Chapter 15
Young Writers Create Digital E–Books Using Nooks

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ABSTRACT
This chapter presents the details of a year-long qualitative study that investigates the literacy development of a diverse group of second graders as they engage in digital writing experiences at school using the Barnes and Noble Nook e-reader. Twenty students, including eleven English learners whose first languages were Spanish, French, and Korean, immersed themselves in reading e-books and then, wrote and narrated their own digital books using the available tools from the DrawWriteRead app and the Tikatoc.com Website. The findings reveal students developed a sense of agency while developing new literacies through interactions with others. The chapter begins with an introduction to the use of technology with diverse students. Next, an overview about the theory associated with digital and new literacies is discussed. The chapter continues with a review of current research studies focusing on digital writing with young students across a variety of contexts. Finally, this particular study is detailed through a description of the methodology, findings, and conclusions.

INTRODUCTION
Using digital tools for writing becomes increasingly important for children growing up as the availability of technology expands and the world takes on a more global ethos. Young learners view their world through a technocentric lens in which they gain insight from their experiences in virtual worlds (Karchmer-Klein & Shinas, 2012). There is a need to develop and/or enhance the digital literacies of students, so they are able to actively participate as citizens in the interconnected world of the 21st century (National Council of Teachers of English, 2008). Communicational changes are remaking the ways in which the use of screens impact writing and primary students rapidly adapt to these new social practices. Digital writing is much more than word processing (Walsh, 2010). For example, images continually reshape the appearance or layout of writing and how messages are interpreted. In addition, the access to producing, receiving, and publishing messages has radically changed. Individuals have opportunities to make meaning about their lived experiences and com-

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-5982-7.ch015
municate this in both public and private domains. These cultural products offer multiple points of view that expand what we know about humanity.

As we move into the 21st century it is vital that culturally and linguistically diverse low income students be afforded the contemporary communication and learning opportunities made available to middle-class, native English speaking students. Minority literacy instruction must move beyond Freire’s (1970) banking model of education where the teacher is a “depositor” and young students are empty receptacles waiting to be filled. Research regarding the digital divide shows that there is a significant difference in technology access at home between students who attend Title I schools as compared with students attending non-Title I schools (Thomas, 2008). Students in Title I schools are less proficient at new literacies. Teachers of the lowest income students report a lack of resources for incorporating digital tools into classroom instruction (Purcell, Heaps, Buchanan, & Friedrich, 2013).

Additional research indicates that teachers use technology in different ways with different types of students. Rarely do students of color, English learners, and working-class students have the opportunity to engage in rich, authentic learning activities involving technology (Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010). According to the National Assessment of Education Progress (NCES, 2012), only 27% of students score proficient in writing by eighth grade. These students are likely to score higher if they have experience drafting and revising using digital tools (NCES, 2012).

Another significant challenge facing U.S. public schools is the increasing number of English learners and responding to the academic needs of these students. English learners may benefit from integrated instructional practices like the use of digital texts to engage them in cognitively challenging literacy activities (Ballantyne, Sanderman, & McLaughlin, 2008). This chapter provides a research base for using digital tools to support classroom-based writing instruction for elementary students, shares examples of how students use these digital tools for writing, and offers insight into students’ perspectives. In conclusion, I discuss teaching and learning implications of using digital tools for writing.

BACKGROUND

The field of early digital literacy is emerging as technology is utilized to teach literacy in a vast array of ways in elementary classrooms across the United States. Devices such as e-readers and tablets offer innovative approaches for writing instruction. The use of these tools also requires us to rethink what literacy means in the 21st century. New technologies provide multiple ways of being literate (Burnett & Merchant, 2013). New times and new spaces necessitate an examination of the possibilities for writing. Research tackling the digital revolution is ongoing as new types of texts and the practices around these texts constantly change the field of early literacy. Thus, a need for new pedagogies surrounding digital literacies in the classroom arises.

Digital Literacies and New Literacy Studies

A traditional view of literacy concentrates on the ability to read and write that involves the cognitive functioning of encoding and decoding words (Jones & Hafner, 2012). Digital literacies focus on reading and writing with new technologies in ways that extend text forms in several ways. This transformation includes a more fluid text that is not confined by paper pages and allows for updating, revisions, and hyperlinks. New literacies are non-linear, multimodal, and blur the boundaries between public and private. Texts are more collaborative and multi-vocal as they become intertwined with comments and replies. Writing in the digital age offers speed for communication as well as new audiences for the exchange of ideas (Merchant, 2007).
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