

RSG Radio Station: Ons en die onderwys (Education and us)

Interview: 2 August 2020

<http://www.rsg.co.za/Program-Vorige/60/Ons-en-die-onderwys>

[Translations provided from Afrikaans. Text originally in English is presented in blue.]

Johan van Lill [presenter]: It is time for educational issues on RSG (100 to 104 FM) and worldwide on the Internet at rsg.co.za. Remember you can also listen to us on DSTV's audio channel 813. We are discussing metaliteracy today. We have two international guests and Prof. Jako Olivier, UNESCO Chair program at the North-West University. Can you tell us why we are talking about metaliteracy today and also introduce our guests.

Jako Olivier: Metaliteracy is a teaching approach and it is relevant to students, parents, teachers and even lecturers. For me this is relevant because of two reasons: in education students should not just consume information but also produce information in a responsible manner and, furthermore, we should consider issues around the increase in fake news and irresponsible sharing culture of misleading information.

Both aspects are not new, but technology makes it so much easier and pose possible new problems. The ease in which information can be share on Facebook, Instagram and even WhatsApp can be somewhat problematic. I understand that almost a half of Americans get their news from social media and I believe in the South African context this might be similar.

This type of sharing is innocent unless it relates to issues around crime or the COVID-19 pandemic. The school context is one place where an awareness can be created. I do believe that we should all become self-directed metaliterate learners.

But let us turn to the experts. It is a great privilege to introduce Prof. Tom Mackey and Prof. Trudi Jacobson. They are both from universities in New York State in the USA. They were guests of the North-West University in September last year when they were keynote speakers at the International Information Literacy Conference hosted by our university at our Vaal Triangle Campus. Here they introduced many South Africans to the concept of metaliteracy and even there the feedback from conference attendees was that this a very important issue to the South African context.

Johan van Lill [presenter]: Prof. Tom Mackey, can you tell us what is metaliteracy?

Tom Mackey: Hello and thank you for inviting us to talk about metaliteracy. I'm Tom Mackey, Professor of Arts and Media at Empire State College, State University of New York.

Metaliteracy is an approach to teaching and learning that places individuals at the center of a reflective and active process for producing new knowledge. Metaliteracy is gained through self-directed and social learning that takes place when people communicate with and learn from each other. To become metaliterate means to reflect on one's own thinking to understand how knowledge is gained while also taking control of the learning process itself. As self-directed learners, metaliterate individuals become aware of what they know, through formal and informal experiences, while also identifying areas for continued growth. They are fully engaged in developing strategies to meet personal and professional goals. Central to the metaliteracy model is the idea that individuals are not just consumers of information but also active producers as well. In today's environment, being a producer of information involves writing essays and developing social media content, as well as creating dynamic multimedia such as digital stories that combine word, image, and sound. The learner as producer role supports several active learner responsibilities such as communicator, publisher, researcher, and teacher. Individuals gain a metaliteracy mindset by seeing themselves these roles and as they strive to meet learning goals and objectives. They also apply the four domains of learning which include: thinking, feeling, reflecting, and acting. Through this unified

approach, metaliterate learners always reflect on how they may feel about information, while checking those responses through critical thinking to take informed action in the world.

Johan van Lill [presenter]: Prof. Tom Mackey mentioned self-directed learning, Jako, what is your view regarding the link between metaliteracy and self-directed learning?

Jako Olivier: For me this starts in making classes student centered and then also to counter the one-way transfer of information from teachers to students. What is proposed here, is in my opinion, a very sensible way to foster self-directedness through the formation of metaliterate learners.

This self-directed learning involves that students take responsibility for their own learning with or without the help of others in the process of deciding what they would like to learn, how and with who and what. In addition, because the choice of resources is also an important aspect of self-directed learning, according to Malcom Knowles. So, we need to provide students with tools to interact critically with information.

