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## Book Reviews

### **Partners in Literacy: schools and libraries building communities through technology**

SONDRA CUBAN & LARRY CUBAN, 2007

New York: Teacher's College Press

150 pages, ISBN 978-0-8077-4795-7

Driving through any town or city, one will pass by a school, a library, or both. Schools, supported through tax dollars, are buildings children are required to spend time in each day for most of the year. They work, learn, and socialize in classrooms with peers. In the USA, communities are responsible for their schools, running them and determining goals and missions through electing school boards and hiring district administration. Public libraries, on the other hand, are attended and used by children voluntarily. While public libraries, too, are supported by tax dollars – again in the USA – they historically have been supplemented through other gifts and grants, such as those given by the Carnegie Corporation.

Computers and technology have been adopted to different extents within both institutions. Since computers have become compact, manageable, and generally affordable, schools and libraries have become places where they are used, though the ways that schools and libraries have adopted and taken advantage of technology have differed greatly. This is the focus of Cuban & Cuban's *Partners in Literacy: schools and libraries building communities through technology*. The central questions that Cuban & Cuban attempt to answer in this text are: (1) how have computers transformed the purposes and functions of libraries and schools; (2) why do schools and libraries appear to use technology in different ways to meet different goals; and (3) how can these institutions work together for the good of the people in the communities they serve?

Schools and libraries have coexisted in the USA for nearly two centuries. Within this context, the purpose of schools has been to deliver compulsory education for all children. Similarly, the purpose of libraries has been to educate, but through services offered voluntarily to all residents in the communities they serve. While the goals of both institutions have been to promote literacy, they have traditionally accomplished this goal separately. The emergence of technology has heightened this separation as computers have been adopted differently in schools and libraries. In general, across the USA, libraries have embraced technology while schools have resisted it. Cuban & Cuban begin with an overview of this history of how schools and libraries have performed their various functions. Through a historical analysis of both the purposes and development of schools and libraries, the authors begin by placing each institution side by side, comparing the growth and missions of each during nineteenth and twentieth century reform movements to the present. Grounded in diffusion-of-innovations theory, institutional theory, and learning theories, the authors attempt to answer how technologies in schools and libraries revolutionize their roles, explain how each institution has adopted and applied technology differently, and how these institutions can team up to provide the best services within the communities they serve.

Schools instill literacy, reading, writing, and arithmetic, through grade-level instruction and testing, while libraries offer choices and professional librarians at the service of the patrons' choices and interests. Over the last two hundred years, both institutions have been defined by social reforms, such as progressivism and the Civil Rights Movement, and educational reforms, such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and No Child Left Behind. Pressures to educate the public to provide a stronger democracy played a role in both the missions of schools and libraries and these can be traced to how each institution functions today. As for new technologies, libraries have been quicker to adapt, while schools have lagged behind.

According to Cuban & Cuban, the period of time from the mid 1800s to the 1920s in the USA was a *coercive* period for schools and libraries, where both struggled for legitimacy. Libraries received funding, especially through the Carnegie foundation while schools received government funding. The 1920s to the 1970s was a *normative* time for schools and libraries, where jobs and roles in both institutions were professionalized as each branched out to rural communities and strived to expand services. The period from the 1970s to the present is a *mimetic* period for both schools and libraries as these government institutions have come under pressure to adopt business models to make each run more effectively. During this time libraries adopted technology for record keeping and encouraged patrons' use of technology. Schools, on the other hand, were using technology mostly for record keeping, not as a tool in the classroom.

Until libraries took advantage of computers for educational purposes in the late 1990s, they were seen by the public mainly as buildings that housed books. Technology allowed libraries to support adults' workplace literacy and offer tutoring services for students and immigrants. Libraries have been quicker and more innovative adopters of technology because computers have served as a valuable tool in their efforts to continue adult and community education efforts. This is supported through studies that have been done in cities around the United States researching how technology has been used in libraries.

The public schools have been slower and less adaptable in their adoption of technology than libraries. Though the presence of computers in schools has increased substantially in the past few decades, this does not mean that they are being used by students in the classroom. In fact, the authors state, teachers who do include technology in the classroom are in the minority. The research that has been done on computer use in schools has not answered questions about the effectiveness of its use, and mainly focuses on computer-assisted intervention. Some studies of one child-one computer configurations use have been promising. But, the authors warn, these studies rely on self-reported data which makes them untrustworthy.

Overall, libraries and schools work separately in promoting literacy in neighbourhoods across the country. Schools promote an autonomous literacy, while libraries are involved in promoting multiple literacies (critical literacy, health literacy, digital literacy, etc.) Different groups take advantage of resources available at the library for different reasons. Cuban & Cuban present a framework aimed at helping both institutions to work together by means of a shared focus on digital technology. They present several examples of this already occurring in cities around the USA. Successful collaborations are marked by shared visions, goals, and resources, and focus on the needs of the particular communities in which they are located.

