

# Chapter XIII

## Using Technology in Pedagogically Responsive Ways to Support Literacy Learners

**Lisa Kervin**

*University of Wollongong, Australia*

**Jessica Mantei**

*University of Wollongong, Australia*

**Jan Herrington**

*Murdoch University, Australia*

### **ABSTRACT**

*In this chapter the authors discuss two central themes: the changing nature of literate activity brought about by Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), and suggestions for how educators could respond to this guided by principles of authentic learning. The access many young people have to ICT has resulted in new forms of literacy as they manipulate technology, using this new knowledge to assist the process of meaning making. Each new technology brings with it navigational concepts, space to negotiate, new genres and a range of modalities, all of which need to be interpreted. ICTs have the potential to reshape literate practices in classrooms as students create, collect, store and use knowledge as they connect and collaborate with people and resources across the world. What is crucial though, is that the nexus between technology and literacy within classrooms is conceptualised through meaningful, relevant and authentic connections with curricula.*

## **THE CHANGING NATURE OF LITERATE ACTIVITY BROUGHT ABOUT BY NEW LITERACIES**

The modern workplace demands effective interpersonal skills for collaboration, critical evaluation and identification of problems with creative approaches to designing socially responsible solutions (Oblinger, 2005; Leu, 2001). Leisure activities, too, have changed; Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) afford swift, cheap and convenient connection with a vast range of people from various cultures and with various interests. Combes argues that successful interaction and participation within this environment depends on being able to 'navigate in a global knowledge economy' (2007, p. 17). Essential to this process is engaging with New Literacies and adopting the literate practices afforded by ICT, challenging educators to rethink and reconceptualise their pedagogical practices for providing learning experiences that empower learners through literacy. While there is no unanimously agreed definition for "New Literacies", they have been described as new social practices which contribute to online reading comprehension, learning and communication and the presentation of new discourses as users work across a range of semiotic contexts (Leu, Zawilinski, Castek, Banerjee, Housand, Liu & O'Neil, 2007). There is an undisputed relationship between New Literacies and ICT as the role of non-verbal modes and multimodal interaction in literacy practices are challenged through the flexible, collaborative and participatory nature of these practices (Coiro & Dobler, 2007; Sutherland-Smith, 2002; Labbo, 2006).

The literature often describes children and young people in ways that imply competence with ICT, for example, 'digital natives' (Prensky, 2001), 'clickerati kids' (Hill, 2004) and the 'Net Generation' (Oblinger, 2005). This group is reported to access in excess of eight hours of 'media mes-

sages' each day; much of the time participating in multiple simultaneous activities such as Internet surfing, listening to music and participating in online chat (Roberts, Foehr & Ride-Out, 2005, in Oblinger, 2005, p. 69). Technology is described as integral to their social, economic and educational environment (Combes, 2007), while their education in these New Literacies created by ICT is evidently self-taught (Sefton-Green & Nixon, 2003). The literature advocates that literacy in multiple medias, the ability to multitask, a preference for visual over print-based materials and a collaborative culture are characteristics of the contemporary learner (e.g., Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005; Prensky, 2005).

It would be inappropriate, however, to assume that children and young people already possess the skills and strategies required for successful engagement with new and emerging literacies. Walsh, Asha and Spranger (2007) observe that learners will not necessarily transfer their skills and knowledge from one setting to another, while Comber and Reid (2006) argue that teaching about literate practices throughout upper primary and secondary school requires the same close attention as is given to early literacy development. If this is the case, then, in an already overcrowded curriculum, educators need to make discerning choices with clear articulation of a rationale and strong connection to theoretical underpinnings.

The traditional learning environment of educational institutions is consistently identified in the literature as insufficient in meeting the needs of the modern student (Jonassen, 2003; Oblinger, 2005; Anstey & Bull, 2006; Herrington & Herrington, 2006; Leu, Mallette, Karcher, & Kara-Soteriou, 2005; Harste, 2003). If learners are to develop lifelong learning competencies, they must be freed of restrictive environments where teachers prescribe activities in isolation from other subject areas and the community, allowing little collaboration with peers and experts and culminating in teacher directed summative assessment (Voogt &

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