

# Chapter 18

## Multiliteracies: Moving from Theory to Practice in Teacher Education Courses

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### ABSTRACT

*In this chapter, the author explains how a theory of Multiliteracies helped to shape the development of a graduate course which, in turn, initiated changes in an undergraduate content-area literacy course in a teacher education program. Both courses are described, and ways in which digital technologies changed the way the instructor and students collaborated, worked and learned are discussed. Service learning aspects of these courses are explored with examples of how pre- and inservice teachers engaged with K-12 students and teachers in the community. Implications for teacher education faculty and students are presented as well as the need to implement Multiliterate pedagogies across the K-12 spectrum.*

### INTRODUCTION

Technology has always played an integral role in literacy and literacy education. The tools of literacy from clay tablets to paper and pencil are technologies that have enabled humans to be literate. However, over the past few decades, the rapid growth of computers and other Information Com-

munication Technologies (ICTs) have expanded our notions of text and literacy. *Multiliteracies*, a term coined by the New London Group (1996), captures this shifting notion of literacy to include the “multiplicity of communications channels and increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in the world today call for a much broader view of literacy than portrayed by traditional language-based approaches” (p. 60). In short, these scholars looked beyond the limitations of traditional notions of

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literacy to include social and cultural changes in society and the emergence of new technologies that enable students to negotiate “the evolving language of work, power, and community, and fostering the critical engagement necessary for them to design their social futures and achieve success through fulfilling employment” (p. 60). These ideas have been echoed by organizations including the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). The NCTE’s policy statement on 21<sup>st</sup> Century literacies states:

*As society and technology change, so does literacy. Because technology has increased the intensity and complexity of literate environments, the twenty-first century demands that a literate person possess a wide range of abilities and competencies, many literacies. These literacies—from reading online newspapers to participating in virtual classrooms—are multiple, dynamic, and malleable. As in the past, they are inextricably linked with particular histories, life possibilities and social trajectories of individuals and groups (National Council of Teachers of English, 2010).*

While the scholarship of literacy has in many ways attempted to keep up with the rapid changes of an increasingly “flat world” (Friedman, 2007), schools and other educational institutions including teacher education programs have not (Collins & Halverson, 2009). States have attempted to enact policies to help bridge this gap between literate technologies used beyond the school and those used in classrooms. For example, The North Carolina State Board of Education established *A Strategic Plan for Reading Literacy* in April 2007 which states:

*Reading is the fundamental skill needed for success in life, especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While students must be at proficiency or above in basic literacy (reading, writing, listening, speaking, using conventional or technology-based media),*

*these skills are no longer sufficient for college- and work-ready high school graduates. As the world continues to change rapidly, schools must evolve to meet future needs. In many cases, this means we are trying to refine and structure an educational system for a future that many people cannot visualize. (p. 1)*

The North Carolina *Strategic Plan for Reading Literacy* calls for teachers and schools to prepare students to be globally competitive 21<sup>st</sup> Century citizens and professionals able to provide leadership for innovation using 21<sup>st</sup> Century technologies. The State Board of Education places teacher preparation and professional development at the top of its list of factors that influence literacy instruction and student growth. However, the need to advance the teaching and learning using 21<sup>st</sup> Century technologies is not limited to P-12 educational institutions. Colleges and university instructors have been slow to adopt Web 2.0 technologies especially at the individual course level (Ajjan & Hartshorne, 2008; Maloney, 2007).

In this chapter, I describe *r/evolutions*, a term I invoke to capture the varied and often increasing pace of change in my own teaching of undergraduate and graduate literacy teacher education courses that have developed over the past three years in response to ICTs and other technologies<sup>1</sup>. These changes include replacing Web 1.0 technologies (printed copies of word processed documents and static websites, for example) with interactive Web 2.0 tools (wikis, blogs, and shared document spaces) to foster and enable collaboration on assignments.

However, these changes in the use of technology did not remain within the university classroom walls. Service learning clinical assignments required teacher education students to implement literacy instruction using digital technologies with elementary, middle, and high school students. University students developed theme based projects with K-12 students which included the creation

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