This book succinctly offers a view of technological innovation and adoption in schools and libraries within the USA. Cuban & Cuban's criticism of schools' adoption history of technology, similar to that of Gee (2004), and Buckingham (2007), ascribes its failure to the 'school structure, pedagogical issues, and the aims of education as varied stakeholders interpret them' (p. 79). However, Cuban & Cuban do not get bogged down in the bureaucracy of schools or libraries. Instead, this text provides a quick and complete overview of these institutions and their relationships with technology. The concepts presented are simple, even though the subject matter is not. Though the final chapter provides instances of libraries and schools working together in the technological age to provide resources for residents of several communities, little detail is given concerning the experiences of teachers and libraries working together. However, this bodes well for the text as a whole, considering its main purpose is to examine and inform its reader of the state of technology in schools and libraries and not outline a detailed blueprint for their integration.

Cuban & Cuban's *Partners in Literacy* would be an excellent textbook in any librarian and school librarian degree or certificate program – even programs outside the USA would benefit from the insights to be obtained from their well-informed recommendations. Practising librarians in a range of settings – community, school – would also find this book a very useful read. School administrators and technology coordinators similarly would find much of use in this accessible book.

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### **Technology and English Studies: innovative professional paths**

JAMES A. INMAN & BETH L. HEWETT (Eds), 2006

Mahwah: Erlbaum

250 pages, ISBN 0-8058-4588-7 (hardback), 0-8058-4589-5 (paperback)

Our technology stories are probably similar to your own. In the mid 1990s, like many people not 'in' the tech world, while trying to figure out this new thing called *email*, we would have found it difficult to imagine that only 15 years later we would be using email, text messages, voice-over-internet software, wikis, and cell phones to collaboratively write this book review. Our pre-digital era selves would also have found it difficult to imagine that we both would be new academics, in different disciplines, trying to carve out spaces for our work both inside and outside of educational institutions during a crippling global financial crisis. It was through discussions of our stories about technology and the changing nature of our career paths that we began to tease out our understanding of *Technology and English Studies: innovative professional paths*.

On a local level, universities are freezing hiring and, increasingly, we are seeing blogs, websites, and list serve posts about job positions not exactly in our disciplines or even within defined disciplinary boundaries. An increasing number of these notices are encouraging academics to 'go outside of their disciplinary boundaries' and collaborate/research across disciplines. Technology, with its multiple definitions, is often heralded as a key component in facilitating these forms of collaboration. Not surprisingly, questions of (self)identity almost inevitably emerge, especially as we try to bring together all the seemingly diverging parts of our lives (rapidly changing political landscapes, jobs, family, community engagement, identity [formation and performance], daily activities, changing/evolving cultural norms and ways of being) into tangible steps we can take to make space for ourselves. *Technology and English Studies: innovative professional paths* shares 'alternative stories' of how people have successfully navigated, transcended and/or blurred disciplinary and other institutional or cultural boundaries in their work with technology in English Studies.

This volume, edited by James A. Imman & Beth L. Hewett, consists of 16 autobiographical narratives that describe the diverse ways that these English Studies scholars have come to use technology in the work that they do. Two contributors to this volume, Jude Edminster and Mark Warschauer, both use Everett Rogers' (1962) concept of *innovation diffusion* in their respective chapters to make sense of technological and organizational innovation and resistance to such changes. This model is also useful in understanding the roles of many of this volume's contributors in introducing technological innovation to English Studies. As the volume editors explain, the contributors' interest in emerging technologies is not typical of English Studies and, as such, these alternative paths can be seen as examples of how other academics might consider including technology in their careers. Warschauer explains that according to Rogers' concept of innovation diffusion, 'changes are first adopted by a small group of risk-taking *innovators*. Soon thereafter come the *early adopters*, who are not as cutting edge as the innovators but who tend to have more standing in their institutions and respect from their colleagues. The innovators are crucial for launching an innovation, whereas the early adopters are critical for getting innovation accepted by the mainstream. Following the early adopters are the *early majority*, the *late majority*, and eventually what Rogers called *laggards*' (p. 165). In similar vein, Douglas Eyman, another contributor to this volume, explains that 'the academy changes at a far slower pace than the cultures it studies and informs' (p. 87). The stories shared in this volume remind us that some academics – the innovators and early adopters – are more mindful of this reality than others.

