Chapter 11
Aligning Children's Books With Digital Tools for Reader Response:
The Text, the Tech, and the Task

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ABSTRACT

Through an exploration of three vignettes, the authors share innovative ways young learners and their teachers are responding to children's literature using digital tools in the context of new literacies. In the first example, primary grade students use digital tools to gain agency in their literacy practices as part of project-based learning within a STEAM curriculum. In the second, struggling readers in an after-school program integrate traditional and out-of-school literacies to produce authentic literacy products outside the constraints of standards and established curricula. Finally, an example from a teacher education program shows how the next generation of teachers can become leaders in the use of new literacies through their own experiential learning. Despite the differences in context and content of each vignette, all three demonstrate strong use of literacies pedagogy to guide selection of digital tools for the creation and consumption of text.

INTRODUCTION

Children are exposed to digital devices and the texts they carry from an early age, long before the start of formal schooling. According to Common Sense Media's 2017 report, 95% of children between the ages of 0-8 years had access to mobile devices, and children between the ages of 2-6 years interacted an hour daily on mobile digital devices (Common Sense Media, 2017). The authors of that report credit these levels of exposure and emergent use to the increasing availability of easy-to-use mobile devices as well as the potential effects of family literacy practices that often center around digital device use. For example, Marsh and colleagues found that between the ages of two and four, children are immersed in a range of multimedia, multimodal practices that are scaffolded and encouraged by family members (Marsh, Lewis & Ritchie, 2017). These family and societal practices create very different emergent literacy practices than in the past (Wolfe & Flewit, 2010). Such digitally-infused early literacy experiences also create a different set of expectations and possibilities in early literacy classrooms.

These practices are also termed New Literacies—the skills, strategies, dispositions, and social practices needed to effectively research, solve problems, answer questions, and communicate learning online (Zawilinski, Forzani, Timbrell, & Leu, 2019). Zawlinski and colleagues suggest beginning to teach and learn New Literacies as early as possible, even in preschool, while viewing literacy standards both through a lens of the past and a lens of the future. Digital tools for new literacies provide affordances that are easily accessed by students in public schools equipped with computers and Internet access. With access to these tools, even young students can create video, capture audio, take pictures of physical or drawn objects, use editing tools, and publish their work. Outside of school, these same children are heavily exposed to mobile apps, YouTube videos, and photographs through a variety of ever-changing social media (Rideout, 2017).

The constant stream of new pictures, videos, and short texts on sites such as Facebook and Instagram conveys the sense that anyone can publish online, which makes creating multimodal projects a potentially more accessible and exciting task. However, these types of social media and online activities tend to be categorized as out-of-school literacies, systemically viewed as less valuable than the traditional literacies of the schoolroom (Knobel & Lankshear, 2003). Thus, teachers who can capitalize on students' interest in such digital activities by incorporating multimodal reading and writing tasks into the school's literacy curriculum are those who find ways to blur the lines between traditional literacies and new literacies.

Digital media opens the door for learners to have choice and voice to make student-directed learning possible for every learner (Coiro, Kiili, & Castek, 2017). One important caution, however, is that the affordances of digital tools are not self-evident. The affordances manifest in pedagogically meaningful ways when teachers are intentional about the ways they introduce the tools and ideas (Dalton, 2012). This is especially true when working with young students, who are more likely to benefit from modeling and appropriate scaffolds as they grapple with the real issues behind interpreting or creating in a digital space using new or unfamiliar materials (Burnett & Myers, 2006). Simply providing access to the tools is likely to be an insufficient condition. An important goal of the language arts teacher, therefore, should be to create a limited but meaningful set of options for students as they interact with texts and craft their individual responses. Appropriate amounts and types of choice can be powerful motivations to persevere even when a text may be difficult (Guthrie and Wigfield, 2000).

In this chapter, the authors share three different examples of responses to literature being manifested in the form of new literacies wherein using digital tools imparts the learners with agency, both as consumers (readers) and producers (writers) of text. Since the authors are the teachers in each vignette, their names

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