

Critical Perspectives on Literacy and Generative Artificial Intelligence

Technologies commonly grouped under the label generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) are now part of the literacy landscape that children and teachers inhabit, whether through classroom tools, writing platforms, search engines, image generators, curriculum materials, or everyday digital life. For literacy educators, this raises questions that cannot be answered by enthusiasm for innovation or concern about misuse alone. A critical literacy orientation offers a way to ask not only how GenAI might be used but what values, assumptions, infrastructures, and power relations are built into these technologies and their use. Such questions are especially important in work with young learners, whose experiences with reading, writing, multimodality, authorship, and digital participation are still being formed.

A growing body of scholarship across literacy studies has emphasized the need for such critical approaches. Researchers have drawn on critical posthumanism (Burriss & Leander, 2024), disruptive multiliteracies (Rowse, 2026), critical ethical literacy (Kim et al., 2026), critical multimodal literacy (Kargin & Karataş, 2026), and frameworks that foreground critical wonder, speculation, and distributed agency in human–machine relations (e.g., Burriss & Leander, 2024; Rowse, 2026). These perspectives help educators ask how literacy practices involving GenAI may shift agency, reinforce or challenge inequities, and shape what students are able to know, express, and imagine. Collectively, this work challenges educators and researchers to move beyond instrumental questions of how to use GenAI and instead examine the social, cultural, political, ethical, and relational dimensions of AI-mediated literacy practices, including the systems, infrastructures, values, and power relations through which they are produced.

Emerging work in literacy education contexts for children up to age 12 offers important directions, while also pointing to the need for more sustained research. For example, studies with elementary-aged learners suggest that children can use GenAI in creative, discerning, and socially responsive ways when instruction supports them in prompting, evaluating, revising, reflecting, and composing multimodally (Kargin & Karataş, 2026; LaMear & Gillern, 2025). At the same time, challenges related to bias, unreliable information, and the limits of AI-generated responses in representing students' intentions show that such work requires more than access to tools or encouragement to experiment (LaMear & Gillern, 2025). In response to these challenges, other scholarship offers critical frameworks that help teachers and students navigate considerations for using GenAI (Arastoopour Irgens & Burriss, 2026; Floris & Renandya, 2026; Hutchison, 2024). Together with research showing that children and teachers make thoughtful, situated decisions about when and how to engage GenAI (Barnes & Tour, 2026; Higgs & Stornaiuolo, 2024), these studies point toward how such critical perspectives can inform literacy pedagogies that support agency, critical judgment, and purposeful decision-making.

At the same time, critical inquiry must continue to extend beyond whether learners use GenAI responsibly or evaluate its outputs accurately. Educational technology research has often privileged novelty and adoption over sustained attention to educational purposes and consequences (Schmidt et al., 2025), a tendency that is especially consequential when attention shifts from literacy learning to the technology itself. From this perspective, GenAI cannot be understood only as a neutral tool or resource. It shapes composing processes, classroom communication, and the kinds of knowledge and expression that become available to learners (Leander et al., 2025; Robinson & Leander, 2025). Literacy research must therefore ask not only what AI-mediated practices enable but also what they reshape or constrain, whose knowledge and values they privilege, and how they matter for reading, writing, inquiry, and meaning-making.

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As such, this special collection invites manuscripts that keep students, teachers, and literacy learning at the center of conversations about GenAI. We welcome empirical, practitioner-oriented, and classroom-based work that moves beyond technological optimism and narrow questions of adoption by asking how these technologies are being taken up, questioned, adapted, or resisted in literacy contexts. We also welcome studies that explore how literacy instruction can support critical, ethical, creative, and humanizing engagement with these technologies. Collectively, this special collection aims to help literacy educators consider not only what GenAI can do, but whether, how, when, and to what ends these technologies should be used in ways that support children's reading, writing, composing, relationships, identities, agency, and participation in literacy learning.

We invite manuscripts that include but are not limited to:

- Classroom pedagogies that support critical engagement with GenAI
- Critical ethical literacies for reading, writing, and composing with GenAI
- Students' critical and reflexive understandings of GenAI systems and uses
- How teachers, students, and families navigate GenAI amid high-quality instructional materials, accountability demands, and restrictive literacy policies
- Bias, representation, misinformation, and source evaluation in GenAI-supported literacy learning
- Teacher learning and professional development around critical GenAI literacy
- Assessment, authorship, and evidence of learning in AI-mediated literacy work
- Critical, pluriversal, posthuman, sociomaterial, and affective approaches to literacy and GenAI
- Relationships and the distribution of agency among students, teachers, texts, technologies, and platforms
- Humanizing and justice-oriented approaches to GenAI
- New conceptualizations of literacy, authorship, multimodality, composition, and creativity

Expected Timeline

Deadline for Full Manuscripts: November 6, 2026

Peer Review Window: November–December 2026

Deadline for Invited Revisions: March 1, 2027

Target Publication: March/April 2027

When **submitting your manuscript**, select either Research in Action or Teaching and Learning in Practice as your article type, and select this special issue in the Additional Information section.

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