As described in the book's preface, this book is organized into four thematic sections and each section consists of four narratives. The first section, entitled 'The Past as the Future', shares the stories of Eric S. Rabkin, Nelson Hilton, Wendy Morgan and John F. Barber. Each of these authors

looks to key moments in their past that shaped their professional paths and the innovations they have introduced into their respective professional disciplines. The second section, entitled 'Searching the Academy', consists of four narratives written by Joanna Castner, Douglas Eyman, Keith Dorwick, and Dene Grigar. These stories share the many ways in which the contributors have succeeded in pursuing less conventional routes to their ultimately important academic positions. 'Pushing Boundaries' is the title of the third section and includes chapters written by Pamela B. Childers, Jude Edminster, John M. Slatin, and Mark Warschauer. The authors in this section explore the role of innovation in pushing boundaries in our professional lives. Finally, the volume concludes with a section entitled 'Forging Beyond'. This final section consists of narratives contributed by James Elmborg, Diane Greco, Beth L. Hewett, and Mark Amerika. These authors examine the potential for technology and English Studies to serve as a focus of study.

The stated purpose of this edited volume is to 'promote breadth, diversity and inclusivity' (p. xv) in the ways that people working in English Studies and related fields approach the development of their careers. This purpose is achieved by sharing 'alternative narratives' by those who have innovatively and successfully combined English Studies and technology. While our own academic domains are not directly related to English Studies, we did see examples of disciplinary line blurring while reading these narratives. Of note, it was the stylistic organization of this text that afforded the most conversations around the roles of breadth, diversity and inclusivity in seeking to merge seemingly disparate fields. At times, we found the diverse formats of chapter organization challenging, specifically around the lack of consistent inclusion of 'Lessons Learned' or concrete suggestions we could 'take away' from the chapters. However, upon reflection and our extended discussions of this book (via wikis and instant messaging, of course), we came to see that sources cited and the presentation of the book were, in and of themselves, an alternative narrative of how to situate this book in the growing academic and non-academic discussion of career paths.

*Technology and English Studies: innovative professional paths* raises important questions about the role of career-path innovation within an education system that is increasingly turning to a more corporate-like culture and system. This corporate-like turn raises further questions about the controversial nature of what constitutes English Studies and how to define the discipline. Conversely, we can extend this discussion to the current moment in almost any discipline within the humanities. What is enabled and what is constrained by increasing hybridization of the fields? What will 'survival' look like? For scholars (innovator, laggard, or somewhere in between) thinking about the possibilities of integrating technology more fully into their own careers – particularly in fields such as rhetoric and composition, literary studies, technical communication, and writing centres – this volume contributes preliminary answers to these questions and others about the potential for innovation in the academy.

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### **Laptops and Literacy: learning in the wireless classroom**

MARK WARSCHAUER, 2006

New York: Teachers College Press

178 pages, ISBN 978-0807747261 (paperback)

*Laptops and Literacy* presents Mark Warschauer's study of 10 diverse one-to-one laptop programs in California and Maine. One-to-one laptop programs are defined as 'all the students in one or more classes in a school hav[ing] individual laptop computers available throughout the school year' (p. 28). In today's world, at least in developed countries, our jobs and routine life demand multimedia technology use, inspiring an increased penetration of laptop programs in US schools. With US schools facing 'sobering literacy challenges', Warschauer examines whether one-to-one laptop use can be effective in tackling three prime issues in education: changing literacy demands, divergence of home vs. school, and diverse socioeconomic levels among students (p. 5). Examining the effectiveness of laptop programs in 10 schools of varying demographic and economic

backgrounds in California and Maine, Warschauer focuses on the following areas in literacy: reading, writing, information and research, media and design. Although he finds that a one-to-one laptop to student ratio has numerous positive effects in the classroom, including increasing student engagement, improving editing skills, and allowing the fluid use of media, Warschauer concludes that laptops are not quick fixes and will not necessarily improve test scores or eliminate the socioeconomic stratification of society and 'fix' schools; classroom teachers and school environments are critical in the mix as well. Ultimately, Warschauer proves his point that laptop use does have undeniable advantages in school classrooms and will undoubtedly have increasing use in connecting the word of the classroom to the greater outside world.

Chapter one, 'Literacy Challenges in the 21st Century', describes the complex issues facing today's educators in diverse socioeconomic educational situations and successfully stimulates the reader to consider the use of laptops as a valuable tool for students. Warschauer focuses on the link between academic literacies – that is, those important to school success – and digital literacies, which he defines in terms of 'making meaning from and interpreting texts in computer based digital realms' (p. 4). Warschauer creates a dramatic portrait of each of his aforementioned three major literacy challenges. Contrasting past and present social mores are illustrated by a portrait of a 1940s student immersed in the world of classic printed text and a 'millennial' student embracing multimodal learning and multitasking. Within this chapter, the disparity in ubiquitous home and workplace technology use versus the general stagnant superficiality of technology use in schools is clearly delineated. The influence of divergent income levels on technological proficiency is also discussed; undoubtedly those with access to new digital technology have an advantage. In closing this chapter, Warschauer intrigues the reader by reviewing past studies promoting the use of technology to address the perturbing challenges of moving classic classroom teaching towards the world of new literacies.

