

Chapter 88

Recognizing Similarities and Differences Between Print and Digital Literacy in Education

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on recognizing similarities and differences between print and digital literacy in the field of education since the 1980's. The author found that many books and peer-reviewed articles agreed that both forms of literacy are social constructions of thought used to help humans read and write in the world. Literature suggests more work must be completed in the field of literacy studies and education in order to best understand the needs of digitally driven students in the United States. Differing definitions of print and digital literacy among articles were apparent, but those differences highlighted the importance of the meaning-making process. The evolution of recent advances in technology gives reason for researchers to question the future of literacy and its role in education. Literature for this review was limited to texts in English from the UNM Library databases: ERIC, WorldCat.org, ArticleFirst, Education Abstracts, Google Scholar, and Academic Search Complete.

INTRODUCTION

The field of literacy studies has made many of us take a deeper look into the similarities and differences between print and digital literacy. It seems not only through the literature but also by observation as a classroom practitioner that there are certain elements and conflicts between digital literacy and print literacy that need to be combed through by educators in the field. So, what does the field need to know about this new generation of literacy, and perhaps more importantly, how can recognizing the similarities and differences between print and digital literacy improve the way students learn to read and write in the K-12 classroom? It begins by looking at the current scene of literacy studies and its relation to the current educational practices of teachers today.

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The scene of literacy studies has become inundated with new literacies, and because of it, Gee (2001) suggests, "...that if someone wants to know about the development of literacy, he or she should not ask how literacy and language develop. Rather, he or she should ask how a specific sociocultural practice (or related set of them) embedded in specific ways with printed words develops" (p. 31). For the purpose of this review and discussion, there will be controversy in the juxtapositions given between digital literacy and print literacy. This after all is the study of new literacy, and to some, new is bad, untrusted, and often times avoided. However, it appears to millennials like myself that the thought of a well-balanced literary diet contains both print and digital literacy. It is with much delay that new literacy studies are bringing a refreshing change in their wake, not only to society, but education at large.

As the field of literacy studies continues to grow, so too does the need for researchers to zoom in and look at what brought education to its steepest literary precipice yet. "It is in this world that national reports find a literacy crisis, and that nonstandard literacies and language forms are regarded as deficits rather than differences" (Dagostino & Carifio, 1994, p. 4). With education companies like Pearson and McGraw-Hill shifting literary paradigms and moving digital, it means big change for education. Ng (2012) discusses how, "digital technology tools are advancing and proliferating the marketplace at an increasing pace" (p. 28). The relationships between digital literacy and print literacy are effected by sociocultural components like politics, big business, privilege, oppression, and many others. However, for many educators their questions about how to tackle these literary issues find action beyond the classroom. It is the educator who, amongst all social components, must ask themselves: What will be the most effective literacy learning approach for the students? What does the data say about the students' reading and writing habits, and what do they need from their teacher? It is easy to get lost in the questions, and literature on the subject falls short of good examples of what good print and digital literacy look like in K-12 classrooms across the United States.

The change in the way we make meaning in the world using literacy has not always been easy to recognize, but observe a classroom and watch students learn for a day. Take some time to look at the pieces of text they are reading and writing. How are they using digital literacy and print literacy, or how are they not using them? Watch the students make meaning from their literary experiences. Then, ask yourself if those students are reading and writing the appropriate texts that will help them prepare for the real-world, the outside-world, their world, or even the next grade level. Are the literacies being used old, current, innovative, or a mix? Kajder (2010) says, "Research shows that out-of-school literacies play a very important role in literacy learning, and teachers can draw on these skills to foster learning in school" (p. x). However, it is digital literacy in particular that needs to be better integrated into the average classroom to foster such out-of-school connections to the student's literate and culturally unique lives. Print literacy plays a role in this, but with the increase in the use of digital media, especially among children and adolescents, there is good reason to start paying closer attention to digital literacy. "The discourse of specific disciplines and social/cultural contexts created by school classrooms shape the literacy learning of adolescents, especially when these discourses are different and conflicting" (p. x). Educators must scan their own classroom and cultural environments to see how much print and digital literacy is necessary for their students. There is no one perfect formula for literacy learning, it depends on many factors, but considering the use of both print-based texts and multimedia-based texts is a great place to start when designing a curriculum in any subject and grade level.

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