In order to foster self-directed learning, the shift from consumers of knowledge to the producers of knowledge is an excellent strategy. It is also at this point that the learner roles that Tom mentioned may be relevant: the student becomes the creator of new knowledge, a communicator that can effectively and responsibly share knowledge, a publisher that can consider and filter knowledge critically and then publish it online. Furthermore, roles like that of a researcher and teacher are fairly self-explanatory.

Johan van Lill [presenter]: Prof. Trudi Jacobson, why do you think metaliteracy is relevant for education today?

Trudi Jacobson: Metaliteracy is ultimately about a multi-faceted discovery process that leads to learning and self-knowledge. It involves a person discovering their capabilities, their potential to take on active roles in school and in society, and their capacity for

continued growth. This discovery process is in many ways integrally connected with information: learning from it, sharing it, and creating it for others. Yet how do students, and learners of any age, navigate the information environment? We need information in order to understand the world ourselves, and to help us contribute to developing information to assist others.

Metaliteracy provides a guiding framework that is particularly important at a time when truth has been devalued, as seen in both actual fake news and real news that is labeled fake. Learners must determine what and whom to trust. Metaliteracy emphasizes both the responsible use and the ethical creation of formal or informal information at a time when students are bombarded with sources both credible and not. The school years are an important time for students to hone their critical thinking abilities and a reflective mindset, attributes that they will take into their adult lives as citizens. The tenets of metaliteracy strongly support such learning and personal development.

Through metaliteracy's discovery process, learners are empowered. They come to recognize that roles they had thought were beyond their capabilities or hadn't considered at all, such as being a **teacher**, are within reach. Being a student doesn't mean that one can't also teach others. Everyone has interests and passions that they can share. Likewise, roles such as **collaborator**, **author**, or **producer** are ones they can own and take pride in. From our work with students, we know that they frequently don't identify with these roles, yet when they do, they bloom. And isn't this what education is about?

Johan van Lill [presenter]: Jako, how can this critical thinking and reflective mindset, emphasized by prof. Trudi, be developed?

Jako Olivier: Critical thinking is a difficult skill to master and it is important that teachers promote this in classes and also provide sufficient time for reflection.

Critical thinking is also not a general or generic skill and it should be considered for each subject or facet of our lives. Critical thinking is a high order skill and therefore students' language skill should be developed so that they can understand and express themselves. Furthermore, critical thinking requires sufficient knowledge of a specific field.

To make this practical, one can merely consider the tips provided by Jai Flicker on *wikiHow*. Teachers can pose more open questions where there might be more than one answer to the questions; give students time to think; let students consider the pros and cons on conflicting ideas; let students draw connections between issues and discuss that; let them ask "why?" – he talks about doing it five times for a statement. Let students discuss reliable and unreliable sources and information. Talk about the fact that views can differ. In the language class for example advertisements is a handy starting point as such texts are sometimes rather aimed at selling something than informing.

Johan van Lill [presenter]: Prof. Tom, which characteristics should a metaliterate learner have?

Tom Mackey: Metaliteracy advances several characteristics of the metaliterate learner. The **reflective** characteristic is essential because it provides insights about what individuals know, while recognizing areas for continued growth. Metaliterate learners start to see themselves as producers of information as they strive toward the **productive** characteristic for creating content in a variety of media formats. They also need to develop the **informed** attribute to identify reliable information and to know the difference between truth and untruth, especially when misinformation circulates so easily through social media. Being **participatory** is vital to civic engagement among people in community settings and social media environments. This quality is tied to being **collaborative** because working together supports dialogue between individuals who are co-creators of knowledge in social settings. Metaliterate learners are **adaptable** to digital technologies that are always changing while knowing how to protect personal

privacy and information security when using social media in particular. The **adaptable** characteristic prepares learners to look critically at social technologies while being flexible and confident in using them. Being **open** is another key quality because it is essential to be open to new ideas and insights while having empathy for other people and considering diverse viewpoints. In today's world especially, the **civic-minded** characteristic supports taking responsibility for the communities we design and build together.