Chapter two, 'Educational Computing's Third Wave', begins by asking 'whether computers and the internet will be essential tools or tools used occasionally in schools?' (p. 18). In response, Warschauer briefly describes historical shifts in the use of computers in schools from tutor to tool, and the one-to-one laptop program's origins in Australian schools. Previous struggles with integrating computers into schools are outlined, including problems with unreliable technology, the logistics of moving computers to the classroom, and the need to apply higher level thinking to computer use. Past technology trials delineating the disadvantages of laptop carts and handheld devices in comparison with one-to-one laptop programs also are discussed. Warschauer affirms that computer use is growing in schools aiming to teach twenty-first-century skills and convincingly anticipates a decrease in these early issues.

Warschauer gathered data at elementary, middle and high schools with divergent socioeconomic and cultural populations in both California and Maine. He describes his investigation as a pioneering study since previous studies of laptop use have been few, especially studies of economically diverse schools, and because his work focuses on comparative analyses of traditional and new literacies. Warschauer includes schools with one-to-one laptop programs in Maine, a predominantly white, English-speaking state with high student test scores which has a state-supported laptop program that ensures each seventh and eighth grade student receives a laptop. He quotes Maine's eloquent task force statement addressing laptops' purpose in schools:

The challenge is familiar, but the imperative is new: we must prepare young people to thrive in a world that doesn't exist yet, to grapple with problems and construct new knowledge which is barely visible to use today. It is no longer adequate to prepare some of our young people to high levels of learning and technological literacy; we must prepare *all* for the demands in a world in which workers and citizens will be required to use and create knowledge, and embrace technology as a powerful tool to do so. (p. 29)

California laptop programs contrast greatly with those of Maine and usefully diversify Warschauer's study base. Not state supported, but funded instead by grants, parents, and individual school districts, California school districts using laptop programs do so to prepare students for the twenty-first century and to equalize learning opportunities by providing English language learners and minorities with access to computers. Degree of access varies from program to program, with some schools allowing laptops to be taken home while other schools, primarily those in the lower socioeconomic areas, requiring laptops to be left in school.

The third chapter, 'Reading', describes the realities of reading instruction today, including the infamous *fourth grade slump*, or failure to successfully teach students to read for content, as well as the staggering effect of socioeconomic status on reading success and the effect of one-to-one laptop programs on reading. Warschauer introduces the reader to three capable teachers who exemplify how laptops can be used effectively to engage students in reading activities, including: accessing background information for readings, using graphic organizers, and language analysis. Useful examples from these classes include analyzing customer book reviews on Amazon.com, students posting their own book reviews, and the creation of a literary newspaper. One teacher in particular, Ms Gonzales, a ninth grade teacher passionate about technology, reveals some of the myriad possibilities of laptop use in reading by skillfully incorporating a wide array of media, including students creating PowerPoint advertisements, Blackboard discussions (much like in universities using course content management systems), and Lesson Builder to create interactive versions of some readings. Inclusion of such new literacies in the classroom prepares students for function in the twenty-first century. Warschauer details major patterns observed in relation to reading in his case-study classrooms, including encouraging a hearty use of scaffolding, with students using their laptops to discover background and linguistic knowledge. For example, Warschauer finds that epistemic engagement increases as the students enjoy working with laptops. However Warschauer warns that such engagement is not solely computer generated, but the result of the pedagogical practices of the teachers. An important 'page-to-screen shift' is described by Warschauer as students increasingly use their laptops without a focus on learning computer skills. Notably, Warschauer again reminds the reader that laptop use is not synonymous with higher reading test scores as standardized tests do not assess such digital media skills.

'Writing', chapter four, discusses how one-to-one laptop use contributes to writing skills, another reportedly neglected subject area in US schools. Warschauer identifies many uses and benefits of laptops for each stage of writing, including: pre-writing, researching on the Internet and using graphic organizers for planning. Advantages during the writing process itself include ease of typing versus handwriting, the provision of scaffolding, including dictionaries and thesauruses, and increased readability of written text both on screen and once printed. Both teachers and students were consciously aware that rewriting frequency increases when students are able to compare their texts directly on screen. Techniques such as color coding and automated teacher and fellow student feedback do appear to facilitate student writing in all three classrooms. Dissemination and sharing of materials also was reported by all three participating teachers as more extensive in laptop classrooms; this, in turn, increased students' motivation and drive. Examples include a 'Thought Pot' in which the teacher reads and provides feedback on anonymous students' work, and publishing student work, such as children's books and business letters, for actual audiences. Warschauer also discusses the debated use of automated writing evaluations (AWE) in laptop programs. Although AWE use in the schools he studied led to escalated student motivation and was time-saving for teachers, Warschauer finds it also increased formulaic writing.

