

#poetryisnotdead: understanding Instagram poetry within a transliteracies framework

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Abstract

Adolescents are more connected to the globalised world than ever before, with an increased prevalence of social media use amongst youth. Young people are composing multimodal creative works, including digital poetry, to share with an online audience, using platforms such as Instagram. Drawing on transliteracies theory, this case study found that three main themes appeared regarding the nature of literacy practices on Instagram. Community and interactivity were important to poets, especially in regard to feedback. The platform and complementary apps, especially those used for photo editing, afforded poets agency and fostered multimodality when composing, thus highlighting the changing nature of digitised writing practices. Value was placed on the mobility and accessibility of Instagram as a mobile app, for composing and consuming digital poetry. Young people may therefore be considered innovators of multimodal writing who employ ever-evolving technologies to engage in authentic literacy practices in digital spaces. As a result, this study suggests that the implications of Instapoetry on English pedagogy include the increased exposure and relevance of poetry writing and appreciation, a space for student-centred writing, reading, and analysis of poems, as well as a relevant method of peer review and collaboration.

Key words: digital literacy/ies, Instapoetry, multimodality, poetry, writing, transliteracies, pedagogy

Introduction

Adolescents are more connected to the globalised world than ever before. In the United States, for instance, 95% of teenagers have access to a smartphone (Pew Research Centre, 2018). With the widespread availability of online access and mobile application technologies has come an increased prevalence of Internet and social media use amongst youth, with 89% of American teens, and 91% of 18- to 29-year-olds in European Union nations, going online once or more each day (Eurostat, 2017; Pew Research Centre, 2018). This adoption of social media has resulted in new spaces for online engagement that have changed communication patterns (Bell, 2013; Clary et al., 2013; Warner, 2016). Young people are now composing short- and long-form creative works in 'spontaneous' and 'reactive' ways (Warner, 2016,

p. 164) to share online with a wide audience using media such as blogs, forums and apps (Lutkewitte, 2016). Instagram is one such platform where young people are composing multimodal poetry, by utilising images, text, filters and hashtags, to publish their work for, and gain feedback from, a global audience, consisting of the app's 700 million active monthly users (Constine, 2017).

Engagement in online literacy practices in this way is incredibly familiar and relevant to adolescents' personal lives and future professional trajectories (Alvermann & Moore, 2011), yet there remains a disconnect between the paper-based reading and writing as prevalent in schools and the literacy practices that young people are undertaking in digitally mediated environments such as Instagram (Lutkewitte, 2016; Sweeny, 2010). Modern conceptualisations of literacy and technology must challenge traditional composition practices in the face of an ever-evolving body of texts, tools and modes (Alvermann & Moore, 2011; Clary et al., 2013). Consequently, scholars have identified the need to teach digitally mediated and multimodal literacies within the English classroom (e.g. Bell, 2013; Lutkewitte, 2016; Sweeny, 2010).

Poetry is one aspect of the English curriculum that can illustrate how to merge multimodal and print literacies in the classroom, yet it has long held a negative reputation amongst both students and teachers. Interviews during Gregory's (2013) studies of spoken word poetry, and Weaven and Clark's (2013) analysis of text selection in secondary schools, reveal that poetry is perceived by students and teachers as inaccessible to read and impossible to write. However, it remains central to the curriculum, as the socio-cultural value placed upon classic text types has embedded poetry in secondary schooling (Warner, 2011). With opposition to poetry apparent, yet widespread access to digital media evident, there is the potential to combine the two using online platforms to engage young people in reading, writing and critiquing poetry. Prior research established the relationship between authorship using online tools and the resulting enjoyment of poetry (Stornaiuolo et al., 2009; Warner, 2011), with the creation of digital poetry in the classroom providing an engaging way to teach students to read and compose poetry (Callahan & King, 2011).

Previous case studies and classroom action research projects have explored the value of using desktop computer technologies to create multimodal digital poetry to achieve the integration of technology and literacy. Curwood and Cowell's (2011) and Callahan and King's (2011) studies of student-centred poetry projects identified agency, engagement and flexibility as benefits of teaching students to create multimodal texts. Students were found to break with traditional poetic conventions to employ diverse modes including words, images and sounds in order to explore semiotics, representation and media. More recently, Padgett and Curwood's (2016) research into an online writing community highlighted how young people used online tools in an out-of-school context to connect with their global peers, share poetic works and engage in reciprocal feedback processes. They addressed the benefits of such processes for improved literacy and community building, with implications for inspiration and collaboration in the classroom. This provides a sound academic foundation for the present study, as it indicates that digital poetry has the potential to act alongside school-based English language pedagogy, to aid the development of literacy skills amongst young people. However, digital poetry composition has since advanced from desktops to mobile tools, which provide highly accessible methods for writing and image editing. Our study fills the gap between previous research into desktop-created poetry and the context of poetry composition via mobile devices and social media tools, by exploring the impact of Instagram on literacy "in the wild" (Curwood et al., 2013), notably self-sponsored reading and writing processes that occur outside of school contexts.

