Beyond Technology for Technology's Sake: Advancing Multiliteracies in the Twenty-First Century

CARLIN BORSHEIM, KELLY MERRITT, and DAWN REED

Abstract: Due to emerging technologies from Web 2.0 to podcasting, the nature of literacy is changing. Teachers who apply these technologies in their classrooms do more than motivate students with the latest cool tool; they prepare students with multiliteracies and for the realities of the technological world. Therefore, teachers must go beyond implementing technology for technology's sake to consider the evolving nature of texts and the literacy skills associated with consuming and producing those texts. In this article, the authors share specific technologies they have used in English and English education classrooms and offer examples for adapting teaching to the impact of technology, rather than adapting technology to teaching.

Keywords: English education, multiliteracies, multiliteracies pedagogy, teacher education

In her invitation to the 2008 annual convention, National Council of the Teachers of English President Kylene Beers (2007) invited presenters to consider this theme: Because shift happens: Teaching in the twenty-first century. Taking a cue from the popular YouTube video *Did You Know?* (Fisch 2007), Beers and other education professionals have begun to refer to the rapid evolution and integration of technology in an era of increasing cultural diversity and global connectedness as "the shift" (Richardson 2006). This shift includes the monumental paradigm shift from traditional literacy to twenty-first-century multiliteracies—and reflects the impact of communication technologies and multimedia on the evolving nature of texts, as well as the skills and dispositions associated with the consumption, production, evaluation, and distribution of those texts. This shift has important implications for teachers and teacher educators because, as Beers's title suggests, although the shift is clearly technological, to prepare students for full and equal participation in public, private, and work environments of the twenty-first century, it must also be pedagogical.

Our discussion of *multiliteracies*, a term that originated with the New London Group (Cope and Kalantzis 2000), is based on the well-established assumption that technologies (including computers, cell phones, PDAs, the Internet, and Web 2.0 applications such as wikis, blogs, and other social networking sites) have impacted the nature of texts, as well as the ways people use and interact with texts. We draw on Anstey and Bull's definition (2006) of a multiliterate person as one who "is flexible and strategic and can understand and use literacy and literate practices with a range of texts and technologies; in socially responsible ways; in a socially, culturally, and linguistically diverse world; and to fully participate in life as an active and informed citizen" (55). Teachers who employ a multiliteracies pedagogy offer their students ample opportunities to access, evaluate, search, sort, gather, and read information from a variety of multimedia and multimodal sources and invite students to collaborate in real and virtual spaces to produce and publish multimedia and multimodal texts for a variety of audiences and purposes. Teachers committed to a multiliteracies pedagogy help students understand how to move between and across

Carlin Borsheim is a doctoral student in curriculum, teaching, and educational policy at Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan. Kelly Merritt is pursuing her doctorate in teacher education, also at Michigan State University. Dawn Reed, MA, is an English teacher at Okemos High School in Okemos, Michigan.

various modes and media as well as when and why they might draw on specific technologies to achieve specific purposes.

It is our contention that teachers who use a variety of media and technologies in their teaching do more than familiarize students with specific technologies or motivate them with the latest cool tool: They prepare students with multiliteracies for the twenty-first century. In the following sections, we each describe our efforts to continue shifting toward a multiliteracies pedagogy. Although our examples reflect our experiences in English and English education classrooms specifically, we hope to reach an interdisciplinary audience by describing possibilities for a multiliteracies pedagogy that have relevance across the curriculum. Because current discussions of technology must go beyond technology for technology's sake, we consider the pedagogical reasons for drawing on these particular technologies in all classrooms.

Multiliteracies in the Traditional Curriculum (Carlin's Voice)

Integrating technology into the classroom can seem complicated when current educational policy clings closely to traditional curriculum. Considering the pressures of high-stakes tests and mandated curricula, why should teachers include teaching and learning with technology in an already full curriculum? Integrating technology (or what we are calling a multiliteracies pedagogy) does several things. First, a multiliteracies pedagogy facilitates a constructivist model of learning in which students can make meaning through authentic experiences. Second, a multiliteracies pedagogy can support traditional curriculum objectives, like reading challenging texts or engaging in various aspects of the writing process. Finally, and most important to our article, a multiliteracies pedagogy goes beyond traditional literacy objectives to support and advance the development of multiliteracies.

The traditional research paper unit, commonly included across the curriculum, provides ideal opportunities for prioritizing multiliteracies while also tackling traditional objectives. For example, in my tenth-grade English class, my students and I learned about technologies that make the entire research process more effective. First, our high school's collection of library and reference books was almost completely replaced by up-to-date online databases and Internet resources. Although I encouraged students to take advantage of the available books, the proliferation of online resources meant that students needed new and explicit strategies for locating, sorting, gathering, evaluating, and reading articles from online databases and Web sites. As students began to identify and gather credible sources, we put away the 3 × 5 note cards and experimented with using Word documents, wikis, and

social bookmarking sites to organize information and take notes.