Another motivating factor for subscribing to one-to-one laptop programs is greater ease of computer use and curricular flexibility when compared to using a scheduled computer lab or laptop carts. Laptops enable writing to be fluidly integrated into the school setting. Other benefits of laptop use include more iterative writing; that is, the steps in writing became routine for the laptop students. This results in a more visible and increased quality of work produced and an increase in pupil autonomy as their understanding of writing protocol increases. At the same time, however, Warschauer warns that laptops are not magic and will neither automatically cause students with weak writing skills to write proficiently, nor will students, Warschauer argues, be able to use all of the functions of the computer, such as spell check, grammar checkers or a thesaurus without help.

Chapter five, 'Information and Research', examines the multiple rewards of laptops in teaching information literacy, including finding information and determining its usefulness and reliability. Reported advantages of one-to-one laptop classrooms include greater access to current information of a wide variety and more in-depth learning. Certainly, more 'just in time learning' or teachable moments occurred in the laptop classrooms studied by Warschauer (p. 87). One-to-one laptops also provide greater ease for teachers in individualizing learning and research. Warschauer also found, in these classrooms, that research documents and findings tended to be critically scrutinized by students. Warschauer closes this chapter with the warning to move carefully; with

the ease of research on the Internet, comes the need for literacy training, including teaching the risks of plagiarism.

Despite having the same opportunities within and across participating classrooms there are striking variations in laptop use among the schools Warschauer studied. Warschauer explains these differences by the 'amplification effect' – schools already strong in critical inquiry use laptops productively, while schools struggling to address higher level thinking do not improve this skill with laptop use (p. 93). Warschauer exemplifies these differences further through additional discussion of three schools in his study group: a high socioeconomic status (SES) area school which uses laptops for critical thinking and literacy training, a low SES rural high school which fails to use laptops for critical thinking, and a diverse school with successful use of laptops for project work, although not for critical thinking.

'Media and Design', chapter six, explains a shift in literacy practices away from the printed word in today's post-typographic era, resulting in teachers' growing interest in teaching students media literacy to pique their interest in the classroom, as well as to allow them full participation in society and the workplace after graduation. This multimedia literacy, defined by Warschauer as 'the set of skills required to interpret and create products of messages that make use of images, photographs, video, animation, music, sounds, and typography', is stressed as essential, but, as Warschauer claims, can also be more distracting than useful if not properly taught (p. 106). The laptop programs ultimately allow more natural and enjoyable integration of media for the reported 'multimedia sponges' of today and enable a greater focus on multimodal education (p. 124). It is certainly refreshing to find a book that includes a focus on information literacy, also paying attention to the importance of multimedia literacy.

In this same chapter, Warschauer discusses six specific concepts related to multimedia, providing examples of each and how they are affected in laptop classrooms. These concepts include resemiotization and hybridity, which are frequent in the laptop schools. Examples include composing music to illustrate text, and writing a narrative about the human nervous system. Persuasion is addressed by most of the schools and includes critiquing and editing broadcast media. Genres explained as debatable in education, but perhaps needed to give children their own voice, are discussed via examples including creating a movie trailer for an imaginary film based on a book read in class. Warschauer also argues that reflection through documentation and presentation of students' work to authentic audiences increases motivation for schoolwork in the laptop classes. The efforts of most of the schools to use multimedia are described as adding to the enrichment of the students; Warschauer concludes that the laptop classes clearly exceed their non-laptop counterparts with respect to enhancing student learning outcomes.

Chapter seven, 'Habits of Mind', discusses what Warschauer defines as 'perceptions, behaviors, attitudes, and dispositions', or abstract determinates of success (p. 126). Reflecting on the elusive success of a student, Warschauer examines three related 'habits of mind', engagement, study habits, and inventive thinking, in the one-to-one laptop classes. Engagement is evaluated by measuring variables such as cognitive engagement and number of suspensions. Cognitive engagement is determined by surveys of students and parents. Three integral facets of engagement, relatedness, autonomy, and competence, are aided and abetted in laptop classrooms. However, admonitions are attached to these assertions by Warschauer; engagement results are not just reliant on laptop use. School context is essential to successful engagement with laptop use; in one high school, laptop use led to greater student distraction rather than student engagement, with students using their laptops for instant messaging conversations during class. Laptop use is found to improve study habits; laptop students are better organized and ownership of their own items increased. This finding was particularly notable in low SES schools, where teachers were impressed with the students' increased sense of responsibility. Warschauer next focuses on inventive thinking and concludes that while laptops are not vital to this 'habit of mind', inventive thinking nonetheless was rife in laptop classes led by creative, inventive teachers. Warschauer emphasizes that laptops can be successfully used by creative teachers to achieve variable pedagogical purposes in a variety of classroom settings, from a gifted and talented wealthier elementary school to a low SES alternative middle school. Laptops can serve, with an invested teacher's impetus, to push towards goals as diverse as increasing student inventive thinking and empowerment to creating a more disciplined classroom. Warschauer successfully makes a case for manifold possibilities of laptop use

in schools despite reminding the reader yet again that laptops are not magical tools to eradicate disparities among schools.

