A Classroom with a View: Teachers, Multimodality, and New Literacies

Peggy Albers, Vivian M. Vasquez, and Jerome C. Harste

Today, more than ever before, attention is being given to the role of the arts and, especially, the new literacies as they relate to the use of technology in the English language arts classroom. This attention is significant and timely as it reflects a growing shift in how literacy is being defined and what it means to be literate in the 21st century. Consider one of the most frenzied moments in recent media history when stand-up comic Michael Richards (Kramer from Seinfeld), in a fit of exasperation, shouted a racial slur to a heckler in the audience. Another audience member captured this scene on a cell-phone video camera and put it up on YouTube the next day. Mere hours after Richards's performance at the Laugh Factory in Los Angeles, this video hit the national airwaves and appeared on every news station in the country. Or consider the students and teachers of Selsted Primary School, a K-6 school in South-East Kent in the UK. When faced with the impending closure of their school due to low enrollments, they partnered with local musicians to write a song called “Save Our School.” The children were invited to be guests on a local television show to share their plight with a bigger audience, and their song was picked up and played by podcasters (online audio broadcasters) in different countries around the world who encouraged their audiences to purchase the song, available through download at different online music stores for approximately 99 cents. In the end, as a result of the television and online exposure, enough funds were generated to help Selsted School remain open.

It’s here—technology and the desire to create multimedia texts. Children to adults are using digital media to capture, develop, produce, and publish all types of products and projects, especially in literacy and ELA classes. Our title reflects this eruption of new literacies, especially in light of multimedia and technology, and plays upon the title of the 1985 Merchant-Ivory film, A Room with a View, in which Lucy struggles with her individuality in the face of the restrictive Edwardian culture. As literacy and language arts teacher educators, we continually struggle with the tension between the restrictive culture of political mandates, which values traditional approaches to literacy, and a culture of possibilities that engages and builds upon the new literacies that students bring with them to class daily. In this article, we wish to present a classroom in which literacy practices of the 21st century are imagined, and multimedia texts and new technologies are celebrated.

We are continually enthralled at the intensity with which young people immerse themselves in arts and in technology. While some see such engagement as problematic, we, like Gee (2004), understand this attraction as redefining the world of literacy and our most basic understanding of what it means to be literate. We argue that ELA and literacy educators, across grade levels, must be knowledgeable about and prepared to work with the tools through which multimedia projects are created and messages are sent, received, and interpreted. Media and technology position us as both viewers and users of multimedia texts in the world, endowing us with an identity we may or may not wish to take on (Albers & Harste, 2007; Vasquez, 2004). In this essay, we want to offer the Talking Points audience both a way to define and think about the arts, technology, and critical literacy, and a way to look at the implications each of these has for the literacy and English language arts classroom. We focus on the role of teachers, both preservice (PT) and inservice (IST), in their own exploration of the new literacies in our university classrooms, and on how their new-found abilities to design, create,
For students, YouTube, iPod Nanos, cell phones with still, video, and audio capabilities, and other digital devices are not new; they are the everyday tools used to communicate in or navigate their worlds. Producing, and critiquing multimedia products encourages a different mindset in their own practice.

When it comes to electronic and digital devices and software, Gee (2004) argues that children today are learning more about literacy outside of school than they are in school. For students, YouTube, iPod Nanos, cell phones with still, video, and audio capabilities, and other digital devices are not new; they are the everyday tools used to communicate in or navigate their worlds. However, older social practices—writing legibly, spelling, etc.—have staying power in today's classroom, which positions us instructionally to ask, “How do we bridge the knowledge and experience that today's students bring with them to class daily, and put in place a new set of technology-fused social practices to support a more thoughtful and critically reflective student, especially in light of the arts and technology?” As always, we want to position students as agents of all types of text, from print-based to visually digital, rather than as passive readers of said texts (Harste, Albers, Felderman, Vander Zanden, White, & van de Kleut, 2007). We also want to make sure that these students, as agents, unpack and understand the positions from which they create text.

