

Technology, freedom of expression, identity, and inclusion: Fresh perspectives— Introduction

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In 2019, the New Zealand National Commission for the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) contributed a special section to *Curriculum Matters* with a range of perspectives on Global Citizenship Education, which is a key area of focus for UNESCO nationally and globally. In this issue, we take another area of focus for our organisation, that of freedom of expression.

At the international level, UNESCO upholds Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stating that it, “defends and promotes freedom of expression, media independence and pluralism, and the building of inclusive knowledge societies underpinned by universal access to information and the innovative use of digital technologies”.¹ UNESCO considers freedom of expression to be a cornerstone of democracy where the free flow of information builds mutual knowledge and understanding.

However, in recent times, especially in our own country, the rise of mis-, dis-, and malinformation, conspiracy theories, and hate speech brings into question what is meant by “freedom” of expression. Freedom for whom? For some? For all? To do or say whatever they wish? Online and offline? Is freedom an unassailable personal right? Or does it bring with it wider personal and social responsibilities?

UNESCO’s definitions of some of the key terms include:

- **Misinformation** as “information that is false but not created with the intention of causing harm”.
- **Disinformation** as “information that is false and deliberately created to cause harm to a person, social group, organization or country”.
- **Malinformation** as “information that is based on reality used to inflict harm on a person, social group, organization or country”.²

- **Hate speech** as “a virulent form of discrimination that targets and undermines the human rights of persons and peoples based on their—presumed—identity and serves as a driver of populist narratives and violent extremist ideologies”.³

In attempting to contribute to discussion and debate on these issues, the New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO has commissioned a series of thought pieces, in which the authors reflect on themes relating to changes in technology, freedom of expression, inclusion, and diversity. In particular, we wanted to include some younger generation voices, as they will be our future leaders. The articles in this special section combine personal reflection with discussion of relevant issues. We asked the authors to keep these pieces “fresh”, in the sense that we wanted their own voices, experiences, and ideas to come to the fore. Each author took up the challenge in a slightly different way. Our hope is that one or more of the pieces will resonate with readers, who will find themselves reflecting on their own experiences as they come to make sense of the contradictory and complex interrelationship between technology, media, information, freedom of expression, and human rights.

This set of articles opens and closes with commentary by Fiona Cram and Kate Hannah, who responded to the brief of contextualising the themes of the articles as they related to their own areas of interest and experience. Fiona Cram (Ngāti Pahauwera) is director of Katoa Ltd, a company that specialises in kaupapa Māori research and evaluation. By using her memories of the introduction of the television set and its unintended consequences on her whānau’s life, she hopes to encourage today’s young people to be more aware and critical of the benefits and pitfalls of changing technologies. Kate Hannah, is director of The Disinformation Project. Her work focuses on how disinformation is used to target, radicalise, divide and disrupt. She concludes this set of papers by highlighting the power of stories, and the importance of viewing stories as “data with soul”.

The three middle articles are from our emerging writers, two of whom are New Zealand UNESCO youth leaders. These writers share how their personal identities have shaped their interest in, understandings of, and engagement with modern technologies and the complex issues that they raise. Kauri Tearaura (Ngāti Mahuta), a current UNESCO youth leader, picks up the themes of identity and diversity. He argues how the use of current technologies, when

left unchecked, leads to hate speech and hate crime, especially against minority communities. Katya Neef, also a current UNESCO youth leader, examines technology and media in Aotearoa New Zealand through a migrant lens, which enables her to highlight structural racism and the harm that it has done, and will continue to do, unless we begin to take individual responsibility for our part in its perpetuation. Hannah Christini, a final year teacher education student, brings a note of hope. After outlining her motivation to become a teacher, she discusses how she intends to prepare the young people she will teach to be more discerning consumers of technology and media in order to build a more inclusive society.

We hope you find, in each of these reflective pieces, a provocation, an insight, or a challenge to spur your interest in engaging in this important topic.

Ultimately, the goal is for each community to have safe, inclusive and respectful living and learning environments where everyone feels that they belong, are respected, have a sense of purpose and can interact with others across dividing lines with tolerance, compassion, patience, empathy and a collaborative spirit.⁴

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Notes

1. <https://www.unesco.org/en/communication-information> (para. 1).
2. <https://en.unesco.org/fightfakenews> (para. 1).
3. https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/publications-and-resources/Addressing_hate_speech_through_education_A_guide_for_policy_makers.pdf (p. 9).
4. https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/publications-and-resources/Addressing_hate_speech_through_education_A_guide_for_policy_makers.pdf (p. 14).