In chapter 8, 'Teaching the Word and the World', Warschauer assesses the role of laptops with respect to his previously defined three primary issues in education: 'past and future', 'home and school' and 'rich and poor'. Laptop classrooms achieve greater success when compared to non-laptop classrooms in decreasing technological disparities between home and school and in student preparation for future life and work. Laptop programs are less successful, however, at leveling the differences between 'rich and poor': high SES schools are more successful at using laptops effectively for literacy learning than low SES schools. The two schools in which students could not take laptops home were both low SES populations where the laptops were frequently lost or broken with no funds for replacement. Most telling, we learn that two of the laptop programs at low SES schools have been disbanded as grant funding expired and interested personnel transfer to higher SES schools. In a gloomy yet realistic tone, Warschauer asserts the undeniable effect of SES in determining schooling success, although he offers a ray of hope as he reminds us of the significant achievements of one low SES school in his laptop study. Although laptop programs currently are rare, Warschauer emphasizes that the decreasing prices of laptops and their peripherals will make laptop use inevitable in schools in the near future. Thus, the reader is left with the vision of two possible worlds of laptop use: that currently exemplified primarily in higher SES classrooms that inspire independent critical student thinking and interaction with a wider, non-school-based community versus the more current standard of laptop use as a basic tool to improve decoding and comprehension skills, create PowerPoint presentations, etc. (p. 155).

*Laptops and Literacy* serves as a review of current laptop use in US schools and is unquestionably a useful read for administrators contemplating the integration of one-to-one laptops in their schools. Warschauer intentionally studied contrasting schools and classrooms in order to assess the reality of laptop use in different settings. He does not shy away from discussing the grim realities or the sometimes unfulfilling results of laptop use, but readers are nonetheless left feeling upbeat about the educational possibilities of one-to-one laptop programs in schools if used properly by a trained and invested teacher. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, Warschauer's text will challenge educators to expand their use of laptops beyond current content and skill driven practices.

A possible beneficial addition to this volume would be the inclusion of more specific information on the logistics, assignments used and grading systems in the laptop classrooms studied. Teacher interviews and rubrics could be helpful to teachers and administrators alike in envisioning a successful laptop program. However, Warschauer's aim is not to outline exact uses for in-service/pre-service teachers but, instead, to analyze how and to what extent laptops can be effective in teaching literacy. Perhaps a second volume could delineate more specific and practical guidelines.

One drawback in the text overall is the blurred line between Warschauer's generalizations and his survey results, prompting the reader to question exactly from where he draws his conclusions. Also, observations were minimal in some schools, forcing questions as to whether or not Warschauer or his colleagues ever viewed some activities, including an interactive reading lesson, but nonetheless went ahead and critiqued these activities.

One also must ask several questions not addressed by Warschauer that require further follow-up: Will increased student engagement persist as they create repeated digital video productions or repeated literary newspapers? How were study results influenced by the fact that teachers in current laptop programs are specially chosen, highly motivated and interested in promoting computer use in all aspects of education? How did teachers who did not agree to be interviewed by Warschauer view computer use in the classroom? Why were they uninterested or reluctant to be interviewed? These are all important and unaddressed questions in any study of the efficacy of one-to-one laptop programs.

Although Warschauer certainly convinces the reader of both the inevitability of laptop use and the benefits of their one-to-one use in the classroom, unfortunately the reader is nagged by thoughts of the requirements and stresses of the current education system and mandatory testing. None of these issues are solved by laptop use, as Warschauer repeatedly reminds us. Warschauer also admits that, although greatly assisted by the fluidity and ease of laptop use, many of the assignments and activities observed in participating classrooms could succeed without computer

use at all. Higher level thinking does not require computer use. In the end, creative teachers are the most necessary tools in the classroom.

Warschauer's *Laptops and Literacy* succinctly reviews the research and theory of laptop use to improve student literacy and learning and demonstrates actual results achieved in literacy gains in 10 diverse one-to-one laptop classrooms. Warschauer presents both benefits of, and problems with, using laptops in schools, but clearly believes one-to-one laptop programs provide students with advantages in technology and thinking skills that will benefit them in the world at large. We are left with the realization that laptops themselves are not cures for all of the issues facing educators today, but rather, if used by proficient, creative teachers, can be used to better prepare students for a future in a world which requires embracing multimedia.