Multimodality and New Literacies: Framing Technology-Fused Social Practices

Our work is framed within multimodal theory (Kress & Jewitt, 2003) and the theory of new literacies, as these enable us to explore and explain the significance of not only the product that develops in ELA classes, but also how and which media are selected and for what purpose. Informed by the work of Halliday (1978), Hodge and Kress (1996), and Kress and van Leeuwen (1996/2006), multimodal communication is comprised of “modes,” forms, such as digital, visual, spatial, musical, and so on, within various sign systems, or communication systems, that carry the meanings that a social collective recognizes and understands. In multimodal theory, Kress and Jewitt (2003) identify four aspects that comprise one's representation of meaning: materiality, framing, design, and production, all of which come into play when texts are constructed. Materiality refers to the materials and resources used to represent meaning (still images, music, transitions, fabric, as well as ideas, concepts, etc.), and their affordances, or the qualities of that material/resource and its potential to communicate messages in various ways. For example, when someone creates a short movie, their use of photos, animation, video, and text in combination can become very interactive and highly engaging; how they arrange these materials can alter a viewer's perspective and interpretation. Consider the controversial blackout of the final episode of The Sopranos: viewers believed that their cable had gone out rather than understanding this to be an intentional decision by the director.

Framing defines the way in which elements of a visual composition operate together: how they're spaced, the existence of dis/continuities in color, how elements within a text connect (or not) with each other, how elements “move” on the canvas, and so on (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). Within digital texts such as PowerPoint presentations, Web pages, or digital films, framing involves the placement of a visual image, the selection of an image that best fits the intention of the message, size and font types, and so on. In creating such texts, the text-maker considers how these elements interrelate, and how this relationship will inform a viewer's interpretation.

Design, the conceptual side of expression (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001), is separate from the actual product. Design refers to how people make use of the materials and resources that are available to them at a particular moment to create their representation. For example, when Vivian designed her podcasting site, Critical Literacy in Practice Podcast (CLIP, http://www.bazmakaz.com/clip/), she conceptualized the website and considered the content and how best to engage and progressively attract a worldwide audience. However, it was a technology expert who helped her realize her design and concept, an active and intellectually engaging site. The resources (ideas, beliefs, etc.) on which the website was designed were abstract and capable of being realized in different materialities.

Lastly, production refers to the creation and organization of the representation, the actual product or text.
(website, movie, podcast, visual text, dance, play, and so on), as well as the technical skills (skills of the hand, eye, ear, body) used when working with media in creating the text. How one works with iMovie is different from how one works with Final Cut. The knowledge, skills, and techniques associated with movie making in the two software programs have some similarity (how to storyboard, include transitions, slice video clips), but those working in these two different programs recognize the significant properties, capabilities, and limitations of each.

In concert with multimodality is the area of new literacies studies (Albers & Harste, 2007), or literacy in a digital and high-tech world, which speaks to a shift in perspective or mindset (Kist, 2005; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, 2007). While sharing their view of new literacies, Lankshear and Knobel (2007) identify two interrelated elements: new technical stuff and new ethos. They suggest these two elements are necessary components of work in new literacies. New technical stuff “can be employed, to do in new ways, the same kinds of things we have previously known. Equally, however, they can be integrated into literacy practices that in some significant sense represent new phenomena” (p. 9). In essence, this new technical stuff doesn’t just allow us to technologize our existing practice, it creates space for us to move beyond where we are now to allow for greater participation, collaboration, and distribution of knowledge—to do things that were not possible with our previous level of technology. Lankshear and Knobel (2007) refer to this as “new ethos stuff.” Unlike conventional or expert-dominated literacies, this “new ethos” is “less published, individualized, and author-centric” (p. 9). Using social media tools like blogs, podcasts, and wikis allows for a broad dispersion of information that is accessible across time and space so that expertise and authority are distributed amongst networks and collectives.

The ease and speed with which information can travel seriously disrupts traditional authorial social relations. For instance, Vivian’s husband, Andy, has been using social media tools for some time. One such tool is Twitter, described as a free social networking and micro-blogging service that allows users to send “updates” (or “tweets”—text-based posts up to 140 characters long) to the Twitter website, via short message service, instant messaging, or a third-party application such as Twitterrific. Updates are then displayed on the user’s profile page and instantly delivered to other users who have signed up to receive them.

