

Foreword

Once upon a time, the act of entering text into a computer was unknown to most and challenging for a select few. A decade later, as it became more commonplace, many were delighted to discover the wonderful feature of word processing that meant never having to copy over just because some change was needed. By the 1970s word processing had entered the business world, and soon after, the classroom. Some educators began to say that writing, not mathematics, might be the signature feature of the computer. In the 1980s, I worked with *Quill*, which provided early versions of organization tools, email, and collaboration tools, but those were primitive by today's standards. More typically, writing with computers meant little more than a means to facilitate revision, if that happened at all, or to make student work look neater than it would if written by hand.

How things have changed! As the chapters in *Exploring Technology for Writing and Writing Instruction* attest, writing with new technologies has blossomed into a garden of creative activities. We now see blogging, remixing, rating, portfolio building, and the use of online information. The computer serves to guide revision, display text features, and provide sources for writers, not just to enable text production. The authors in this volume are exploring how to build writing and response communities. They are examining the implications for developing writers and for English Language Learners.

Kristine Pytash and Rick Ferdig have brought together an outstanding group of authors whose explorations show us that the space for technology for writing is more varied and more challenging than some had imagined. Rather than having a tool that simply facilitates some aspects of pedagogy, we have a set of tools, or new media, as some would prefer, which transform possibilities for inquiry, communication, creation, and expression. Technology for writing enters the pedagogical world in three important ways, each of which are well represented in this book.

First, we need to *learn the technologies*. Young people today are often viewed as being digital natives, able to miraculously manipulate any device with an “e-” or “i-” in front of its name. They walk around with ear buds and smart phones, operating two, three, or more instruments at once. They Google the world and post incessantly, but this picture is incomplete at best. Many young people have limited access to these new tools. Multitasking is more an illusion than a fact. Perhaps, most importantly, the very facility that some young people demonstrate belies (the) misconceptions and limited awareness they have of the very tools that are supposed to represent their generation. The chapters here address the need to learn the (these) technologies. They show what learners can do with blogs, glogs, wikis, computer-mediated communication, social media, affinity spaces, and other media, but also, where they can learn more. By implication, they also serve to show what teachers can learn, both for their own facility and for teaching others.

Second, we need to *learn through the technologies*. New media offers opportunities to learn language, science, history, indeed, every aspect of the curriculum. They are thinking tools, which help us develop and extend our general problem-solving abilities. At the same time, they can limit our understanding, as, for example, when an online search leads to inaccurate information, or a collaboration (collaborative?) space results in a hurtful or unhelpful response. Thus, there is a need for developing critical engagement and understanding the perspectives of others (maybe a bit more? or maybe not). The chapters describe explorations of this learning through technology, demonstrating what is possible, as well as what is needed to facilitate that learning.

Third, we need to *learn about the technologies*—what they mean for our individual lives and our collective endeavors. This is crucial for both students in the classroom and for teachers. Questions that might seem to be reserved for a linguist, a literary critic, or a philosopher are ones that the beginning student needs to engage with at some level: What is a text? What is an audience? How do I assess validity of a claim? What is an online identity? How does community relate to writing and learning to write? The chapters here offer a powerful resource for understanding what the technologies are, what they facilitate or hinder, and what they mean for ourselves and our futures.

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