

## **New Literacies: Essential or Enrichment?**

TechForum New York

David Jakes

In a classic comedic vignette, Don Novello (a.k.a. Father Guido Sarducci) describes a school that he would like to open, called The Five Minute University. The basic premise is that he would teach you the things that you would remember after five years after graduation from college-and that this process would only take five minutes to accomplish. Obviously, college graduates remember more than five minutes worth of information-but in 2006, what kinds of skills are required to effectively function in a world of almost limitless information, digitally available at our fingertips? What skills are essential and what are simply enrichment? And, of that essential skill set, what technology literacies are critical and supportive of life-long learning?

As we all know, technology is characterized by continual change. New tools emerge daily-blogs, wikis and podcasting, to name a few. How do schools meet the challenges of using these new tools, in the context of the literacies that they potentially support? Or do schools simply keep on doing what they've always done? Does the use of these new tools represent enrichment, or should they be considered absolutely essential for success?

### ***Should schools:***

Continue to have students write essays for the consumption of the teacher or should they do their writing in a blog, for the consumption of a global audience? Should they do both?

Use wiki technology to interact in a digital space to collaboratively build content, or should they continue to work in small groups in the classroom to build some non-digital product?

Promote digital storytelling? Is the development of a competitive voice important? Is producing a 2-3 minute digital story worth the 2 weeks of classroom time in a standards-based, high-stakes testing environment (based on a high school classroom where the teacher sees students once a day)?

### ***Essential or enrichment?***

Use the 250 million photographs of Flickr to promote visual literacy instruction and skills, or should it be blocked because it contains some inappropriate imagery?

Develop programs of personal professional development, which take advantage of RSS technology and aggregators, or should we continue to rely on the single shot staff development day?

Expect superintendents and principals to blog about their schools, their students, and their academic, athletic, and extracurricular activities. Or does the monthly newsletter home enough? Should they also podcast?

*Essential or enrichment?*

Teach information literacy skills, embedded within classroom instruction, that prepare students to access, use, and evaluate information in a world of information explosion?

Build online textbooks which assemble the very best Web resources in del.icio.us, or should they continue to rely on outdated and costly textbooks?

Take advantage of the technology students bring or could bring to school, or just basically ban everything?

Develop options for asynchronous learning, or just rely on traditional face-to-face “synchronous” learning.

*Essential or enrichment?*

The growth of these new technology tools has been nothing short of remarkable. But it’s not about the tools obviously; it’s about their capacity to be used to create learning environments that are dynamic, student-centered, and information-rich. It’s about creating classrooms where students can learn the skills that will make them effective life-long learners in the context of today’s world. That’s *certainly essential*, and understanding these tools are a major part of achieving that goal.

Every school is different, with different resources and different needs. Many hurdles exist that prevent these tools from being effectively used, or even used at all, in schools—most notably the focus on standards-based education and high stakes testing. But our students will use these tools with or without us (see Teen Content Creators and Consumers in resources). Schools need to get on board....

Effective schools are fundamentally grounded in solid instruction, but always have an eye cast towards the next step and what constitutes *mission-critical essential* technology use.

### **Additional Resources.**

21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

<http://www.metiri.com/21/Metiri-NCREL21stSkills.pdf>

Teen Content Creators and Consumers

[http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP\\_Teens\\_Content\\_Creation.pdf](http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Teens_Content_Creation.pdf)

The New Literacies: Essential or Enrichment?

<http://www.jakesonline.org/newlit.htm>