During the Virginia Tech shootings in the spring of 2007, Andy started receiving tweets from Twitter friends in Virginia about what was happening. In fact, as the shootings were taking place, students were using various social media tools to inform one another as to events as they unfolded, which may have kept some students out of harm’s way. Gone are the days when newscasts and newscasters held court over the news and what made the headlines. It is no surprise, therefore, to now hear newscasters pointing their audience to their station’s podcast or blog site.

When we consider technology-infused social practices, Kress’s (2003) idea of “the new page,” or the electronic page on a computer screen, identifies for educators possibilities within classroom spaces that encourage multimodality and new literacies, especially as they support students’ ability to play with design and create exciting texts. With play comes invention, as students invent new uses for common materials like photos, which can be altered, revised, and enhanced in Photoshop, or video clips that no longer are non-edited streams but involve intentional decisions about moments that are necessary in the viewing and others that can be left “on the cutting floor.” Such reflection necessitates a shift in thinking about literacy as more than just a move from a verbal or written expression to a visual or digital expression, but one that considers how identities get positioned in such representations.

Teachers, Multimodality, and New Literacies: A Classroom with a View

In our work with teachers, we push them to reconceptualize—to design, choose materials for, frame, and produce multimedia texts—their own vision for
We have come to learn that it is not the tools that keep teachers from working with newer literacies; it’s the fear that is associated with learning new concepts, software, and ideas and the time it takes to design and develop multimedia projects and shift one’s way of thinking.

What we have learned is that it takes longer to imagine and then carry out the technologization of existing teaching practices and curricular projects than it does to imagine what the new technologies can afford, once that shift in mindset takes place.

Peggy’s Work with Multimodality and New Literacies

In my courses for preservice and inservice ELA teachers, I have developed a set of projects designed to encourage teachers to explore literature and language, become frustrated at the process, and yet, find significance for these projects in their own classrooms. I will speak to two projects that use software loaded onto general PCs or Apples: one-minute public service announcements and family history projects.

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS

Inspired by an idea of a colleague and friend of mine, Oscar Hernandez, I began introducing my teachers to a multimedia project involving public service announcements (PSAs)—engaging one-minute multimedia texts that present persuasive or informative messages about social issues raised in a literary text. PSAs can be created using Windows MovieMaker, iMovie, or PowerPoint, and they can include copyright-free images, music, written text, and/or special effects (e.g., transitions, entrance/exit of images or texts, fades to black). One key point about PSAs is that they are self-running, especially when using PowerPoint. As a demonstration of multimedia PSAs, I begin with some examples of everyday texts in both print-based materials (like magazines) and non-print-based materials (television or Internet sites). One example shows a still image of a brain in the top part of the frame with the text, “This is your brain.” In the bottom of the frame are two eggs frying in a pan: “This is your brain on drugs.”

We discuss the hard-hitting in-your-face visual messages directed at adolescents and young adults, the significance of the placement of the objects in the ad, and the intention of adults to construct ads to frighten the intended young viewers. This leads to a discussion of the issue(s) presented within a PSA, the viewers to whom the message is directed, and the designers of these texts. Teachers then choose a literary text (young adult or classic novel) and design a PSA based upon an issue they want to address; they develop their idea with multimodal features such as images, text, voiceover narration, and transitions.

Figure 1 is an example of a partial PSA designed, developed, and produced by Candy, a preservice teacher (PT), after reading Death of a Salesman. In this self-running PowerPoint with John Mellancamp’s “Mr. Happy Go-Lucky” playing in the background, Candy wanted her viewing audience to consider the play’s ongoing theme of “being used up” (appliances, friends, Willy Loman’s effectiveness as a salesman). Other PSAs, both serious and humorous in nature, addressed social issues that cut across a range of literary texts: child abuse, alcoholism, global warming, neglect, cutting, drug abuse, etiquette, and peer pressure.

