

Chapter II

Technologies

Challenging Literacy: Hypertext, Community Building, Reflection, and Critical Literacy

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes how new technologies are challenging the traditional concept of literacy and redefining its meaning. New genres of texts change conceptualizations of literacy development and present new challenges for reading and writing. Important consequences for instruction, especially how teachers and students exploit new forms of literacy to enhance teaching and learning, are presented and discussed. A particular emphasis is placed on the role of technology for community building, reflection, and teacher learning. Deconstructing notions of how technology shapes society and the role of critical emotional literacy are also explored.

INTRODUCTION

For many years, a traditional concept of literacy as the ability to read and write print on a page has dominated schooling and adequately served the literacy demands of the society and of the workplace. In the emerging digital economic era, this traditional concept of literacy is being challenged. Traditional reading and writing are but the initial layers of the richer and more complex forms of literacy required in an electronic context. The unique characteristics of reading and writing with computers make us realize that electronic texts represent a substantively new technology that does not readily mesh with the assumptions that have risen from the technology of print. This implies a re-elaboration of techno-space into an infinite, and thus a loss of the finitude of material inscription; consequently, the notion of literacy has to be renegotiated.

Recent theoretical work helps us to better understand the central relationship between literacy and technology. Reinking (1998) provides a transformational perspective of the relation between literacy and technology, observing that technology transforms the nature of literacy. From this perspective, a review of research studies would seek to understand the new forms of literacy possible within new technologies. A critical approach to study the relation between literacy and technology would include studies of how information technologies transform literacy, as well as how educators need to problematize technology as it relates to issues of access, gender, equity, and social justice (Zembylas, Vrasidas, & McIsaac, 2002). Such an approach provides important insights into the many changes currently taking place in the nature of literacy and education around the world.

This chapter addresses four major issues: (1) technology and its impact on the concept of

literacy in general and as it applies to language learning; (2) hypertext literacy and the role of navigation in reading comprehension while interacting with electronic texts; (3) the role of technology for community building, reflection, and teacher learning; and (4) deconstructing notions of how technology shapes society and the role of critical emotional literacy in understanding such issues.

TECHNOLOGY AND ITS IMPACT ON THE NATURE OF LITERACY

The Internet and other forms of information and communication technology (ICT) are redefining the nature of literacy. According to Leu (2000) literacy appears to be increasingly *deictic*; its meaning is regularly redefined, as new technologies for information and communication repeatedly appear and new visions for exploiting these technologies are continuously created by the users. New technologies transform contemporary notions of literacy, teacher education, classroom learning contexts, and resources such as text.

A deictic perspective on literacy predicts, according to Leu (2000), that the nature of literacy will change in important ways:

- a. *“Strategic knowledge will become even more important to successful literacy activities than it is today. Navigating the increasingly complex information available within global information networks that continually change will require greater and perhaps newer strategic knowledge than is required within more limited and static, traditional texts.*
- b. *Literacy will increasingly become a continuous learning task for each of us. Since new technologies and new visions for literacy will regularly ap-*

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