At present, 72% of American teenagers, and 40% of British teenagers, use Instagram (Mediacom, 2017; Pew Research Centre, 2018), while 31% of the world's total Instagram users are aged between 18 and 24 years (Statista, 2018). Increasingly, it is being utilised to share digital poems that incorporate multimodal elements including text and images with a vast global audience. It is a unique tool as writing occurs in the digital poems, comments and the hashtags used to share and categorise the posts (e.g. #instapoetry, #poetrycommunity and #poetryisnotdead). Most recently, scholarship has explored the use of Instagram for multimodal authorship in general terms (e.g. Johnson, 2017; Vadde, 2017); however, this is the first study of Instapoetry.

The present study sought to discover why Instapoetry's popularity is booming amongst young people and to make suggestions about its potential use for literacy instruction in order to increase engagement and promote authenticity. To achieve this, our research drew upon transliteracies theory within the socio-cultural context of contemporary online composition spaces to ask: How are modes of literacy and the practices of writing changing in a world influenced

by new technologies? How are young people reinventing composition methods when creating digital poetry using mobile technologies, specifically Instagram? And what are the implications of these changes for poetry instruction in schools, with regard to English teachers' pedagogy and students' literacy outcomes?

Understanding Instapoetry as a digital, global literacy practice: theoretical framework

Throughout this study, the theory of transliteracies was used to explore digital literacy, Instapoetry and their implications for teaching and learning in the English classroom. Transliteracies characterise literacy in the modern world as having four key qualities: digital tools, multimodal representation, a global audience and dynamic movement across physical and virtual contexts, all facilitated by technological advancement (Leander & Vasudevan, 2009; Leppänen et al., 2009; Squire & Dikkers, 2012; Stornaiuolo et al., 2017). A transliteracies perspective motivates much of the current research pertaining to literacy and digital poetry composition. Given the connection of literacy to the 'social purposes' of particular times and spaces (Alvermann et al., 2012, p. 180), it is clear why digital and multimodal poetry, written for a contemporary, global audience, is being characterised as a new style of literature constructed in its socio-cultural context: the interconnected online world of readers, writers and reviewers (Stornaiuolo et al., 2017; Street, 2003; Wertsch, 1991). Consequently, Instapoetry transcends time and space boundaries in a globalised, digital world to remix language modes as part of the meaning making process (Callahan & King, 2011; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Stornaiuolo et al., 2017).

Methods

Research design

Drawing on qualitative methodologies, this multiple case study (Stake, 2006) used unique cases (Saldaña, 2011; Thomas, 2011) to investigate the nature of the Instapoetry community and which features make Instapoetry a unique genre of literacy practice "in the wild" (Curwood et al., 2013). This methodology was selected as it allowed for in-depth examination (Punch & Oancea, 2014) of the specific, emerging literacy practice of Instapoetry. The qualitative nature of the study saw participant voice (Howe & Moses, 1999) become a crucial source of data when attempting to gain insight on the motivations and perspectives of Instapoets. Grounded in transliteracies theory (Stornaiuolo et al., 2017), our multiple case study focused on the transmission of compositions between globally situated participants and how this is

transforming the way literacy is being enacted in spaces beyond the classroom. It also sought to understand the “cultural and symbolic aspects of practices” (Punch & Oancea, 2014, p. 160) of Instapoetry.

Research context and participants

The research was situated within the online photo-sharing app Instagram, which is accessible as a mobile phone app or desktop site. The platform allows individuals to publish multimodal poems that consist of elements including text, images, filters and hashtags (see Figures 1 and 2). The poets may then receive feedback via likes, comments or direct messages.

Poets were invited to participate in the study based on their age (13–25 years), the use of English in their poems, the length of time publishing Instapoetry (at least 1 month) and the use of at least two multimodal elements in their poems. The online survey was completed by 27 poets from eight different nations, including four countries where English is used as an additional language (India, the Philippines, Germany and Uruguay). Three poets, who posted on Instagram a few times each week and were representative of the sample, were then invited to serve as focal cases in the study (see Table 1).

Data collection

A variety of qualitative data collection and analysis methods were employed in this study. The transliteracies framework informed these processes,

as much of the research occurred across geographical locations and cyber spaces (Stornaiuolo et al., 2017), using online tools.

Surveys. Surveys were completed by 27 Instapoets. Using Likert scale and open-ended questions, the survey focused on how the participants use, perceive and feel about Instapoetry.

Observation. Following the survey, we engaged in systematic online observation of how poets are using Instagram, to determine how literacy happens “in the wild”. The 27 poets’ accounts were observed for 1 month, using an online observation protocol adapted from Black’s (2008) model and informed by Gerber et al.’s (2017) work. Patterns or points of interest in the composition, publication and sharing processes, such as how profiles were curated, how poet personas were represented and the recurring themes of the poetry, were identified for ‘thick description’ in observational notes (Geertz, 1973).

