

Chapter 36

Developing Digital Literacy: Preparing Next-Generation Elementary Education Literacy Teachers

Carolyn Haviland Obel-Omia
Rhode Island College, USA

ABSTRACT

Teacher education programs are increasingly responsible for preparing teachers who use technology fluently across curricula. Future teachers must define literacy more broadly than they have in the past to include digital modes of reading and writing. Experience with digital tools in literacy methodology courses provides opportunities for teacher candidates to reflect critically on these tools, preparing teachers to use technology to its advantage in elementary school classrooms. This chapter describes four digital practices designed to engage teacher candidates in participating in and reflecting on authentic reading and writing to develop next-generation literacy teachers. These practices include examples of activities that can be adapted to both teacher preparation and elementary education classrooms.

INTRODUCTION

I believe that education, therefore, is a process of living and not in preparation for future learning. – John Dewey

Dewey's (1897, p. 78) words are relevant to teacher education because programs that engage prospective teachers in living- reading and writing- create teachers who are guided by their own love of literacy learning. For elementary education teacher candidates to become teachers who inspire students' love of and facility for literacy, they require experience interacting with the breadth of extant literacies. New teachers entering classrooms with an understanding of the possibilities of digital literacy experiences are prepared to share these opportunities with students, combined with being open to new ways of using technology that arise with technological advances. This chapter presents evidence for a need for teacher education programs that incorporate technology into language arts instruction, provides examples of

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practices designed to do so, and considers inherent benefits and challenges. The digital practices were chosen to engage preservice teachers in participating in rich, interactive reading and writing experiences, forming “communities of practice,” (Wenger, 1998), each of which can be modified for elementary school classrooms.

BACKGROUND

A critical component of the English Language Arts Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) is its underpinning in *new literacies*. In this framework, literacy is defined as the ability to not only read and write text, but also participate fluently in a variety of media (Gee, 2012; Knobel & Lankshear, 2014). The term *new literacies* was introduced in 1993 to describe how definitions of literacy, and what it means to be literate, were changing with advances in technology (Buckingham, 1993). Knobel and Lankshear (2014) distinguish traditional and new literacies:

As social practices mediated by digital technologies, new literacies differ fundamentally from conventional print literacies on the basis that their inscriptions are rendered in pixels on screens rather than by impressions on paper, by means of digital code rather than material analogue means. Consequently, “new” kinds of texts are seamlessly multimodal rather than involving distinct processes for different modes (text, image, sound). (p. 98)

Similarly, *multiliteracies* was used by a group of literacy researchers in New Hampshire in 1994 to expand the definition of literacy to include production and comprehension of new kinds of texts, especially digital varieties (Anstey & Bull, 2006; New London Group, 1996). Although the notion that people are literate in different ways in disparate contexts existed prior to the introduction of the term, *multiliteracy* referred primarily to literate practices afforded by new technologies. *New literacy* and *multiliteracy* carry the same connotation. For the purposes of this chapter, *new literacies* refers to skills and practices necessary for comprehension and production of digital texts. These texts include images, videos, blogs, wikis, online forums, online gaming, various social media sites, etc. This expanded view of literacy has important implications for elementary education teachers, and by extension, preservice teachers. Reading requires the ability to draw meaning from information presented in multiple formats in addition to books, to include social media forums and blogs, and beyond text, to include images and videos. Writing looks and feels different too since the process is more collaborative, interactive, and context-specific in a digital context. Multiple authors frequently collaborate on texts, and audiences extend far beyond the walls of a classroom. Whereas publishing originally meant reading a final copy of writing to a class from an author’s chair, it now means sharing ideas widely on websites, blogs, and social media.

Recent definitions of language arts add *viewing* and *visually representing* to the original four: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. In elementary school classrooms and beyond, critical literacy skills when viewing and visually representing are becoming increasingly important. Elementary school students need skills to navigate the digital world, and participate in and contribute to that world. New literacies describe “ways in which meaning-making practices are evolving under contemporary conditions that include, but are in no way limited to, technological changes associated with the rise and proliferation of digital electronics” (Knobel & Lankshear, 2014, p. 97). Even if reading and writing remain primary

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