

Chapter 1

What's Old Is New Again

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ABSTRACT

Schools closed in March 2020, causing teachers to reinvent themselves. As classes were forced into remote learning, educators jumped into virtual instruction – to a variety of outcomes. This chapter documents one teacher's personal inquiry during the pandemic shutdown through a literacy lens. By asking the question, "How do teachers engage students during this difficult time?" she ultimately realized that what she had always known about good pedagogy in a face-to-face classroom transferred into virtual contexts: content needed to be relevant, assignments and assessments needed to be project-based and authentic, and students needed the opportunity to connect with others. The move to remote instruction may have made the pedagogical choices that surrounded her teaching beliefs even more important. For this teacher, the goal of developing her students' literacies in order to help them become critical thinkers was at the heart of her integration of technologies into her learning environment.

INTRODUCTION

*And don't throw the past away
You might need it some other rainy day
Dreams can come true again
When everything old is new again
"Everything Old Is New Again," Allen & Sager*

Education did a topsy-turvy in March 2020 when schools closed overnight, forcing teachers and students into remote learning contexts. As an eighth-grade language arts teacher, Jill had positioned herself as lead learner in a classroom of readers and writers who conducted their own inquiries throughout the year. By the time the pandemic hit, her students were regularly using technologies to consume texts that

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interested them, create digital compositions that documented their personal inquiries, and connect with other readers and writers outside their classroom.

But that March, Jill was forced to step back from what she knew to be good pedagogy. Her school required all language arts teachers to work collaboratively to develop curriculum that would carry them through the early weeks of the shutdown. All students were to have the same experience, and Jill knew that her colleagues, not having experienced through their past practice the power of digital tools to engage students in authentic work, would revert to more traditional methods. In fact, the lessons that the team developed did not engage Jill or her students, and she made the decision to go rogue, to collaborate with a colleague outside of her school, and to use technologies to help students (1) learn and (2) process the moment in which they were living while it was happening.

By asking the question, “How do teachers engage students during this difficult time?” Jill embarked on her own teacher-inquiry. Ultimately, she realized that what she had always known about good pedagogy in a face-to-face classroom transferred into virtual contexts: content needed to be relevant, assignments and assessments needed to be project-based and authentic, and students needed the opportunity to connect with others. The move to remote instruction may have made the pedagogical choices that surrounded her teaching beliefs even more important. For Jill, the goal of developing her students’ literacies in order to help them become critical thinkers was at the heart of her integration of technologies into her learning environment. This chapter documents Jill’s personal inquiry during the pandemic shutdown through a literacy lens.

BACKGROUND

Foundation and Development of the Concept of Literacies

In the last decade of the twentieth century, the New London Group brought together inquiries on new literacies that changed the way that researchers and teachers both defined literacy and approached instruction. Prior to the global transformation that occurred in 2020 in response to a pandemic, educators had been integrating digital technologies into teaching and learning, and researchers had been studying the impact of these technologies on literacy practices both in and out of school.

In the 1990s The New London group began research on what they eventually called New Literacies theory and the new literacies that enabled participation in a digital world, resulting in an understanding that technology had been and continues to influence both literacy and learning. The internet itself required new literacies in order for users to fully realize its potential. Literacies included skills of both consumption and creation that made reading and writing in digital contexts different than in print-based contexts. Leu, et. al (2004) defined literacies as “multiple, multimodal, and multifaceted” and asserted that “new forms of strategic knowledge are required with new literacies” (p. 1589). As part of this argument the understanding that social practices influenced literacies was important.

Work in the field of literacy instruction continued through the 2000s with Hicks and Grabill (2005) making a call early in the new century to make digital writing a part of teacher education. Shortly thereafter, the National Writing Project published *Because Digital Writing Matters* (DeVoss, et. al, 2010), articulating that “Digital writing is about the dramatic changes in the ecology of writing and

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