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As I write this editorial, I am amazed at the world in which it is located – a place and space that is constantly changing with the development of new technologies and the concurrent rise of complimentary new language and literacy practices. Ten years ago the term "new literacies" was only used by those prescient researchers who perceived that new technologies were going to shape language and literacies, such as Lankshear and Knobel's (1997) early work on literacies and texts in an electronic age. Others, such as the New London Group (1996) through their work on multiliteracies, were instrumental in evolving the idea of literacies shaped by technologies and contexts; setting the stage for new literacies to become the vibrant field it is today. While the field has grown over the past decade, the central concern of new literacies research remains the same; researchers scrutinize and analyze how the rapid development of new tools and technologies are shaping language and literacy practices. In this special themed issue of *Digital Culture and Education (DCE)*, we begin a conversation that compliments how we think about conceptualizing, viewing and talking about "new" literacies.

"New literacies" emerged from literacy research, primarily the New Literacy Studies (Gee 1996; Heath, 1983; Street, 1995), as an area of research in its own right (Gee 2009). The field of new literacies focuses on how language and literacies are shaped by the ongoing development of new tools and technologies and their roles in daily life. However, in the case of new literacies, the emphasis is on what makes them "new" in a world of constantly evolving technological tools that exploit the affordances of ubiquitous network connections alongside up-to-the-minute software and hardware designs. Take for example Apple's iPad and its affordances: what does it mean to read an eBook that so closely approximates the real thing? Is it just the same? Reading on a computer screen, or online is very different from reading a book, at least right now. But that is changing quickly and a multitude of factors relate to those changes.

In fact, new literacies change so quickly, they can be thought of as deictic, or dependent on the context on which they are used at the moment they are used (Leu et al. 2004, p. 1591): "Today, technological change happens so rapidly that the changes to literacy are limited not to technology, but rather by our ability to adapt and acquire the new literacies that emerge". Deixis, a linguistic term, relates to words such as "now" or "here", that are understood completely in context – what is "now" means something completely different five minutes later from when it was first uttered. From a research standpoint, deixis means we must research and understand new literacies as they are happening, as users adopt new technologies and make them a part of their lives. These new literacies span the multiple spaces—education, family, leisure, private, public, work—of our lives, and are embedded in our daily activities (Coiro et al., 2008). New literacies change faster than traditional literacies because of the rapidity of technological change; what it means for someone to be a Facebook user now may be very different two days or two weeks from now, as changes to the technology or to the user's life occur.

This special issue, entitled "Beyond new literacies," seeks to broaden the conversation around new literacies research by extending the possibilities to include multiple lenses and research perspectives. Here we mean "beyond" as "in addition to" – in the sense of adding to the conversation between new literacies research and other theoretical and methodological frames that will enrich the study of new literacies. It is a

call to augment a complex field. As Coiro et al (2008, p. 12) write in the *Handbook of Research on New Literacies*:

> Research questions on the new literacies of the Internet and other digital technologies take place in contexts that are far too complex and too rich for any single perspective to account for all that is taking place. We believe that to understand these new literacies will collectively require us to bring multiple sets of perspectives to research on new literacies.

This special issue brings additional perspectives to new literacies research in order to expand its contribution to the growing field of digital media and learning. To that end, this issue was originally proposed as a call for perspectives on new literacies that add new perspectives, and complicate the tensions between new and traditional viewpoints. In this issue, we include articles that match new literacies work with spatial theory, visual literacy, critical literacy, and semiotics as well as articles that explore the tensions between new literacies and traditional literacies in on and offline spaces.

Defining and understanding new literacies

Defining new literacies as 'new' is possible in two ways; first in their "technical stuff", or in terms of the kinds of affordances that new technological tools allow and second in their "ethos" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007, pp. 7-9). The technical relates directly to the technical affordances of the technology, or the direct practices the technology allows. Texting via mobile phones is an excellent example. What are the technical affordances associated with texting? What does texting allow or constrain? Texting allows for short, staccato messages rather than longer, full messages with complete words, which has given rise to an entire genre of writing and set of phrases and abbreviations, some of which have crossed over into other language and literacy practices. The limitations of the mobile phone constrain and shape the literacy practices available to the tool in particular ways.

New literacies are also new in their "ethos" or spirit. New literacies, in contrast with traditional literacies, are more participatory. They are more collaborative in allowing for the open sharing and creation of information on sites like wikis and blogs. New literacies also offer the opportunity for the design of texts that are fluid and can be added to, remixed and constantly re-shaped. They can be shared easily through less hierarchical forms of distribution (Jenkins, 2006; Lankshear & Knobel, 2007). The ideas of the "read-write" web and Web 2.0, where easy publishing, blogging, posting of pictures and social networking exist has created a shift of power that changes in possibilities of authorship and challenges notions of expertise. One way of thinking about the change in power is as a change in mindset between ideas of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 (Knobel & Wilber, 2009) or between a "physical-industrial" and "cyberspatial-postindustrialist" model (Lankshear & Knobel 2007, p.11). In the first case technology is the location of information and texts are unchanging; the user interacts with the technology primarily to get information on an individual basis. In the second case, texts are changeable, and authorship is open, giving the user more power to write, remix, and publish. Expertise is open, and collaboration is common and distributed among users.

This change in mindset is exemplified in the depth of participation by users in what is known as "participatory cultures," (Jenkins, 2006, p. 3) how users participate in popular culture and new literacies through practices such as fan fiction, gaming, and online web communities. This involves participation in communities, which may include

contributing original texts, organizing online and face-to-face meetings, and editing and publishing work.