Interviews. The survey was used to recruit three participants from three different nations to serve as case studies. These poets engaged in an hour-long semi-structured interview, conducted online using Skype. Interviews were conducted in tandem with observations, drawing upon the initial questionnaire responses, to establish connections between the datasets for triangulation (Kendall, 2008). The interview was used to gain an understanding of the individual and their opinions about Instapoetry, and to explore their creative process in greater depth, using three poems provided by each participant as artefacts

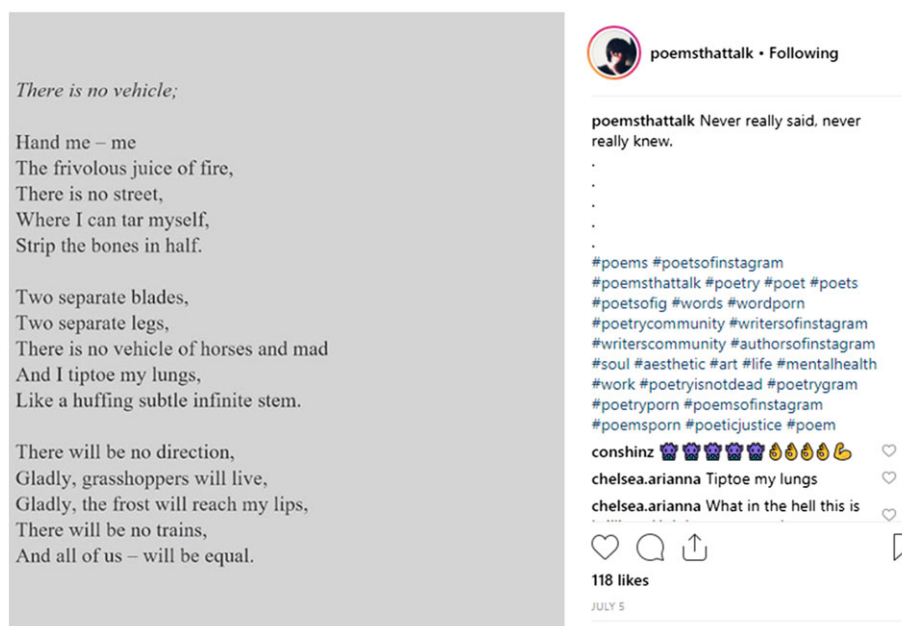



Figure 1: A poet has combined colour editing using Instagram tools, and text, to create a multimodal composition. The poet has composed a caption to complement the poem. He has included hashtags to help a wider audience find his poetry using Instagram’s search function. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

poemsthattalk

Crack of death:

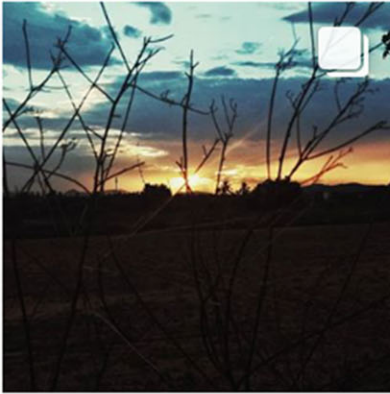
It wasn't too long ago,
When I was a kid, the bike chain was all rattled up,
On a cross highway cool design,
It all made so much sense,
That evening me and my ---,
I was talking to the stakes of marble,
About someone with more than a few hands,
And how my mother believed in him,
Cause she was too scared of everyone else, even me.

This is real, how as we kids were captured,
By walls everywhere, by mattered bricks -
like squashed tomatoes, juggling down on a hot day,
How can anyone expect us to wash it?
That guy somewhere with arms and legs,
Smothering willows like rice cutting air thrown up,
As if the bullets we were, he never talked.
He stood there and played archery with me.
We shot a few others and strangled a few others to death.
This was him,
I was what I was, son of death.



Unbearable faces:

There's suspicion from yesterday, in the -
Corner shop besides fuel to burn, and food to Harlem
No alarms, and bells in my pockets, their eyes,
Their white gloomy beautiful mascara filled -
As ambulance doors open like wafer chops -
Disguised as elegy in own newspapers,
With the milk bottle, reflecting white in snow. I -
There's no love, no hatred, saving time
And surprises of all profound faces.
In 5 words, writing books -
Little swings of fracture and blue jay tail bones.
Quirks with peace of mind,
Finish me in dinner, there's time too
Happy little unbearable each others,
No love, no hatred, saving time.



Soy:

Say brother, not too sure -
If nothing in your pocket,
Will save you from ginger bullets,
And shoe famine.

Say oh sweet lady, not too vivid -
If we need day and night,
And all the lines in between,
She is deaf towards dead children,
Masking moon pies, influenza of spasms.

It's a beautiful thing to live among creeps,
With ugly chins and imperfect lips,
Trying to kiss each other in flawed drunk tensions.

Look;

At our diminished minds,
Big boulder boy
Kissing big girls
And diving virtuous gleams,
And fortune having affairs
With losing tyranny.

Shovel;

Weeding pathways,
Big horrendous child of
Twisted rotten woods of
Alpine cones of my wine,

Dig;

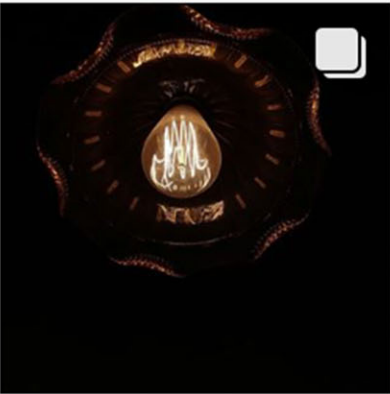
For I clean myself,

There is no vehicle;

Hand me - me
The frivolous juice of fire,
There is no street,
Where I can tar myself,
Strip the bones in half.