As multimedia texts, PSAs bridge the more conventional literary studies talk (Pirie, 1997; Langer, 1995; Scholes, 1986) and the newer literacies (arts and technology). After viewing a PSA based on a literary text, PTs and ISTs (inservice teachers) engage more deeply in conversations about events in the literary text. As part of these conversations, PTs and ISTs also discuss the technical skills that the creator of the PSA needed to construct this multimedia text. Once they become familiar with the tools needed to create PSAs, teachers at all grade levels (elemen-
tary to high school), invite their own students to design, develop, and produce these texts. Students enthusiastically and positively respond to this assignment because it, at once, situates discussion of social issues in the literary text within their own lives, and brings into play their desire to create multimedia texts, for which they can draw upon their knowledge of technology, image manipulation, special effects, music, and so on. Creating the PSAs allows students to speak to others of their own age group in significantly different ways—not the hard-hitting in-your-face messages that adults send to young viewers. As critical literacy engagements, PSAs bring to the surface an awareness of which social issues speak to the reader and/or were raised by the author. The choices that a PSA creator makes in selecting images and music, using written language, and manipulating all of these features through special effects reflect the producer’s intention to shift the perspective of the viewer, and show the viewer the producer’s choices in her or his belief system. Candy’s PSA turns the social issue of “being used up” into a more contemporary and global issue of how we are using up the earth’s resources. Candy encourages us, the viewers, to take action—one of the purposes of a PSA—as she makes visible her own commitment to environmental issues.

**Family History Projects**

Using similar technology, I have developed an engagement that connects a literary text, family, and historical events into family history projects. Like PSAs, the family history project is born out of the reading of both literary texts and informational texts; it integrates issues in the literary text with historical events that occurred during the time of the literary text, and connects this inquiry with students’ own family stories.

Teachers begin this project by choosing a text, historical event, or a time period that interests them. For example, Kathy, a fourth-grade IST, chose to read Karen Hesse’s (2005) *Out of the Dust*, set in the time of the Great Depression. Kathy began her inquiry of the Great Depression by reading a range of expository texts about that period of time, gathering photos of family who lived then, and videotaping an interview with her grandmother, who related stories of her life during the Depression. As the designer of this multimedia project, Kathy spent time storyboarding the ideas she wanted to present, the factual information she wanted to include, and the personal stories to give life to this time period and Hesse’s novel. Once she had decided on the story she wanted to tell, Kathy wrote a script to accompany all her artifacts, which included some black-and-white photos from the Library of Congress website, photos of her family, and the video interview with her grandmother.

As multimedia texts, family history projects allow teachers to use a range of media to tell a story when one medium is not sufficient. In most cases, teachers choose to work with either MovieMaker or iMovie because they know how movies capture the attention of an audience. Drawing upon what they like about movies (consciously or unconsciously), they consider such features as rolling titles, subtitles, special effects (e.g., fade-ins and -outs), the use of music to convey atmosphere or develop suspense, and the use of short written text to highlight key information they want the viewer to know. With a plan in mind, they design their project and how it might look, gather the materials that will allow them to tell the story, and...
Emerging Literacies for the 21st Century

Critical literacies should never be treated in a formulaic way or as a program of study. Rather, critical literacies should look and sound different in different spaces and places.

In my work creating spaces for critical literacies with young children, I have maintained that a critical literacy curriculum needs to be lived as an overarching transgressive perspective or stance that is fluid and that should be reoriented depending on the context within which teachers and students find themselves (Vasquez et al., 2003; Vasquez, 2004). What this means is that critical literacies should never be treated in a formulaic way or as a program of study. Rather, critical literacies should look and sound different in different spaces and places. While working with my teacher education students, therefore, I make it clear to them that the projects they take on in the university classroom are demonstrations of possibilities that can serve as resources for imagining critical literacy projects in their own settings.

I imagined one such project, the DC-Area Literary Map Podcast, after listening to students in my children's literature courses talk about ways in which they use books in the classroom, their choice of books for their students, and their struggle over finding books that connected to their students' lives in some way.