In the next phase, students used traditional word-processing applications to compose and revise their formal research papers, and I found the comment feature in Word to be an invaluable tool for commenting on students' rough drafts, as well as for persuading students to be specific in their feedback on one another's work. In a final and important step, I asked students to adapt their traditional research paper into a media genre appropriate for reaching an audience outside the classroom. For example, one student, who wrote about issues related to healthy relationships, filmed and edited a short informational film intended for a teenage audience. A student who researched depression and mental illness used a desktop publishing program to create a visually appealing brochure for distribution through the school's counseling office. The process of composing a traditional research paper and another type of text raised students' awareness of the ways and reasons they might use media to reach audiences and achieve diverse purposes.

With databases, wikis, and film-editing software, the research process looks different for students today than it did when I started teaching fewer than ten years ago, but traditional literacy objectives, including writing a thesis statement, synthesizing information from a variety of sources, and supporting an argument remain at the heart of the process. Technologies scaffold students' development of these traditional skills and make the purposes and processes more authentic than they were in the past. More important, the multiliteracies approach helps students learn to be savvier users and organizers of online resources, use technologies to facilitate revision and collaboration throughout the writing process, and use technologies to achieve authentic goals and reach real audiences for their research. This particular experience also helped me to realize that a multiliteracies pedagogy can work simultaneously to support traditional curricular objectives and advance multiliteracies.

Multiliteracies beyond Classroom Walls (Dawn's Voice)

Teaching from a multiliteracies perspective also suggests the need to examine the way students engage with reading and writing. Some critics may be concerned that students today are not reading and writing, but considering the amount of text messaging and posting on social networking sites that students are involved with, I agree with David Bruce (ctd. in Collier 2007) who suggests "there is a fallacy that kids aren't reading and writing anymore. They are, but they are just reading and writing differently than what we've traditionally done in schools" (8). The incorporation of social networking sites, blogs, wikis, podcasts, and discussion

forums offer ways to involve students in multiliteracy experiences that apply in the classroom and beyond.

To provide a larger, more diverse audience for my high school speech students, and to engage students in a speaking experience focusing on voice through the use of recording software, we began podcasting in the spring of 2007. Students listened to National Public Radio's "This I Believe" essays, wrote essays, recorded and edited podcasts, and posted them on a blog for an audience that included people in our local community (classmates, family, teachers, and friends) as well as students in classrooms across the country. (See the Digital Voices [2008] Web site to hear the "This I Believe" podcasts.) Communication skills were clearly expanded as the audience for our words stretched beyond the classroom walls.

With an increase in the use of social networking sites such as MySpace or Facebook, students demonstrate literacies outside of the classroom in many ways, including technological literacy experiences. I aimed to bridge students' home and school literacy practices by engaging them in genre studies. Recently, this included the study of a popular social networking site as a model genre. Students created a poet page in the genre of a social networking site in a class wiki based on research they conducted. Students presented the information in the popular categories of a social networking site, such as a list of friends, chat conversations with other poets about their work, or an analysis of the poem written from the poet's perspective. Tapping into this literacy practice connected home and school literacy experiences through the critical reading of a popular text among students (the social networking Web site) and their creation of a social network about the poet. Therefore, students were presenting their researched information and analyzing the material in the context of a writing style with which they were familiar. In this process, students analyze a familiar genre (the social network) and then apply this knowledge to consider conventions of genre, audience, purpose, and situations of writing.

Through the use of multiliteracies in the classroom, I witnessed a change in the writing process. From text messaging to social networking updates, students are involved with writing in a way that is less traditional than in your everyday English classroom. McKee and DeVoss (2007) suggest, "Digital technologies and the people who use those technologies have changed the processes, products, and contexts for writing and the teaching of writing in dramatic ways" (11). Through the speech class "This I Believe" project, students noted the extensive amount of revision that took place in working on the speech; one student noted "after spending countless hours revising and re-revising my speech . . . I'm very excited to be able to share my beliefs with them, as well as everyone else in the world who is interested."

Students demonstrated a desire to make their speech perfect because of this extended audience and the permanent nature of the speech.