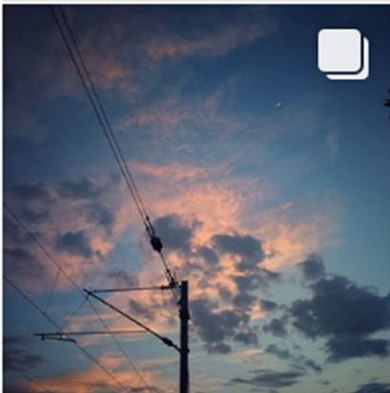
Two separate blades,
Two separate legs,
There is no vehicle of horses and mad
And I tipsoe my lungs,
Like a huffing subtle infinite stem.

There will be no direction,
Gladly, grasshoppers will live,
Gladly, the frost will reach my lips,
There will be no trains,
And all of us - will be equal.



In the shade of sky:

Single grounds and black hair,
Maniacs and men in empty grey funnels,
Travel vague and master of things,
By tunnels of list in shopping malls -
We stay inside every time,
Making sure they say -
bars with pus of old breaks,
Stamping bruises with heavy mistakes.
Pseudo doors, shaking windows,
Open as wind from rotating chimes and picking,
One last hope -
For Green gangs and mobs, in masses,
Filling lungs, branch and decorative candles,
Old cassette players, sandy tapes,
Till exhaust bursts tad of sky skies,
Males connected market of hanging,
Shoes with access to breaking,
Language and the whimsical stories,
Pushing last hopes into,
Blanc thrift envy off roofs.




Possion;

The skaters of this city have a node,
A very shady arch in a very dim room,
"The stores and the schools,
I roam like an animal with caddy more"

Romanticizing every train and the -
Funnels that held the rocks and weed,
I have seen them bury the bells,
And drains are filled with shard mills.

The truth they all seek,
Racket magnets and minds of language,
Breaking barriers like wars on infants,
Species of crime and crime itself.

Breaking the roads my only -
I am sorry, That was the only,
You seem august red, skinny -
You'll happen to know.



Casualty;

On a single night,
I could feel the ground stiff enough to hold me down,
Raise my head in the air and let my face be,
Covered in black nails.
The gush of the air that came with two cuts,
Took a little of me,
And made a turbulent moment outside.

the dewdrops chose to run wild and down
to beat my eyelids and end a trance -
long lost desires in grey strands of hair
and a spine ready to perish.

So long, as the brim of my back kept falling,
and the remainder ran through -
skid the hatchet, somehow I'm driving the
hearse of my own. Hollow inside, crumbs intact.

No mercy is worth an appetite, below

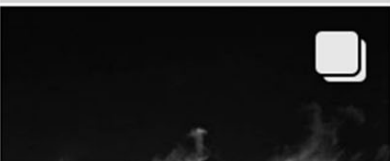


Figure 2: Instapoet's profile. A curated aesthetic, blending images, colour editing and text to provide a multimodal experience to his followers. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

Table 1: Interview participants

Poet name, username, age, location, gender	Length of time composing Instapoetry	Number of followers (at time of study)	Definition of poetry
Anna (annaxmania), 25, Philippines, Female	1 year	3200	"Poetry is leaving bits of your soul in words for other people to piece together."
Grace*, 17, Germany, Female	1 year	324	"Poetry is a way of telling stories and painting pictures with words."
Parv (poemsthattalk), 20, India, Male	9 months	980	"The complexity, of words, rhythm, meter, style, free verse or no verse, the idea, all other technicalities and non technical ways of pushing unprecedented words into something unexpected."

*Pseudonym used upon request; all other names used with permission.

for discussion about online contexts, communities and interactions (Pahl & Rowsell, 2011).

Artefacts. Finally, the collection of artefacts promoted systematic analysis of media and texts (Saldaña, 2011). This examination focused on the multimodal elements that have been used to identify how multimodality is being adopted amongst Instapoets and is facilitated by the Instagram platform. While not every poem provided had been published on the Instagram platform, the poets selected the artefacts as a representative sample of themselves as poets and remained valuable for examining how literacy is practised by young people outside of formal education contexts. While this study had at its core a focus on poetry on the Instagram platform, the poets acknowledged that they had vast amounts of material they were yet to post on Instagram but could be published in the future. Therefore, unpublished artefacts were welcomed, as they reflect the development of the poet's craft. The artefacts were representative of the majority of poems published on Instagram, though included fewer multimodal elements, especially images, than many of those found on the platform.

Data analysis

To analyse the survey results, Likert scale results were quantified to determine usage patterns, while open-ended responses were thematically coded to reveal patterns in poets' perspectives about poetry composition and the platform. Member checks gave participants the opportunity to revise interview transcripts to ensure the credibility of the record (Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004). The interviews were coded using the in vivo system to determine patterns and themes in the ways young people talk about themselves, composition, peer feedback and the differences between

school and online literacy (Saldaña, 2011). The codes were then recategorised to determine dominant themes across the interviews.

Comparing artefact analysis with the coded interviews and surveys revealed which elements are most popular and why, as well as how meaning is conveyed using these elements. At all times, the principles of transliteracies informed the determined impact of Instapoetry methods on digital literacy, by considering patterns in the ways participants reflected on their poetry and themselves as poets (Leander & Vasudevan, 2009; Leppänen et al., 2009; Squire & Dijkers, 2012; Stornaiuolo et al., 2017). After each process of data collection and analysis was complete, the emergent themes from the 'overlapping methods' (Shenton, 2004, p. 71) of surveys, interviews and artefacts were compared for methodological triangulation, to determine that the initial findings from the observation were consistent with the experiences reported by the poets, and to establish credibility (Guba, 1981; Merriam, 2009; Shenton, 2004).

