ENVIRONING CONDITIONS CONDUCIVE FOR TECHNOLOGY-RICH LITERACY PEDAGOGY

As the light from the afternoon sun filled the wide hallways of the elementary school, a group of twenty or so students, who looked to be in third or fourth grade, was being led in a line through the hallway by their teacher. What struck me about this otherwise ordinary scene was the children's posture. They walked with their heads slightly lowered and with their hands clasped behind them; any accidental eye contact with adults in the hallway was immediately admonished by their teacher or by a passing administrator. In that moment, the broader sociocultural context of the school was brought into sharp focus through this enactment of the school-wide classroom management and discipline policy in which the controlling of bodies seemed to be of utmost importance, a pattern I witnessed during our initial three-day visit and in subsequent visits throughout the two years I was involved with the school. What was the role of literacy professional development within a school context heavily centered on school discipline and containment? How would my colleagues and I maintain an inquiry stance in our work with the teachers at this school, despite witnessing what we felt was an event that was contrary to the ethos we aimed to cultivate through our work? Where would we find spaces in our professional development work with teachers for the latent tech-savviness of their students to take center stage?

A range of forces—some hidden, like conflicting assumptions between teachers and students about the shape and form of literacy, and others more explicit, such as curricula adopted by schools to meet state-imposed standards—is at play whenever one undertakes professional development in a school setting or prepares a course experience for pre-service teachers. Such was the case when colleagues and I were engaged in a multi-year professional development endeavor within several school districts throughout the eastern United States. In many instances, our challenge, as the vignette above illustrates, was to find ways for our partnering teachers to consider the integration of new media, technology, and new literacies into their pedagogy within broader institutional contexts that did not always appear to embrace the consequences of such pedagogical shifts.

In their now seminal text, *Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out: Kids Living and Learning with New Media*, Mimi Ito and colleagues offer layered portraits of young people using, manipulating, and discovering digital technologies in wide variety of ways, across a range of settings, and for myriad purposes. Through their exploration of various digital media technologies and texts, immersive virtual environments, and rapidly changing incarnations of social media, youth take on roles as users, designers, reviewers, coders, audiences, media makers, and more. We see in the findings of the researchers’
ethnographic, multi-year and multi-sited study that what is native about so-called digital natives is not some magical ability to be instantly fluent in the range of practices that have been deemed as important by institutions and standards; rather what this and many other studies routinely illustrate is that the existence of multiple media and technologies is not foreign in the quotidian experiences of children and youth today and, therefore, when engaged thoughtfully, hold tremendous potential to transform teaching and learning spaces into ones in which all students have opportunities to participate actively in their education.

Thus, educators are presented with a different sort of challenge—that is, to reconfigure our understandings about how to engage young people as partners in designing and enacting literacy pedagogy that reflects an awareness of the changing landscape of literacy practices. Confusion and pedagogical frustration arise when assumptions about children and youths’ familiarity with the rapidly evolving digital and literacy landscape is mistaken for *a priori* proficiency that can be measured and evaluated according to school-based standardized measures. It is toward the disruption of these deterministic views of technology integration that this volume you are about to read is oriented.

In *Literacy Enrichment and Technology Integration in Pre-Service Teacher Education*, Keengwe, Onchwari, and Hucks have brought together a thoughtful collection of chapters penned by authors who are located at various points across the literacy teaching and learning context and positioned as educators, teacher educators, researchers, and advocates, and often occupying more than one of these positions in their work. These varyingly situated positionalities, therefore, allow the authors to consider the relationship between technologies and literacy from multiple perspectives. The authors draw from their primary research in a range of settings—teacher education courses, virtual field trips, professional development, middle and high schools—with pre-service and current educators as well as youth to take up the question of how we prepare teachers to effectively, meaningfully, and humanely embrace emerging technologies into classroom spaces through their curriculum, pedagogy, and ways of being with the children and youth whom they interact with everyday.

However, as the authors in this volume demonstrate, it is not only toward youth that we must develop a new orientation. Teachers also need to be given space to play with ideas and to explore the technologies that they are supposed to be integrating into their practice as educators. Through the accounts of their research, the authors strive to reposition youth as well as teachers as actively engaged in and curious about how better to support the educative contexts in which they participate everyday while also striving to effect change in these very contexts. Thus, we need new postures of noticing the many ways in which young people are engaged in learning through new technologies, and similarly, we need to embrace Dewey’s (1997) framing of the role of teachers:

*A primary responsibility of educators is that they not only be aware of the general principle of the shaping of actual experience by environing conditions, but that they also recognize in the concrete what surroundnings are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth. (p. 40)*

In short, this volume by Keengwe, Onchwari, and Hucks moves us closer to what it might look like, then, to “[environ] conditions …[that] are conducive to …experiences that lead to growth” in literacy learning that meaningfully integrate emerging technologies. The explorations evoked in this volume suggest that through unhurried, consistent, sometimes unexpected, and multifaceted approaches, we can resist the trap of “technology as panacea” and instead make actual steps toward sustainable changes in literacy learning in the lives of children, youth, and educators.

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REFERENCES
