in higher education and the role of writing retreats in supporting scholars at the college and university levels. We hope they will be informative for you to examine similar issues deeply, extensively, and continuously. We thank the careful, critical, and hard work of all the reviewers for their thorough and constructive suggestions and comments. Finally, we sincerely encourage all the Chinese American Educational Research and Development Association members, other professional researchers, and practitioners to contribute to the *Educational Research & Development Journal*. These contributions will make the journal a high-quality outlet for enriching our understanding of various professional education issues.

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