New literacies are multimodal (Kress, 1997; Jewitt, 2009; Walsh, 2009), or comprised of multiple modes – visual, sound, and text-based. The online text is different to that of the print-based page. What it means to read has also changed because readers must now make sense of multiple modes of communication: video, images and advertising. This challenges orthodox understanding of texts: what counts as a text; how text structures are created, understood, shaped and re-shaped (in the case of remixing); how genres are made and subverted; and how copyright is defined and understood (Lessig, 2008).

New literacies also cross conventional notions of space (Leander, 2003; 2008). They are existent in and around physical spaces and are embedded in the personal and work lives of users. They are found in popular culture texts and identity practices (Hagood, 2008), such as anime and fan fiction (Black, 2008) or gaming (Steinkuehler, 2008; Squire, 2008; Walsh, 2010). Often, new literacies are central to the lives of users in and out of school, work, and many other contexts, therefore making them a rich site of research not just from a new literacies standpoint but also from other theoretical frames and methodologies such as ethnographies of youth informed by definitions of participation, publics and learning as well as literacy (see recent research on the digital lives of teens, Ito *et al.* 2010).

Papers in this Special Issue

Each of the papers in this issue explores the field of new literacies from a different perspective, bringing in new theoretical lenses, delving into existing tensions between new and traditional literacies, extending new literacies research into new fields, and bridging new literacies research across diverse spaces. Each has a particular position on new literacies, and extends the conversation in new ways, moving us in some sense "beyond" what is already known.

Rebecca W. Black, in her paper entitled "The language of Webkinz: Early childhood literacy in an online virtual world" explores the tensions between the new literacies embedded in the Shared Virtual Environment (SVE) of Webkinz and the traditional conceptions of literacy woven throughout the site. Her article examines how fears around internet safety and static conceptions of literacy and learning can function to constrain the affordances of an SVE. Despite the possibilities built into an SVE, her finely nuanced analysis shows the contrasts between the new literacies inherent in the sites and the traditional literacy practices afforded to the users through constraints and conceptions around literacy and internet safety. While it would seem that a website like this would proffer only new literacies, Black's article explores how traditional literacy practices can be instilled through activities mirroring classroom literacy practices and issues with child safety.

Similarly, Maryam Moayeri, in her paper "Classroom uses of social network sites: Traditional practices or new literacies," explores how a social networking site in two secondary English courses was used to support and develop both new and traditional literacies. The uses of the sites, depending on situation, student and teacher concept of the site, practices, assessments, and other factors determined the ways in which the sites were defined and/or limited to new and traditional uses. Despite the affordances of the tool and the directive of the school to integrate Web 2.0 technologies, Moayeri's paper presents the ways in which new technologies do not always lead directly to new literacies and how contexts, issues of power, access, and

student response can cause new tools to be used in traditional as well as new ways, despite the intentions and pedagogical goals of the teachers.

In fact, definitions themselves of new literacies are still traveling across contexts, so to speak – in this case, those spaces where the public and the research community meet and come to understand ideas of literacy and new literacies. In her paper, "Talking past each other: Academic and media framing of literacy", Katherine Oganeyova uses semantic analysis and Goffman's notion of frames to compare thematic coverage of literacy in the New York Times with definitions of media literacy embedded in the Jenkins et al. (2006) white paper entitled Confronting the 'Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century'. The article illustrates how ideas of new literacies within the research community stand in stark contrast against the definitions of literacy found in the New York Times; both in terms of how literacy is defined and how technology as an idea is rarely associated with literacy. The paper concludes by explaining how the two frames, the New York Times and the Jenkins et al. white paper, demonstrate two distinct mindsets, transformative or restrictive understandings of literacy.

Working within a definition of new literacies as transformative, in "Education Remix: New media, literacies, and the emerging digital geographies," Lalitha Vasudevan brings what she calls "digital geographies" bear on the new literacies of her participants as they negotiate their world through the use of new technologies to make meaning in an Alternative to Incarceration Program (ATIP). By bringing in the spaces in which these students work, Vasudevan illustrates how the participants both are shaping and are shaped by the spaces around them and the tools at their disposal. Given that new technologies traversing digital landscapes and educational spaces exist at multiple locations, Vasudevan argues compellingly for a digital geography embedded within and across literacy practices themselves.

In "Digital technologies and performative pedagogies: Repositioning the visual," Kathryn Grushka and Debra Donnelly work with preservice teachers to develop what they have termed "critical visuality" – a way to work with images critically to new literacies through semiotics, critical analysis of images, remixing and visual literacy. Like Vasudevan, this work draws upon the transformative potential of new literacies, although here they focus on the powerful potential of images themselves within constructivist pedagogy. They argue for the necessity for teachers to learn, as a part of a new literacies framework, visual literacy and critical pedagogy, in order to engage students to better understand their world and construct learning.

Also within a constructivist pedagogy, "Improvable objects and attached dialogue: new literacy practices employed by learners to build knowledge together in asynchronous settings", Rebecca Ferguson, Karen Littleton and Denise Whitlock explore how new literacy practices can be used as a framework to understand the development of attached dialogue and the construction of improved objects. This paper presents asynchronous chat as a new literacies practice that participants engaged in through attached dialogue that led to the development of improvable objects. By using new literacies as a framework, the article sheds light on how participants had to learn the chat system as a tool in order to communicate and create the object over time – an aspect of research on asynchronous chat which is often ignored.

Overall, these papers begin a conversation which we anticipate will augment the field of new literacies, but also research into digital culture, technology, and society and understanding the ways in which new media, tools, and information are shaping our lives. This issue presents innovative perspectives on new literacies through fine-grained examinations of specific literacy practices through the frames of spatial theory, visual and critical literacy, and examinations of the tensions between new and traditional

literacies in a variety of spaces and contexts. New literacies emerge quickly and diverse users adopt them accordingly. These realities offer researchers new opportunities for understanding and exploring their affordances.

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