A podcast is an Internet-based audio broadcast that is downloadable to your computer or onto an MP3 player. (MP3 is the standard format for encoding audio for Internet broadcast, and an iPod is one example of such a player.) Podcasts are created by digitally recording audio using any one of a range of recording devices, including social media online tools such as Utterz or K-7, which are telephone-based. With one of these tools, a podcaster would simply call into the phone service, which can be configured to automatically post to a blog site. Other recording tools are portable devices such as the i-River or ZoomH2; these recorders automatically digitize audio by recording in MP3 format. Some podcasters record directly onto their computers, using software such as Audacity or Garage Band, which can also be used to edit recorded audio. This would be the point at which music and sound effects are added. Once audio is recorded and put in an MP3 format, it is then uploaded to an online host. Popular inexpensive hosts include Libsyn and Dreamhost. Once uploaded on a host server, the audio location is added to an RSS feed, which is what people subscribe to in order to download a podcast to their computers and then to MP3 players.

Since first attempting this project, I have tried different ways of producing the audio, from setting aside recording time during class to having students create audio on their own.

Finding books that connect to the world in which their students live was an issue that seemed to come up for my preservice teachers semester after semester, year after
year. I came up with the DC-Area Literary Map Podcast idea as one way to help them become more resourceful when it came to choosing books for their students. I also wanted to create a project that could be useful beyond the immediate needs of my students. Finally I wanted to create a project that could be generative, ongoing, and sustainable beyond the life of the course. I wanted my teachers to contribute to something that could be accessible to others beyond class participants. I have assigned different iterations of the project over the last two years, each one representing my attempts at re-framing the project in hopes of better clarifying what it means to frame the work from a critical literacy perspective. With each new group of teachers, the map has grown, and it has become a more useful and interesting resource for teachers in the DC area who want to explore the use of multimodal text sets. Listeners to the podcasts are able to comment on and contribute to what could be an ongoing conversation about particular texts, issues, and topics.

I begin by telling my students that for this assignment they are to create a four-minute audio or video recording to be added to a literary map podcast of the DC area (see Figure 2). As part of their multimodal reading list, which includes podcasts, blogs, and other Internet texts, I have them spend time with the existing map located at http://www.bazmakaz.com/licmap_dc/.

I explain to them that over the years, literary maps have been used to help students and readers learn about literature, writers, and places, and that in a way, these maps help to bring to the surface the social construction of the texts they represent by geographically locating characters and storylines, and historicizing them. I then have them listen to examples of podcasts that represent the kind of multimedia text set audio they will be creating. These include the following, all found on www.clippodcast.com:

- Acts of Kindness and Social Action, CLIP 23
- A Crossover Show with JOMB on Elbert’s Bad Word, CLIP 12
- Multi-media Text Set, CLIP 3

To create their audio, teachers begin by choosing a book that reflects a social issue (e.g., racism, bullying, sexism, homophobia). The issue they choose is meant to reflect their own students’ inquiry questions. I tell them that the text they choose should connect in some way to the DC area so that we can “map it.” I then ask them to locate a public monument or setting (in the DC area) and a poem, song, art piece, or movie that enriches the reading of the original text.

Once they have the pieces they need, the teachers begin crafting a description of their text set from a critical literacy perspective. Since for many of my teachers, this is their first introduction to critical literacy, the scripts they create for the map are not always critical, but I value their attempts as opportunities for them to begin to imagine what it means to work within a critical literacy framework. In a lot of ways, the work represents attempts at creating spaces for critical literacies. The use of multiple texts that address the same issue or topic is meant to help students to understand that texts are never neutral, which is why we engage in analytically unpacking the words and images in them. As part of creating the narrative for their contribution, they are meant to unpack both language and image choices in those texts, consider how these texts position them as readers, as well as the position from which they...
engage with the texts and construct meaning from them. They are asked to work from the premise that reading children's literature involves the active process of predicting and confirming, or revisiting our hypothesis about the words and images on the page based on our own past experiences, and that it is by no means a passive process of decoding words and information. More specifically, we discuss how texts are constructed, by whom, and for what purpose(s). We also cover ways that the texts advantage some while disadvantaging others by foregrounding particular themes and "backgrounding" others. I also help them to understand what it means to unpack the positions and stances from which texts are written and consumed, including the use of new technologies such as podcasting. Beyond this, the rest is up to their creativity.