A multiliteracies pedagogy involves a different manner of thinking for teachers and students, one that looks to the future to ensure that possibilities are available. As a teacher I do not say "okay, time to use technology," but rather when I am planning, I think about my objectives and standards and the best way to address them. Then, I can think about the technology and how it may influence the writing opportunity. Often, technology enhances writing more than any other practice, but the work continues to be grounded in the writing. When I keep the objectives in the forefront, my students do as well; therefore, they do not get carried away with the technology we use to compliment the writing. Using digital tools to teach writing allows me to learn with my students, and together we build learning opportunities that are authentic for everyone.

Multiliteracies for Preservice Teachers (Kelly's Voice)

Modeling pedagogical methods and rationales is equally useful in preservice teacher classrooms and secondary contexts. When teachers share their pedagogical logic, students (preservice teachers or secondary-level learners alike) enjoy opportunities to engage with the content of our English lessons and with the mediums through which we engage them. As a teacher of preservice English teacher candidates, I often struggle with the predicament of teaching undergraduates how to think not only about what and how to teach in their current and future classrooms but also about why the choices teachers make matter. When I use wikis and blogs in the preservice teacher classroom, teacher candidates gain an increased ability to reflect on and learn about technology's role in the multiliteracies of their lives and those of their secondary students. Wikis and blogs make tangible the illusory pedagogical purposes for technology in preservice and secondary classrooms.

In the previous two years, I used wikis in two distinct ways to emphasize the pedagogical purposes of integrating technologies, and therefore multiliteracies, into secondary classrooms. In doing so, I enjoyed nuanced discussions with preservice teachers about the pedagogical logics we can, but do not typically, employ when we engage multiliteracies. First, our English education program created a program-wide wikispace. This space invites multiple opportunities for modeling and engaging in pedagogies of multiliteracies. Here, teachers and students can view our site much like a Web page, and wiki technology has the added benefit of being collaborative. For instance, rather than requiring difficult-to-coordinate program-wide meetings, the common wikispace allows mentor teachers, interns, university faculty and staff, and teacher candidates a

space to collaborate and discuss online. (See Michigan State University English Education [2008] wikispace for examples.)

With simple discussion features and revision and editing capabilities, the literacies of wikispace technology provide an expanding knowledge of professional presence and engage the teacher preparatory program participants in processes of social and conceptual negotiation, conceptual and written revision, technological prowess, and professional communication. Among many other virtues of wiki technology, one of the top benefits of wiki and blog technologies in preservice preparation is the increased opportunity for our preservice teacher candidates to develop professional identities in multiple environments. Students at university and secondary levels participate in multiple virtual and nonvirtual environments. Integrating explicit opportunities in educational contexts to reflect on and learn about the varied relationships between virtual and nonvirtual environments remains an enormous challenge for literacy educators of the twenty-first century. Wikis and blogs give us a place and a reason to have these conversations as a pedagogical component of what we already do in the English classroom.

Second, I put wikis to pedagogical use in the preservice context by employing a wiki as a primary interface—alongside the classroom experience—for our class documents, discussions, and communications. Although syllabi, paper-based materials, and face-to-face interactions still hold an irreplaceable pedagogical role in English teaching, our capacity to teach multiliteracies increases exponentially when we include wiki-based technologies. Although many institutions offer Blackboard or similar file-management platforms for university-level teachers and students, few of these domains are public or free for teacher candidates to implement in secondary contexts. Alternatively, many wiki technologies are public and free (or at least inexpensive). Therefore, by using a wiki to communicate, share documents, get feedback, build collective pedagogical experiences, and integrate additional forms of technology into a classroom experience with university students, I engage them in the multiliteracies of secondary students as well. In turn, preservice teachers gain confidence using the technologies they can then implement in their secondary classrooms. Whether it is through wiki-based discussion, collaborative editing and revision, or links to student blogs or other online

journals, technology teaches preservice teachers how to use literacies of the twenty-first century and provides a venue for us to reflect on the pedagogical maneuvers and purposes central to teaching the language arts.

Multiliteracies Pedagogy: Adding Depth to a Breadth of Possibilities

Today's students and teachers live in a digital age. We cannot assume, however, that all students have equal access or experience with technology. Students of all ability levels need our support to develop sophisticated multiliteracy skills. Literacy teachers must guide students to sophisticated engagement with a variety of technologies, literacies, and pedagogies. Searching, gathering, managing and evaluating online resources, composing multimodal texts for a variety of purposes and audiences, and developing a critical consciousness about how we produce and consume texts highlight some of the pedagogical challenges that twenty-first century technologies can help us integrate into instruction. Technologies taught in the classroom enhance students' abilities to use them as well as understand the complex ways they challenge us to participate in the world. Incorporating technology in our language arts instruction is a must. We should therefore choose to integrate technology in pedagogically thoughtful ways. Going beyond technology for technology's sake can extend and deepen the many pedagogical goals teaching in the twenty-first century demands.

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