Findings and discussion

Three key findings emerged from this study, relating to community and interactivity, agency and multimodality, and mobility and accessibility in Instapoetry. Notably, the platform and complementary apps, especially those used for photo editing, afforded poets agency and multimodality when composing, highlighting the changing nature of digitised writing practices. Additionally, value was placed on the mobility and accessibility of Instapoetry as a mobile app, for composing and consuming digital poetry. Findings from this study position young people as innovators of multimodal writing who employ ever-evolving technologies, highlighting implications for the potential pedagogical benefits of Instapoetry.

“The community is amazing, it’s a nice place to be”: understanding community and interactivity

Instapoets value the community for the purposes of feedback and emotional support, which aligns with the transliteracies principle that mobility encourages the creation of relationships (Stornaiuolo et al., 2017). Ninety-three per cent said they received feedback on their poems, while 89% said they give feedback to others. Comments were the most popular method for providing feedback, with direct messages (DM) the second.

Feedback given privately via DM, amongst poet friends made through the platform, was perceived as more valuable or constructive than comments. The interviewed poets all reported gaining this private feedback from smaller groups to improve their writing. Grace described the experience, recalling “A girl messaged me ... and invited me to one ... via direct message: ‘Hey do you want to join the support group? We do some amazing stuff, support each other, do you want to be a part of it?’” Parv said that he relied on his support group to determine the quality of his work, explaining, “Whenever I feel like I’ve written something really different, I ask them first ... should I post this should I not? And we are really really honest about it, if we feel that it’s not good, we just don’t post it.” This reflects transliteracies at play in this modern socio-cultural context, as individuals from vastly different geographic locations share compositions via digital means (Stornaiuolo et al., 2017). In Grace’s case, this was using Instagram only, but Parv identified that his three-member collaborative group also use WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger to communicate. This important collaborative element of the Instapoetry subculture, fostered by multimodal literacy and new technologies (Clary et al., 2013; Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005; Ortlieb et al., 2016), has strong literacy implications, as collaboration has previously been identified as promoting higher order thinking, sparking inspiration and increasing levels of enjoyment when writing (Callahan & King, 2011; Ortlieb et al., 2016).

The ability for users to ‘like’ a post by tapping a heart icon was a quick way to show appreciation or interest, without having to write a constructive comment. This made feedback appear ‘cliché’ or ‘shallow’ in the eyes of the participants, which echoed prior research (Magnifico et al., 2015; Padgett & Curwood, 2016). The poets noticed a downward trend in the number of users offering constructive feedback in the comments, with users increasingly commenting a vague word of approval, mostly for self-promotion. Anna recalled, “[In] 2017 people actually gave feedback like ‘Hey you have a typo’ or ‘Hey maybe you could do this differently?’ But then Instapoetry went *boom* and this year we saw a change and everyone is just like ‘Oh how beautiful,’ ‘Oh how nice,’ ‘This is amazing’”. While observation of the platform showed evidence of

some supportive comments still being posted publicly, such as “Oh the visuals are on fire! Your words echo within my mind to appreciate every word slowly!!!” or “Good work! Keep setting fire to your imagination and she will be a good friend”, this change suggests that with more widespread consumption of Instapoetry has come a decrease in the original community value of collaboration and constructive feedback. Similarly to Padgett and Curwood’s (2016) findings, despite the belief throughout the community that feedback was best when received via genuine comment, DM or support group, the total likes on a post eclipsed the number of comments in the vast majority of cases, reflecting the tendency of readers on this platform to simply view and ‘like’ rather than deeply engage by offering commentary and critique. There is a disconnect between the reported experience and the observed experience of how and where feedback occurs, potentially due to the expanding audience and increasingly privatised nature of collaboration via DM on the platform.

Collaboration in the Instapoetry community extends beyond feedback to include emotional support and community building. Anna’s own experiences with mental health saw Instapoetry become an outlet during her recovery, a common experience, as 13 of the 27 observed profiles published poems about mental health. She worked to establish hashtags and support profiles, such as #solidarity, #mentalillnessendthestigma and #letstalkaboutmentalhealth, to provide a safe space for discussion and healing. Parv reported a similar experience: “If I hadn’t started the account or hadn’t started writing, I think I wouldn’t be okay”. The poems he supplied showed self-reflexive writing practice about emotions and the human condition, for instance: “I am the culprit of servitude./And the victim of this insane solitude.”

The provision of a space on Instagram for engaging in introspection and discussing mental health openly is a marker of the “experiments with self-making” which occur across socio-cultural spaces (Appadurai, 1996, pp. 3–4). Instapoetry’s aesthetic and community empower young people to consider their emotions and identities and reclaim power after mental health battles, a process previously identified as one which may occur within digital spaces as well as through traditional poetry (Mazza, 2016; Stornaiuolo et al., 2009). Instapoetry can support transliteracies practices, cultivates understanding and uplifts the community, thereby aiding the construction of writer identities (Curwood & Gibbons, 2009) and facilitating the creation of counternarratives as “an act of resistance ... that challenges the politics of domination” (hooks, 1986, p. 126).

