

Chapter 19

Professional Development for Teaching Writing in a Digital Age

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ABSTRACT

This chapter addresses the issue of professional development as it relates to teaching writing in a digital environment. The goals of this chapter include describing the genres of digital writing tools currently in use, along with their affordances and constraints and the means by which teachers use these tools professionally. The authors explore leveraging affordances of digital writing tools to communicate with stakeholders and reflect on practice, and also describe effective professional development linked to the teaching of writing using digital tools. Finally, the authors address recommendations for future research.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses teachers' uses of digital writing tools and provides a framework for professional development for teachers using digital writing tools and new literacies for a variety of purposes. It is designed to accomplish several goals: a) to provide a description of the genres (Stevens, 2013) of digital tools available to teachers, including the affordances and constraints associated with each, as well as to provide a research base for using these tools; b) to explore teachers' use of digital writing tools, including those used

to connect with a variety of audiences: students, parents and other stakeholders, and other teachers; c) to explore leveraging the affordances of digital writing tools to facilitate teachers' reflective practice; and d) to describe elements of effective professional development and link them to the teaching of writing using digital tools. These goals mirror essential elements of professional development in technology identified by Mouza (2009), including knowledge teachers need to be able to use digital tools in writing instruction, which must be connected to pedagogical knowledge in meaningful ways.

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BACKGROUND

According to the National Council of Teachers of English (2013b), 21st Century literacy involves being fluent and proficient with the tools of technology; being collaborative; designing and sharing information for a variety of purposes; managing, analyzing, and synthesizing information from a variety of sources; and adhering to ethics required in complex technological environments. Twenty-first Century literacies have transformed communication in the 21st Century (Mills, 2010), and a number of characteristics delineate 21st Century literacies from those prior to the advent of the Internet. Twenty-first Century literacies are multi-modal, involving more than words and written discourse. Moreover, 21st Century literacies are not linear – they involve the use of hyperlinks that enable nonlinear navigation of text, videos, audio, and photos (Rhodes & Robnolt, 2009). Another difference between 21st Century literacies and traditional print literacies such as textbooks and magazines is that anyone with an Internet connection and the appropriate technology can post to the Internet – there is no editor; therefore, users must be critical consumers of the information they access, lest they accept at face value information that is not accurate or true. Users must also be mindful of their contributions to the Web (Alvermann, 2008; International Reading Association, 2009). The amount of information available grows exponentially, making it more important for learners to be able to locate, analyze, and synthesize relevant information from a variety of sources (Alvermann, Gillis, & Phelps, 2013). Additionally, the advent of Web 2.0 is another feature of 21st Century literacy. Web 1.0 was primarily a venue to deliver information digitally, but Web 2.0 involves participation, collaboration, and distribution (Knobel & Wilber, 2009). There is a shift from consuming to producing text, in the broadest sense of the term “text.” In response to the advent of Web 2.0, instruction must change (Albion, 2008; Attwell, 2007). Knobel and Wil-

ber (2009) coined the term *literacy 2.0*, to signal a change in literacy as significant as the change from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0. A literacy in which people develop new ways of reading, writing, viewing, and creating text using digital tools. In the classroom, literacy 2.0 translates to a focus on meaningful tasks with authentic purposes and audiences beyond the classroom.

The importance of 21st Century literacy skills in education is evidenced by the proliferation of position statements on the issue from a number of professional organizations, including the National Council of Teachers of English (2005, 2013a, 2013b) and the International Reading Association (2009) as well as research policy briefs (National Council of Teachers of English, 2007). Calls for infusing 21st Century literacy into K-12 instruction abound (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010; Kamil, 2003; Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999). Yet, teachers cannot implement effective instruction that uses digital tools for writing if they are not comfortable using these tools themselves (Groff & Mouza, 2008; Zhao & Frank, 2003). Although pre-service teachers may be more familiar with digital writing tools than in-service teachers, they may not make the connection between their personal use of these tools and potential professional uses (Attwell, 2007). In addition, teachers’ assumptions about student access, practices, and knowledge of digital literacies are factors that must be taken into account as they plan for effective writing instruction (Pew Research Center, 2013a).

In a recently released report, the Pew Research Center (2013b) described results of a survey of Advanced Placement and National Writing Project teachers that explored the impact of digital writing tools on students’ writing. Results indicated that digital writing tools have shaped students’ writing in a number of ways, including providing a wider audience for their writing, prompting increased writing among students (for example, blogging), and using diverse formats for their writing. In addition to these positive influences, teachers

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