Chapter 59

Navigating 21st Century Multimodal Textual Environments:
A Case Study of Digital Literacy

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ABSTRACT

In the 21st century young people live and learn in a technological world that is fast paced and in a constant state of change. As technology becomes more and more accessible outside of the classroom, educators are challenged to re-consider the literacy skills required to be successfully literate. Enacting literacy teaching and learning in and for the 21st century requires teachers to update their pedagogical knowledge, skills and contextual understanding of the world children live and learn in. This chapter offers a brief overview of the Australian Curriculum, locating it within a 21st century learning discourse. The authors interpret and analyse one young student's creation of a digital text in a movie modality. Attention is paid to how the case study teacher created meaningful digital literacy learning experiences and opportunities for children to create and interact in social, multimodal textual environments, both within and beyond the school.

INTRODUCTION

This book looks at how the changing characteristics of digital learners alerts us to the need to explore the ways to better prepare 21st century teachers to teach literacy in a technology rich world. This chapter presents a case study of digital literacy as one example of ways in which teachers and students in schools are developing digital literacies. In doing so the authors address the pressing need for faculty and teacher

educators to prepare current and future teachers to meet the teaching and learning demands of the 21st century technology-rich classrooms.

The ability to successfully engage in literate activities is crucial for social, educational and work lives in the 21st century (Brown & Slagter van Tryon, 2010). While print based texts are still important forms of literacy young people now have the opportunity to create and interact with texts in ways that were unimaginable for previous generations. Today's children are growing up immersed in a technological world that is fast paced and in a constant state of change (Bruce, 1997). As well as hard copy print based texts, literacy now encompasses digital texts in a range of formats and visual literacy has become an important facet of the literacy landscape (Simpson, 2013, p. 11). Social media has had a massive impact in recent years and schools and school teachers are also coming to terms with how these new forms of media can be used meaningfully to enrich the learning experiences of their students. This has lead education policy makers to acknowledge the changing nature of literacies in the Australia Curriculum documents that reflect what it means to be literate in and for the 21st century.

Enacting literacy teaching and learning in and for the 21st century requires informed pedagogical knowledge, skills and contextual understanding of the world children live and learn in. Within this chapter, we offer a brief overview of the Australian Curriculum, locating it within a 21st century learning discourse. We then introduce and define digital literacy, which is discussed within a broader context of literacy in and for the 21st century. Finally, we present, interpret and analyse one young student's creation of a digital text in a movie modality.

LOCATING CURRICULUM WITHIN A 21ST CENTURY CONTEXT

The development of the Australian Curriculum was guided by the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, adopted by the Ministerial Council in December 2008. The Melbourne Declaration emphasised the importance of knowledge, skills and understandings of learning areas, general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities as forming the basis for a curriculum designed to support 21st century learning (Ministerial Council on Education, 2008).

The Melbourne Declaration

The Melbourne Declaration acknowledges major changes in the world that are placing new demands on education. While this chapter does not intend to discuss all the changes the Declaration identifies, we do feel that some of the changes identified within the Declaration provide relevant background information for this chapter. Specifically, the Declaration states that:

Rapid and continuing advances in information and communication technologies (ICT) are changing the ways people share, use, develop and process information and technology. In this digital age, young people need to be highly skilled in the use of ICT. While schools already employ these technologies in learning, there is a need to increase their effectiveness significantly over the next decade. [and goes on to say that] Literacy and numeracy and knowledge of key disciplines remain the cornerstone of schooling for young Australians. Schooling should also support the development of skills in areas such as social interaction, cross disciplinary thinking and the use of digital media, which are essential in all 21st century occupations (Ministerial Council on Education, 2008).

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