Despite the value placed on the community and the positive attributes reported, poets also identified numerous drawbacks. Concerns about plagiarism were common, as six of the observed profiles included a

request in their bio to provide credit if their work was reposted on another profile, such as by requesting "Please tag when you repost." The inclusion of an identifier in the image was another method of discouraging plagiarism, with 21 of the 27 observed profiles including a watermark of their username or initials within the frame of the poem. Additionally, the poetry community was repeatedly labelled as a negative environment fuelled by 'drama', where poets "receive a lot of hate". In some survey responses, references to poor community behaviours, including in-fighting and seeking follow-backs, were identified as the most frustrating or discouraging aspect of Instapoetry. There were significant conflicts in the ways the poets understand the community and balance its value versus its drawbacks, revealing tensions between a desire to contribute constructively to the community and a fear of unproductive interactions and compromised creative contributions.

"I found my own style and voice": considering agency and multimodality

The identifying feature of Instagram poetry is its multimodality, combining visual and written elements, and the ease with which poets can experiment with their writing and aesthetic. Instagram provides a set of tools which, when combined with other freely available tools such as Canva, Snapseed or PicsArt, encourage this multimodal dimension. Filters automatically alter the colouring and appearance of an image, and captions allow the poets to include text beneath the

image they upload, to provide additional lines, describe the content of the poem, and most importantly for all poets surveyed, to include hashtags to help locate their work in the Instapoetry community. The most popular hashtag used is #poetsofinstagram, adopted by 85% of the poets surveyed. Users may also upload short videos, with the potential to layer text, audio, video and graphics into one post.

The interviewed poets all shared how the multimodality afforded by Instagram affected their creative process, especially in the realm of presentation. They all spoke of 'aesthetics' and how they sought to engage their readers with works that 'look nice'. Anna and Parv both combined their own photography and poetry to form multimodal pieces (see Figures 2 and 3). Sixteen of the observed profiles combined text with images in their works, while 16 also layered their poetic texts over an aesthetically pleasing background (see Figures 4 and 5). Such works are a prime example of transliteracies practices fostering digital literacy capabilities, as they combine all of the framework's features in a single multimodal post (Stornaiuolo et al., 2017).

Despite the levels of 'freedom' afforded by these options, which allowed poets to find their "own style and voice", there is a strong favouritism amongst poets for text and graphics. Ninety-three per cent reported using text, and 85% reported using images in their poems (see Figures 4 and 5). The use of video or filters was minimal, while none of the poets in the study used audio. This reliance of text may reflect that traditional understandings of what constitutes poetry are being upheld amongst the young Instapoetry community,



Figure 3: A multimodal, collaborative project by annaxmania and writers_creed. A photograph of the magnetic poem has been overlaid with a photograph of the poet and filters, to create a multimodal digital poem. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

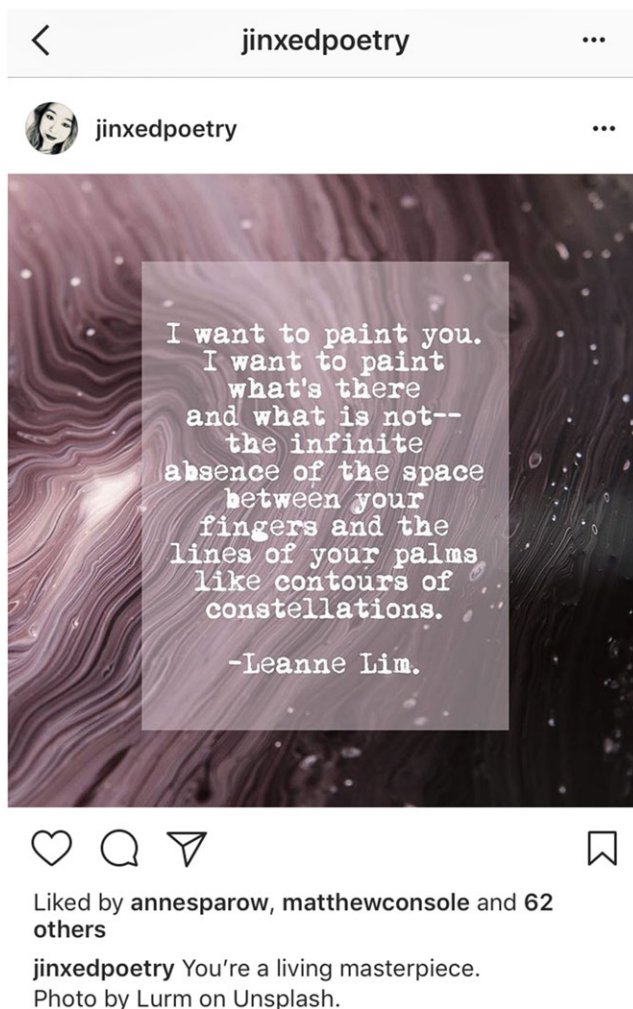


Figure 4: One of the most common combinations of text and graphics in Instapoetry, combining text and a creative background image. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

despite their willing adoption of a few multimodal elements. When asked to define poetry in the survey, phrases relating to poetics including 'pentameter', 'stanzas' and 'Shakespeare' were prevalent. It seems that many young Instapoets, while making 'image-texts' (Johnston, 2016, p. 18) where two or more modes assimilate each other, continue to ground their poetry in structures and knowledge gained from school-based exposure to poetry, thereby innovating while maintaining links to tradition.