Johan van Lill [presenter]: Prof. Tom mentioned a number of characteristics here, but the digital and social media contexts are very prominent. What can parents and teachers do in this context?

Jako Olivier: Firstly, we and the listeners can aim to become metaliterate learners ourselves and to assume some of these characteristics. Teachers and parents should consider the disadvantages but also the advantages of social media. But the online world is very dynamic and it is always a surprise to me when my own students are not as excited about Twitter as I am. Therefore, Facebook might be old news and for children Instagram or TikTok might be more relevant. Therefore, start with the experts for the most appropriate online medium for children and the experts in this context are the children themselves.

If we, therefore, can reflect, create, be informed, contribute, collaborate, be adaptive and open as well as socially responsible in terms of content online, then students will also be so. Dear listener, have you contributed to the Afrikaans Wikipedia in your field of expertise yet?

Johan van Lill [presenter]: What implications does metaliteracy have for teachers and parents in the school context?

Trudi Jacobson: Promoting metaliteracy in students has the potential to empower them in their interactions with information and their engagement with others. If students

understand the impact that they can have through their responsible involvement with information in all aspects of their lives, and if they begin to envisage themselves in roles such as **author**, **teacher**, **collaborator**, and **producer**, a mindset shift will occur that will become evident in their engagement in learning, in team projects, and in open education initiatives. They will gain confidence in their ability, both now and in the future, to participate meaningfully in a variety of contexts.

We encourage teachers and parents to become familiar with the metaliteracy learning goals and objectives, the learning domains, roles, and characteristics. These will provide you with a strong grounding in metaliteracy's core principles. However, to introduce students to metaliteracy, more hands-on tools and activities are needed. As an example, we've created exploratory questions that can be used to expand students' connection to learner roles. Courses may incorporate aspects of metaliteracy in myriad ways, such as having students take on a role that they particularly want to become more familiar with. For example, during discussions in a history class, students might don the persona of **author**, writing blog posts in the guise of news articles from the period being studied, to deepen their learning and that of others. Or they might take on the role of **producer**, shaping the blog, or **researcher**, to confirm facts and figures. In virtually any type of class, students might be invited to keep a journal chronicling the triumphs and challenges as they learn, which would encourage them to engage with the metaliteracy learning domains. Relevant scenarios and activities can be developed by both teachers and by students themselves. Becoming metaliterate in an environment that promotes open education can be both fun and effective.

Johan van Lill [presenter]: If teachers want to integrate metaliteracy in their classes or if listeners want to know more, where do they start?

Jako Olivier: Listeners are welcome to visit professors Tom and Trudi's website <https://metaliteracy.org/>. Here they'll find the latest information and research on metaliteracy. Under 'Goals and Learning Objectives' this information is even available in the local languages Afrikaans and Setswana.

The learning outcomes give good guidelines on what could be done in a class. Goal 1 for example involves that students “Actively evaluate content while also evaluating one’s own biases”. This also relates to acknowledging students’ own expertise, but also that information must be verified and drawn from a spectrum of viewpoints and sources. These two experts also have some relevant MOOCs (massive open online courses) that are available online on platforms such as Coursera.

At the North-West University’s Research Unit Self-Directed Learning I am also involved with Prof. Trudi and Prof. Tom in a project in which we are exploring metaliteracy among student teachers. Here they act in an advisory capacity. This project also relates to open educational resources and will involve eye tracking research.

The key message from my side is that parents and teachers foster a critical mindset regarding the handling, sharing and creation of content. Let us and our children strive to become more self-directed metaliterate learners.

Johan van Lill [presenter]: How can listeners contact you if they have any further questions?

Jako Olivier: Listeners are welcome to contact me by e-mail at jako.olivier@nwu.ac.za.

Johan van Lill [presenter]: So says prof. Jako Olivier UNESCO Chair from North-West University. Remember you can also listen to today’s program again as a podcast. Download this from rsg.co.za. With that I say until next week, from me, Johan van Lill. Goodbye.