In addition to creating their audio, I ask my students to create a collage that represents their focal issues or topics.

To listen to the podcasts, a listener can either click on a numbered point on the DC-area map (see Figure 3), after which time an image (the collage) pops up and the audio automatically plays, or the listener can go to the podcast homepage and click on the audio symbol included in each posted episode (see Figure 4). Those interested could also subscribe to the podcast using media tools such as iTunes in order to receive new shows automatically when they are released.

Chrystelle Panatier, a teacher in a graduate children's literature course that I teach, created a collage that she posted online. Her audio begins with a discussion of book banning and the influence of the Christian Right:

Politics and children's literacy seem to be two areas of thought which are incompatible. Politics being the administration of power and control, and children's literature: the freedom of imagination. However, embedded political perspectives, whether religious, social, or gender based, affect the selection and availability of children's literature.

The Christian Right exercises massive political power in the United States. President George W. Bush has given the Christian Right a significant voice in shaping positions on a lot of issues. Many conservative judges have been appointed and exercise leadership with the Congress in passing legislation that is defined by biblical norm regarding family, sexuality, freedom of speech and I would add freedom of reading.

This is why on the map, I chose the United States Capitol. It is the Capital building that serves as the seat of government for the United States Congress. It is located on top of Capitol Hill at the end of the National Mall. The building is marked by its central dome and two wings: one for each chamber of Congress. The north wing is the Senate and the south wing is the House of Representatives. According to some GOP members of the Congress: Traditional family values have been under attack for the past 40 years. Apparently, the problem is Hollywood, the music industry, and certain books. Society needs to be saved from moral destruction and the minds of the children need to be protected.

Chrystelle then briefly discusses the history of censorship and offers some texts through which to gain perspective on the issue of politics, children, and censorship. Chrystelle ends her audio by sharing what she refers to as “paths worth investigating.” These include social issues and their political effects on children, the nature of the publishing industry, marketing trends, foreign children’s books (and related language and cultural translation issues), the freedom allowed when matching illustrations with text, independent book production units, government reading lists, school
library funding, and the lack of ability for children to make their own reading selections.

For Chrystelle, thinking about children's literature from a critical-literacy perspective created space for her to articulate and make public issues that had been brewing for some time. Hearing her own thoughts on the air gave her an opportunity to further unpack her own ideologies and come to a better understanding of the stances and positions from which she engages with texts. Reading and reacting to comments by others provided additional opportunities to discuss the issue at hand, thereby further helping the podcast reader/listener/audience make informed decisions about their stance on the topic or issue.

Discussion and Reflection

As teacher educators, we are fully engaged and truly excited about working with the arts and technology in our teacher-preparation courses. All of us have learned from each other at various points in our professional lives about the arts, technology, and critical literacy. Jerry and Vivian were introduced to critical literacy while in Australia with Barbara Comber. Jerry in turn introduced Peggy to critical literacy and semiotics, both theories that have greatly influenced their professional research and teaching. Vivian's work in technology and digital media influenced Peggy and Jerry's work with multimedia texts, and in particular, the use of podcasting as reflective practice. Peggy's work in visual discourse analysis has encouraged Jerry's and Vivian's renewed look at the underpinning visual structures and discourses at play in students' visual texts. It is this continual growth and synergy that keep us energized and looking for ways to support teachers as they work with their students in these areas.