While the poets enjoy the agency and multimodality associated with Instagram, they also value how the platform facilitates self-promotion and invites a global audience. All of the poets surveyed said they aspired to move from publishing poems on Instagram to print media. Those interviewed suggested that Instagram is merely the place where "you post stuff so people can find you and you create an audience ... that later buy your book". To that end, Anna had already been published in online compilations elsewhere, while 26% of the observed profiles included a URL to a platform outside Instagram where their work was also published, such as Tumblr or WordPress. This, combined

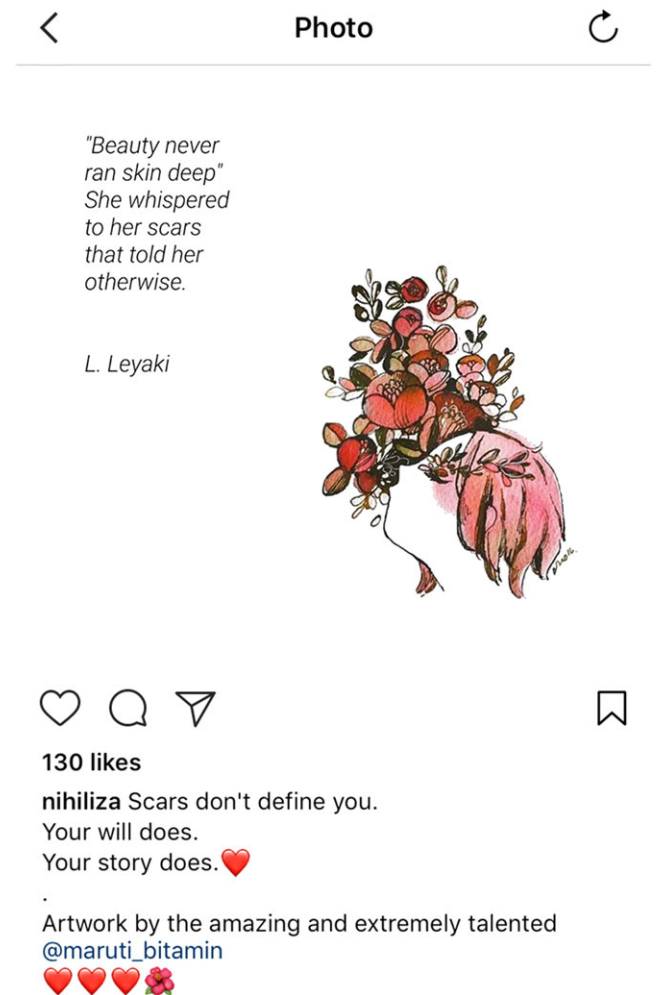


Figure 5: One of the most common combinations of text and graphics in Instapoetry, combining text and a small graphic. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

with the overwhelming opinion that print media are the end goal for poets, suggests that Instagram, even with its popular multimodal features, is viewed as a stepping stone to future literary success, giving poets the agency to publish and gain acclaim and exposure.

"I open my phone, start writing": the benefits of mobility and accessibility

One of the assets of using a mobile platform to write and display digital poetry is the ease with which it can be created and published. This aligns with the foundations of transliteracies theory, enabling literacy practices to occur globally in digitally mediated ways (Stornaiuolo et al., 2017). Grace described how she used her mobile device for instantaneous composition in natural situations: "3am I sit in my bed, watch some Netflix show, and then ... something that pops up in your mind and you just write it down ... it's just something that comes to mind pretty randomly." Some of her shorter poems were only a few lines long, for example, "Your smile made me believe in angels/And

your love showed me that miracles do exist.”, indicative of this swift, natural composition. This reflects the work of Lutkewitte (2016) and Warner (2016), whose research identified how young people write spontaneously and reactively for online publication using portable devices. In addition, the ability to compose on the device increases the ease with which multimodal poems are being created. The poets reported the speed with which the composition and publication process happened, even across multiple editing apps, sometimes taking only minutes. Poetry therefore becomes an authentic, integrated aspect of their daily lives.

The accessibility of Instapoetry, hosted on a free app across mobile operating systems, is another important asset of the platform, giving users access to unlimited content for free. Grace shared that her family could not finance new books regularly, so she was grateful that Instapoetry was freely available. This accessibility has important implications for the literacy of young people. Observation and artefact analysis of Instapoetry identified a breadth of vocabulary, themes including love, mental health and the human condition, and poetic forms and techniques, including haikus, free verse, metaphor and rhyme. For instance, Parv explained how he combined repetition and simile in one of his stanzas, influenced by Gertrude Stein’s ‘Tender Butons’, writing “Two separate blades,/Two separate legs,/There is no vehicle of horses and mad/And I tiptoe my lungs,/Like a huffing subtle infinite stem.” (see Figure 1). These techniques are often-times paired with images, which become visual cues that may assist comprehension, to some extent mimicking ‘message abundance’ pedagogies (Gibbons, 2003, p. 259). Being surrounded by rich texts such as those found throughout the Instapoetry community, and at zero cost, has the potential to improve the reading comprehension abilities of young people worldwide. This global accessibility reflects the act of transliteracies, associated with social purposes, in certain times and places, to share stories of youth and improve writing abilities (Alvermann et al., 2012; Stornaiuolo et al., 2017).

