

Literacy, Media, Technology

Past, Present and Future

Edited by Becky Parry,
Cathy Burnett and Guy Merchant

B L O O M S B U R Y

'A compelling guide to how literacy, media and technology have converged. Read it to understand how communication practices have changed. Prescribe it for students to challenge their assumptions about available technologies. Recommend it to doctoral candidates to push their thinking in new directions.'

Ilana Snyder, Emeritus Professor, Faculty of Education, Monash University, Australia

'Highlighting provocative connections between our present-day literacy practices and those from the past, this engaging and thought-provoking collection of essays uncovers valuable insights about how we shape, and are shaped by, media and technology. Calling attention to troubling gaps between media research and educational practice, the volume has important implications for curriculum and pedagogy.'

Carrie James, Lecturer, Harvard Graduate School of Education, Harvard University, USA

Literacy, Media, Technology considers the continued significance of popular culture forms such as postcards, film, television, games, virtual worlds and social media for educators. Following multiple pathways through technological innovation, the contributors reflect on the way in which digital and portable devices lead to new and emerging forms of reading, participating and creating. Rejecting linear conceptualisations of progression, they explore how time is not linear as technological advances are experienced in multiple ways linked to different personal, social, political and economic trajectories. The contributors describe a range of practices from formal and informal education spaces and interrogate some of the continuities and discontinuities associated with literacy, media and technology at a time when rapidly evolving communicative practices often meet intransigence in educational systems.

The chapters adopt diverse forms: historical perspectives, personal story and reflection, project reports, document analysis, critical reviews of resources, ethnographic accounts, and analyses of meaning-making within and beyond educational institutions. Together, they provide multiple insights into the diverse and fluid relationships between literacy, media, technology, and everyday life, and the many ways in which these relationships are significant to educational research and practice.

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Cathy Burnett is Professor of Literacy and Education at Sheffield Hallam University, UK. She has published widely in the field of literacy and technology.

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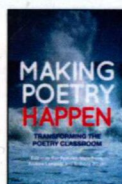
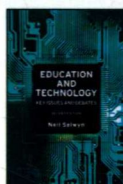
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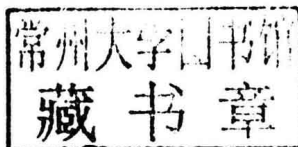


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Foreword

Every foreword I have written has a story behind it. This one is no exception. It started with a conversation about 'past', 'present' and 'future' – words in the subtitle of the present volume, *Literacy, Media, Technology*. Unbeknownst to the person asking my help in revising a similar subtitle for a manuscript he had written – one that the reviewers and a journal editor found problematic – I had just completed a first draft of the foreword you see in front of you. Briefly, the editor wanted a snappy subtitle that steered clear of all allusions to the linear, the straightforward or predictable. Smiling to myself at the coincidental circumstances that had brought us together, I invited the person seeking my assistance to read this foreword. He did, and in the end, he negotiated successfully with the journal editor to keep the same three words in the exact order, but for different reasons.

My reason for finding past, present and future both suitable and necessary in the subtitle of *Literacy, Media, Technology* has its source in Lillian Hellman's introduction to *Pentimento: A Book of Portraits* published in 1973. To Hellman, the term *pentimento* captured the following conditions.

Old paint on canvas, as it ages, sometimes becomes transparent. When that happens it is possible, in some pictures, to see the original lines: a tree will show through a woman's dress, a child makes way for a dog, a large boat is no longer on an open sea. That is called *pentimento* because the painter 'repented', changed his mind. Perhaps it would be as well to say that the old conception, replaced by a later choice, is a way of seeing and then seeing again (p. 3).

It's the seeing and then seeing again process in Hellman's definition that spoke to me as I read the separate chapters in the current edited volume. For example, I saw in some chapters a definition of literacy that replaced an earlier one. But did it indeed? And if it did, what nuances were added, what were subtracted and with what effect? More to the point, why didn't the absence or presence of so-called new definitions and new forms of literacy stop me cold, especially when they appeared side by side with citations to people's work that I both knew and respected?

These same questions could be applied to media and technology. On more than one occasion I realized I didn't need concepts such as New Media or newer

technologies of the twenty-first century spelled out or signalled in some other way. It was as if Hellman's notion of pentimento was sufficient: I was recognizing the past, present – yes, even anticipating the future at times – based on some aspect of literacy (or media, or technology) that showed through a different context, made its way in a changing demographic swell or simply ended up somewhat haphazardly in a configuration that defied instant recognition.

And I was comfortable with all these embodied perceptions, save one. For Hellman, pentimento depended on original lines. For instance, it was the original somewhat faded or morphed that shone through old paint on canvas. Not so for me, at least not as first-time reader of *Literacy, Media, Technology: Past, Present and Future*. Original implies a beginning – an ordering relative to some imagined middle or ending. In my view, there are only middles that connect to other middles, devoid of movement forwards and back – but not static, not by any means.

Let my personal reflections on *Literacy, Media, Technology: Past, Present, and Future* wax too poetic or philosophic or lead to entanglements (even messes) deemed unworthy of the impressive time, effort and scholarship that went into this volume, let me switch roles from reader to enactor, or doer. It's the role change I tell learners in my online classes that can lead to action plans, to walking the walk, not simply talking the talk.

One action plan I have in mind involves adopting this book as the primary text for use in a course I teach online, titled 'Popular Culture in Literacy Classrooms K-12'. Until three years ago, the course was a face-to-face offering. That changed when I found myself directing learners to the Web more often than not to engage in synchronous and asynchronous small group discussions while they sat physically assembled in a room too small to talk face-to-face. Now, fully online with scheduled Google+ hangouts twice a semester, my pop culture class is in need of a text that can support both linear and nonlinear learners. Whether read in past-present-future order or dipped into at will, *Literacy, Media, Technology* embeds the concepts and topics that I value and would like my students exposed to. A second action plan consists of using the book to introduce incoming doctoral students to a range of theoretical frameworks for connecting practice and research. These frameworks, derived from the same literature that the students will encounter in their courses, while presenting at national and international conferences, or designing their dissertation proposals, provide editorial structure and organization to what otherwise might seem a mere collection of research studies. The chapter authors write with authoritative competence on issues that range from child–parent interactions aimed at

critically mediating the media, to identifying the limitations of technological determinism, to studying assemblages that include postdigital literacies and gaming interfaces. Most importantly, the editors have given careful attention to the importance of an internationally balanced and representative research base. What better way to acknowledge a future that readers can recognize and enactors can engage.

Finally, *Literacy, Media, Technology: Past, Present and Future* feeds seamlessly into action plans that call for putting to rest the artificial differences in formal and informal learning. The editors and authors featured in this volume are known for not mincing words and certainly for not taking shortcuts or avoiding controversy. As a result, what they have assembled here will extend the shelf life of this volume. For where else will readers and enactors find a more supportive intellectual environment in which to 'repent' and change their minds, much as Lillian Hellman envisioned.

Donna E. Alvermann

The University of Georgia, USA

Reference

Hellman, L. (1973). *Pentimento: A book of portraits*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown.

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