When reading this piece, we hope that you take away one important point: how we frame the English language arts and literacy makes a difference. As educators, we must commit ourselves to learning the communication practices that our students use every day. Even though the arts and technology are marginal to most school curricula—as is working collaboratively with arts teachers or learning the technological knowledge that students bring to schools daily—we need to share what we know, create multimedia learning opportunities for students and ourselves, and use what we learn to imagine new possibilities for literacy and the English language arts. Further, while all communication is multimodal, too often we ELA and literacy teachers have a disproportionate reverence for the printed word which keeps us from fully exploring the significance of other modes of meaning expression. We include a visual text in our curriculum, add a song, or create a short play, but more often than not, we do this in conjunction with the written word. Although incorporating a visual text or using

For Chrystelle, thinking about children's literature from a critical-literacy perspective created space for her to articulate and make public issues that had been brewing for some time. Hearing her own thoughts on the air gave her an opportunity to further unpack her own ideologies and come to a better understanding of the stances and positions from which she engages with texts.
PowerPoint are significant moves in our teaching practices, we want to argue that multimodality and new literacies are more than merely adding another mode to the written word or asking students to compose in PowerPoint. These theories help us realize the significance that each design and compositional choice affords us in expressing meaning in ways the others cannot.

With the intention of shifting mindsets, we want to challenge teachers to engage in the very practices that they assign to students. We encourage teachers to pick up art tools (paint brushes, clay, digital cameras, pencil colors), see how meaning is made visually, and explore the properties of these tools. We want you to open up PowerPoint, MovieMaker, or iMovie and investigate its features and potential by creating multimedia texts that highlight your family vacation, your dogs playing in the backyard, or your students learning in the classroom. Within such inquiry, educators will be able to talk with students about the decisions they make and help them consider the process of production and revision across communication systems. Because today’s representations are comprised of many different elements that integrate language, the arts, music, and technology, how we work and talk with children about the interpretation and production of said texts makes a difference in how they socially position themselves as literate beings and consumers of these texts. Further, this type of work supports a new set of literacy practices in which critical decision-making and reflection play a large role in the process of creating meaning, as well as a new set of social practices in which the viewing, analysis, design, and development of projects using technology and the arts becomes commonplace. When we understand what these affordances bring to the work we do, we can transcend our very selves by generating new ideas; this is the essence of what literacy—and the power of being literate—are all about.

We live in a highly wired and visually sophisticated world. As teacher educators we need to reconceptualize teacher education so as to include engagements that allow teachers to discover for themselves the relationship between digital technologies and empowered literacy learning. Teachers, after all, can only do for students what they have experienced for themselves. If we wish to create individuals who are critically literate, it is important that students not only experience a variety of communicative tools but do so across the curriculum and in a way that allows them to deal with issues of social significance. So while English language arts teachers need to explore the potential of technology to communicate, they also have to critically study how such media shapes viewers’ interpretations. To be fully literate is to take social action by actively deciding how you wish to position yourself in the world and what identity you wish to take on.

References


**Peggy Albers** is an associate professor in the Language and Literacy unit of the Middle and Secondary Education and Instructional Technology Department at Georgia State University, Atlanta.

**Vivian M. Vasquez** is an associate professor in the School of Education, Teaching, and Health at American University in Washington, DC. Her research and teaching focus primarily on critical literacies, new literacies, early childhood and elementary education, and education for social justice and equity.

**Jerome C. Harste** is professor emeritus of language education at Indiana University. He can be contacted at jerry.harste@gmail.com.

---

**Candidates Announced for the 2008 WLU Elections**

**For President Elect (vote for one):**

Rita Moore, Willamette University, Salem, OR
Dennis Szymkowiak, Mundelein High School, Mundelein, IL

**For Executive Board (vote for two):**

Sally Brown, Charleston Southern University, Charleston, SC
Brian Cambourne, University of Wollongong, Australia
Mi-Hyun Chung, Mercy College, NY
Melissa Conner, Tennessee Tech University, Cookville
Caryl Crowell, Borton Primary Magnet School, Tucson, AZ
Mary MacKay, Lincoln Heights Community Magnet Elementary, NC
Prisca Martens, Towson University, MD
Howard Miller, Mercy College, NY
Timothy Shea, University of Virginia, Charlottesville

Ballot information was mailed April 15 and must be returned to NCTE by **July 1, 2008**. Election results will be announced at the Delegates Assembly on Saturday, July 19, during the Literacies for All Summer Institute in Tucson, Arizona.

Further information about the candidates and the election process can be found on the WLU Web site at www.ncte.org/groups/wlu.