Anonymity, especially the unidentifiable nature of online participants, is another crucial element for accessibility, as online spaces allow for a tailored ‘self-presentation’ (Goffman, 1959) or ‘self-disclosure’ (Archer, 1980). Young people may openly express their ideas and beliefs, without the barriers associated with “gender, ethnicity or religion ... identity flaws or disabilities” (Bronstein, 2013, p. 163). It provides the security to publicly experiment with writing styles, make mistakes and continue to improve with practise and feedback. While some observed poets were very open about their identities, many of the observed profiles had de-identified themselves, using pseudonyms and excluding any personal photographs (see Table 2). One survey respondent spoke candidly about anonymity’s benefits, explaining, “The fact that it’s

Table 2: Profiles using identifiers (of 27 observed profiles)

Identifying feature	Number of users who include the feature on their profile
Photographs of the poet/their personal world	14
Real name	14
Location	7
Age	5

anonymous on some level helps too because I’m a very shy person ... My friends or my family don’t know who I really am or what I think about ... It’s private even though it’s a public account.” The anonymous nature of Instapoetry may facilitate the composition of poetry about personal, emotional themes, as in one of Grace’s poems in which she wrote “Maybe/If I stay in bed long enough,/This pain in my chest/Will sleep a little longer”. These benefits of anonymity reflect Miyazoe and Anderson’s (2011) research into the benefits of anonymity in learning environments, where it increased participation in online writing. These conditions for mobility and access in Instapoetry therefore have great implications for improved youth digital literacy.

Implications for literacy pedagogy

This study has identified how Instagram facilitates transliteracies practices, enabling the creation and global sharing of multimodal, digital poetry. It has shown that the free mobile app is highly valued by young poets, as it provides the tools required to publish their work and gain a following, while making poetry accessible to a worldwide audience. The ability to write anonymously, and the supportive nature of the Instapoetry community, has seen young poets empowered to construct an identity or counternarrative and engage in writing as an act of resistance.

While this study does not consider classroom contexts or pedagogy directly, its consideration of youth digital literacy offers some implications for teachers. Poetry remains crucial in school curriculum, especially Western systems in which value is placed upon classic text types. However, there often remains discontent amongst students and teachers who perceive it in negative terms. In two out of three interviews, this was the experience reported by poets, whose education in the Philippines and India facilitated negative attitudes towards a form that was old fashioned or not taught at all. Grace, who is completing her schooling in Germany, was the only one to report that “my teacher is pretty Shakespeare-obsessed and we’re always talking about poetry. And she’s actually encouraged

me to participate in my first poetry contest ... For me we could talk about poetry all day at school". Given this negative climate, the poets emphasised how their love for poetry has been fostered using Instagram, with Parv engaging in independent education about poetic forms and history. Instagram is therefore situated as a socio-cultural space which may provide increased exposure and relevance to poetry writing and appreciation. Instagram is a familiar, authentic space for young people, which empowers them to create multimodal works for a relevant outcome.

Given these links to authenticity in learning experiences, Instagram has the potential to be adopted in the classroom as a space for student-centred writing, reading and analysis of poems. This could occur using a variety of small-scale and larger scale activities which extend beyond using the platform for publishing alone. The creation of an Instapoem could be integrated into an existing unit about poetry, used to explore a relevant or timely theme. As discussed, themes surrounding the human condition, notably love and mental health, recur on the platform, which may inspire students to write as activists or for catharsis, as was the case with Anna. It may provide an extension activity, in which students compose a caption and a series of hashtags to supplement their initial composition. It could also be used as part of the writing workshop (Calkins, 1987). The workshop experiences of writing, sharing and community support may be replicated via Instapoetry, as it provides a digital space in which choice, time and opportunities to read and therefore write the genre all exist.

Composing Instapoetry, especially in collaboration with others, motivates young people to practise using language features, as well as poetic structures. With collaborative practise comes the development of a range of skills, including spelling, text construction and purposefully incorporating visual symbolisms such as images or emoji (Ortlieb et al., 2016). Meanwhile, constant exposure to rich texts on the platform has the potential to motivate young people to read multimodal works and therefore improve their comprehension and critical literacy (Clary et al., 2013). Incorporating Instapoetry in the classroom may supplement literacy pedagogies, bridging the gap between at-school and online literacies (Gregory, 2013), especially those associated with reading and writing instruction. In conjunction with this exposure, there is an obvious link between the comment and DM features of Instagram and giving and receiving written feedback on poems. Receiving constructive feedback was crucial for maintained motivation and the continuous improvement of poets' writing and revision skills, aligning with research into the educational benefits of peer marking in classroom settings (Facey, 2011). This example of peer review in the authentic Instagram space reveals a pedagogical benefit that may translate across online and classroom contexts.

Eighty-five per cent of survey respondents have been using Instagram to publish their poetry for 1 year or less, reflecting the emergent nature of this type of writing. As the first study into the literacy applications of Instapoetry, further research into this area is needed to investigate its value for literacy development amongst young people and its use as a pedagogical tool in schools. While Instagram may be classed as an imperfect place for writers, it benefits the poets who seek to share and improve their creative work. In Grace's words, "For artists like me who love to conjure a smile on people's faces through their poetry Instagram is a great way to do so."

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