

Chapter 13

Putting Multiliteracies into Practice in Teacher Education: Tools for Teaching and Learning in a Flat World

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ABSTRACT

While technology has always played a role in teaching and learning, with the advent of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs), schools have struggled to keep pace with Web 2.0 tools available for teaching and learning. Multiliteracies, a term coined by scholars who published under the name The New London Group in 1996, has helped provide a theoretical foundation for applying new texts and tools to teaching and learning; however, much of the scholarship around Multiliteracies remains in the academic and theoretical domain. The authors suggest a pedagogic framework or metastructure for applying Multiliteracies to teacher education and by extension to P-12 classrooms. They document Web 2.0 tools and discuss how they have used them in undergraduate and graduate teacher education courses.

INTRODUCTION

Technology has always been integral to teaching and learning. Incremental changes over time from clay tablets to papyrus scrolls to paper and ink have, through human history, shaped the work of teachers and students in their work together. The rate of advancement and impact on teaching and learning took a leap forward with the inven-

tion of the printing press. The invention of mass production printing technologies was one factor among others that in the 19th Century increased access of education from the wealthy and elite to the children of middle and lower socioeconomic families in Europe and the United States (Heath, 1991; Resnick & Resnick, 1977). The rise of Information Communications Technologies (ICTs) over the past three decades has further enriched

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and complicated teaching and learning in P-12 classrooms and, at the same time, accelerated the rate of change. One challenge that remains is how to prepare teachers in the 21st Century to use technology in their classrooms in meaningful ways.

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.” In short, these scholars sought to overcome the limitations of traditional notions of 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.”

While Multiliteracies has been a fruitful area for scholarship and received attention in academic circles, it has been less visible as a concept in P-12 classrooms and teacher education programs as a construct for linking post-modern thinking about teaching and learning. The New London Group addresses a pedagogy of Multiliteracies by introducing a new metalanguage based on the concept of design and the Designs of Meaning which according to the authors includes Available Designs, Designing, and the Redesigned. Available Designs, they write, include “the ‘grammars’ of various semiotic systems: the grammars of languages, and the grammars of other semiotic systems such as film, photography, or gesture.” We see this work as groundbreaking but in working with teachers and students have struggled to translate the academic discourse into meaningful classroom practices.

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 includ-

ing teacher education programs have not (Collins & Halverson, 2009). States have attempted to enact policy to help bridge this gap between technologies used beyond the school those used in classrooms. For example, The North Carolina State Board of Education established the *Strategic Plan for Reading Literacy* in April 2007, which states:

Reading is the fundamental skill needed for success in life, especially in the 21st 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.

Learning and communicating requires an ability to read, write and locate information. Today’s technology driven society also requires digital literacy, which means that an individual can read and write digitally in order to access the Internet; find, manage and edit digital information; join in communications; and otherwise engage with an online information and communications network.

The *Strategic Plan for Reading Literacy* as well as national organizations including the State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA), an association representing technology leadership in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, calls for teachers and schools to prepare students to be globally competitive 21st Century citizens and professionals able to provide leadership for innovation using 21st Century technologies (Jones, Fox, & Levin, 2011).

Preparing teachers to teach in an increasingly connected and digital world is part of the challenge of teacher education. Scholarship documents the challenge of preparing teachers to effectively use ICTs in the classroom (Kumar & Vigil, 2011; Means, 1994; Brooks & Kopp, 1989). This chapter seeks to bridge the gap between the academic

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