

Chapter XI

Transforming the K–12 Classroom with ICT: Recognizing and Engaging New Configurations of Student Learning

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ABSTRACT

This chapter begins with four very public examples of how K-12 education providers across Australia are attempting to assimilate new teaching and learning technologies into existing teaching and learning structures. The transition as predicted is not altogether smooth, and questions are raised as to where and how the discourses of literacy, education, and technology converge in the information and communication technology classroom. The discussion presents a layered case study that brings together the practical discourse of the teacher, the new discourses of literacy, teaching and learning confronting our students, and the challenge these provide to the management discourse of school administrators. In doing so, it points conclusively to the fact that new configurations of learning are at work in our online classrooms.

INTRODUCTION

Using a convenience sample of middle school SOSE students, the discussion draws on quantitative as well as qualitative methods to explore and document the educational, social and information literacy outcomes of students (and their teacher) in their first experience of online learn-

ing. The emerging community of practice is the crucial node at which technology-in and technology-and education is aligned, and its members organised and merged. This situated account describes how this merging is taking place, and how allegiance to the practice of learning both reengineers and re-orientes the very roles, relationships, and distributed knowl-

edge of the school community. In particular, the chapter offers a *gendered* account of how students mediate online learning, how new literacies are appropriated in learning exchange, and how ICT-enhanced teaching challenged one teacher's classroom practice. The chapter urges that before we discount the transformative values of ICTs in teaching and learning, we need to consider the case for a new definition of student learning that focuses on "the demands of the new world environment" (Blasi & Heinecke, 2000, p. 5).

NEW LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES AND EDUCATIONAL REFORM: TRANSFORMING LEARNING

This discussion is framed by the unique and very public circumstances facing schools and school communities across Australia as they endeavour to get up to speed with new learning technologies. In a recent edition of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, an article ambitiously entitled "Experience the Power of E-Learning" (Wilson, 2002) described how the "horse and buggy days of education" were numbered. It went on to announce the transformation of an entire educational system as part of a "learning revolution" capable of "turning education on its head." Educational reform born of new configurations of learning is walking steadily towards our schools along the information superhighway. Such bold expectations reflect a deeper belief that technology will improve learning, but as yet there remains some gap between the pervasiveness of this discourse and the actual progress of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in adding value to teaching and learning efforts. The following scenarios capture something of this impasse.

Scenario One

Under Australian political structures, the constitutional responsibility for public as distinct to private education provision falls to each of the six state and two territory governments. In 2001, the New South Wales (NSW) State Treasurer announced a State Government plan to commit \$21 million over four years to provide an e-mail account for every teacher and student in NSW. In doing so, he proclaimed that, "In years to come, I believe people will look back on this as the year we began a revolution in NSW schools." The Treasurer continued to state that creation of such e-mail accounts "would transform how children learn" (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 2001). Later, when asked to elaborate on how such lofty outcomes could be realised through e-mail provision, he passed the question to the Minister for Education for a more judicious response. A follow-up article reported somewhat tongue-in-cheek:

It turned out [the Treasurer] had little idea how e-learning accounts would work or how they differ from the Internet and extensive education intranets and free e-mail accounts that exist. Instead, he kept insisting the media should ask the... Minister for Education. 'I'm one of those people who still writes his Budget speech with a pen in hand and a piece of paper so I think I will leave the details to John Aquilina's people' Mr. Egan said modestly. And, er, no he doesn't have an e-mail account at home himself. (Hewett, 2001)

Scenario Two

In one of our Southern states, Victoria, the Federal Member for Murray, Dr. Sharman Stone, has publicly criticised the State Labour Government for its lack of action in addressing

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