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### Adolescents and Online Fan Fiction

REBECCA W. BLACK, 2008

New York: Peter Lang

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The nature of literacy is evolving as new online spaces promote the emergence of affinity groups, cultivate global networks, and foster asynchronous communication. While traditional literacy skills are still relevant in these online spaces, researchers are increasingly examining how new literacies engage both new 'technical stuff' as well as new 'ethos stuff' (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). From blogging to tweeting, video gaming to fan fiction writing, these new literacies are increasingly participatory and collaborative.

Rebecca W. Black's *Adolescents and Online Fan Fiction* highlights how youth are engaged in these new literacies as they remix and reproduce existing media in order to create fan fiction texts. Fan-created texts are rooted in popular culture, such as books, movies, television series, sports, music, and video games; writers expand on the plot lines and characterization in the original works to create their own 'fan fic'. Although such works have existed in print-based forms for decades, the appearance of the Internet has prompted a marked expansion of the genre. While countless fan fiction websites exist (including ones that cater specifically to Harry Potter, Star Trek, and Japanese anime devotees, among others), perhaps the largest and most renowned website is FanFiction.net, which Black chose as the site for her online ethnography.

As she notes early on in her book, the advent of online publishing has made fan fiction accessible for a 'global and multilingual population of writers and readers' (p. 11) who post their work, solicit feedback on it, and review and critique others' texts. Through her research, Black shows how fan fiction writers are participating in online affinity spaces and how this involvement allows them to 'traverse traditional geographic, linguistic, and producer-consumer boundaries' (p. xiv). In addition, Black focuses on female English language learners; in doing so, she draws from work in new literacies and second language acquisition, as well as sociocultural theory and the New Literacy Studies.

*Adolescents and Online Fan Fiction* is divided into three main sections. The first part surveys the research landscape and details the theory, methodology, and context of the study. In the introductory chapter, Black overviews anime (Japanese animation), manga (Japanese graphic novels), and fan fiction. She focuses on the history, written and visual content, fan participation, and current research of each in this same opening chapter. As Black notes, "These three phenomena provide salient examples of how new [information and communication technologies] have led to the development of literacy and social practices that traverse accustomed national, cultural, linguistic, temporal, and producer-consumer boundaries' (p. 2). Moreover, we can look to the ubiquity of popular anime series like *Pokémon*, *Digimon*, and *Yu-Gi-Oh!* to understand how youth around the world have integrated fandom into their lives, whether online or off. Whether they are trading cards with friends, creating and posting fan art, or writing their own fan fictions and sharing them on a publicly accessible website, youth are remixing media and creating multiple identities for themselves in the process.

Chapter 2 and chapter 3 detail Black's online ethnography, situate it within a carefully crafted theoretical framework, describe the process of data analysis, and conceptualize FanFiction.net as an affinity space. Black spent more than three years as a participant and observer on FanFiction.net, which has well over a million users and hosts stories in more than 30 languages (Wikipedia, *FanFiction.net*, 2008). In her study, Black elected to focus on the *Card Captor Sakura* (CCS) section of FanFiction.net, which offers a rich, anime-based storyline that chronicles the life of a young Japanese girl named Sakura Kinomoto who discovers she has magical powers at the same time she accidentally lets loose a set of powerful cards that can cause much harm in the world. Sakura is charged with recapturing these cards and sealing them away. Although the Card Captor fan fiction texts and reader responses are on a public website, Black notes that she obtained consent forms from her focal participants and changed identifiable usernames and titles in order to protect the privacy of FanFiction.net participants. Black describes her data analysis as an iterative process that involved multiple layers of coding and interpretation; she further grounds this process in discourse analysis, citing Gee and Fairclough's work.

Within the section devoted to Card Captor Sakura fan fics, Black examines the macro-structure of focal participants' and other fans' texts, which included examining features unique to fan fic, like headers and Author's Notes. Headers typically contain information such as the story or chapter title, author, original media, genre, spoiler alerts, and content preview. Author's Notes are a way for the writer to communicate directly with the reader, and may appear at several points in the story. Black also focuses specifically on focal participants' interactions in FanFiction.net, looking for correlations with the themes and characteristics that she had previously identified in fan fiction texts as well as coding for new, emergent patterns. As Black states, 'Examples of this initial broad coding include categories such as *thematic topics* in all types of texts such as culture, language learning, identity, peer pressure, and fandom; *functional characteristics* of headers and Author's Notes such as informing, introducing, greeting, leave-taking, and self-deprecation; and *functional characteristics* of reader reviews such as scaffolding, positive feedback, negative feedback, and encouragement' (p. 29). Black situates this work firmly within a sociocultural and 'new' approach to literacy studies, arguing that a New Literacy Studies framework is particularly suited to examining the everyday use of digital media in online spaces. By understanding literacy as a social practice (Street, 1984) that facilitates the use and acquisition of multiple Discourses (Gee, 1999), Black argues that researchers are able to examine how youth are using print text in conjunction with other forms of semiotic expression within online environments. Furthermore, by conceptualizing FanFiction.net as an affinity space (Gee, 2004), rather than as a community of practice (Wenger, 1998), Black states that we can focus attention 'on the interplay among engagement, active participation, a sense of belonging, and the production of social space' (p. 36).

This second part of the book explores how adolescent English language learners engage in literate and social practices on FanFiction.net. Through writing fan fiction and interacting with others within the affinity space, Black shows how these young women actively (re)construct their multinational identities and (re)position themselves as multiliterate writers. Chapter 4 examines how three of her four focal participants use their participation in the fan fiction community to socialize, express their identity, and develop their language skills. These participants include Nanako and Cherry-chan, who live in the same large Canadian city and whose families emigrated from Shanghai and Taiwan, respectively, as well as Grace, a Filipina who is 10 years older than the others and began participating in FanFiction.net in 2001 as a teenager. Black provides excerpts from each focal participant's stories, and notes the changes that are evident in their writing across time and space. As she puts it, 'Grace's interactions with readers and presentation of herself as an ELL [English language learner] writer provided both Nanako and Cherry-chan with textual models for representing themselves and for designing their own interactive writing spaces in ways that facilitated their individual language development' (p. 53).

Chapter 5 presents a more detailed case-study analysis of Nanako. Black argues that this is critical. Even though scholarship in second language acquisition has highlighted the situated nature of language and role of identity, little research has examined the ways in which popular culture and fandom influence young English language learners. She suggests that identity is a fluid construction that shifts over time in conjunction with English language learners' sustained participation in online communities such as FanFiction.net. Here, Black uses her interviews with Nanako (which took place via instant messaging) to illustrate how she develops as an English language writer and

how she positions herself as such within and through her fan fiction texts. Black notes that contrary to the deficit model typically applied to English language learners in school settings, Nanako did not have to adhere to an ascribed English language learner role, nor was she constrained by labels such as 'immigrant' or 'native Mandarin Chinese speaker' in her fan fiction writing. Black tracks how Nanako uses her participation in FanFiction.net to represent the multiple facets of her identity, solicit support from the community in developing her English language skills, and use her writing to explore certain aspects of her Asian heritage.

Black explains that, 'Rather than being constrained by the expectations of a monolingual, uniform group of readers, Nanako's process of self-representation and meaning-making was instead supported by a linguistically and culturally diverse group of youth from across the globe' (p. 96). This type of support is detailed in chapter 6, which examines the use of peer review and editing in the fan fiction community. Here, Black focuses on how Nanako designs her composition along with her social interactions and participation in a particular affinity space. Indeed, at the time when Black was writing, Nanako had garnered over 6000 reviews of her 50-plus fan fiction texts on FanFiction.net. Black uses these reader reviews to illustrate the three common types of reader responses: gentle critique, focused critique, and editorialized gossip. The latter occurs when readers gossip about the characters in the fan fiction narrative as if the events occurred independently of the writer. According to Black, the immediacy of reader responses on fan fiction websites provides English language learners with just-in-time feedback while the generally positive nature of these reviews encourages English language learners to further their English language skills.

The third and final part of the book shifts to a discussion on the evolving nature of literacy in a digital age; here, Black suggests that the literacy practices embedded in fan fiction websites can (and perhaps, should) inform the practices that have long been staples in traditional, print-based composition classrooms. She notes that it is crucial for teachers to design learning environments that facilitate student self-direction, allow for authentic uses of technology, promote interaction, and encourage creativity and innovation. As a former English as a Second Language teacher, Black quickly noticed upon her initial visits to FanFiction.net that many of the non-native English speakers openly expressed a desire to improve their language skills through participating in fan fiction. She says that 'Many of the activities on this and other fan fiction sites are consonant with many practices that we try to promote when teaching writing, such as collaborative writing, a great deal of writer/reader interaction, and peer review' (p. 21). In fact, Black & Steinkuehler (2008) argue that the intertextual, hybrid genres of fan fiction are something that literacy educators should pay attention to. In this social space, youth are intently focused on the format, style, and content of their text and they readily access resources, perform research, and solicit critique as they write and revise their composition. When K-12 (kindergarten to grade 12) students willingly engage in such tasks in out-of-school settings, teachers would do well to take note.

*Adolescents and Online Fan Fiction* is an important contribution to new literacy scholarship; by examining the interplay of language, identity, interaction, and globalization within online spaces, Black offers key insights into how youth are using and remixing literacy in out-of-school spaces. Perhaps it would have been wise to expand the number of focal participants and include more native English speakers in her study. By conducting additional interviews (including face-to-face or telephone interviews), Black may have gathered additional rich, 'thick' description (Geertz, 1973). But on the whole, this work offers significant insights into youth's engagement in fan fiction as well as how we, as researchers, conceptualize online spaces that foster literacy learning.

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