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HANDBOOK OF  
RESEARCH  
ON NEW  
LITERACIES

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# HANDBOOK OF RESEARCH ON NEW LITERACIES

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# Preface

## Purpose

During a period when the Internet has deeply altered our literacy lives, the *Handbook of Research on New Literacies* provides a central resource to support the emergence of new literacies research. It brings together leading scholars from around the world to review research in their area, from the perspectives they find to provide the greatest insight, as they study how the Internet and other digital technologies profoundly redefine what it means to be literate. We expect the *Handbook of Research on New Literacies* to provide the central leadership for this newly emerging field, directing scholars to the major issues, theoretical perspectives, and interdisciplinary research on new literacies. The *Handbook* helps us to begin the bold new thinking required to reconceptualize literacy research.

Students of the history of literacy research will recall that reading research attracted a broad collection of researchers, from many disciplines, during the final decades of the 20th century. That intensive, interdisciplinary effort prompted a richer and more complex understanding about the nature of reading and it moved literacy research forward in important new directions. A similar phenomenon may be taking place today with new literacies. As literacy and technology converge on the Internet, many scholars from many different disciplines are moving their research into this arena. They find that the constructs emerging in new literacies research inform their own work in productive ways. At the same time, it is increasingly clear that new literacies research also impacts societies, education systems, and public policies in powerful ways. As a result, educators, policy makers, employers, and the public at large all recognize that these new literacies of the Internet will be central to the most important literacy and learning issues of our generation. We believe it is time to capture the emergence of this new area of research, to inform others,

and to begin the construction of an important new area of inquiry. We seek to accomplish all of this with *The Handbook of Research on New Literacies*.

This first volume of the *Handbook* is much more about raising questions than it is about providing answers, though both will be found in abundance within these pages. The *Handbook of Research on New Literacies* provides a single location for reviewing wide-ranging, interdisciplinary research through multiple lenses, and in multiple areas of inquiry, in order to determine the most important issues, problems, and questions that must be studied as the Internet becomes this generation's defining technology for literacy and learning. Such a volume is integral to developing the multifaceted perspective necessary to improve our understanding of literacy in online and other digital spaces.

The ethos of the *Handbook* is to provide conceptual, theoretical, and methodological shape for an emerging field without unduly foreclosing on potentially valuable perspectives and epistemological approaches. Our approach has been to allow leading researchers to collectively define central constructs and central issues through their individual work, not to force a single perspective upon a newly emerging field. We are confident that this is the only sensible approach during the emergence of this important area of inquiry, and it is one that takes full advantage of all perspectives about what new literacies are and how we might best study them.

Finally, the irony of a volume on new literacies research that appears within the pages of a 500-year-old technology is not lost on us. Nor is the irony that changes to literacy happen so quickly that some elements of this change will appear, and go unreported in this handbook, during the time required to publish a hard copy volume of this nature. We expect that economic, technology, and research pressures will eventually remove these revealing ironies; the nature of literacy is changing far faster than some elements of our society can respond, especially those so intrinsically connected to printing-press technologies. Like nearly everything else in literacy, this, too, will change.

### Audience

The audience for this volume includes members of the international literacy research community, broadly conceived. This includes scholars from the traditional reading and writing research communities, as well as scholars from information science, library and media studies, cognitive science, educational psychology, psychology, sociolinguistics, linguistics, computer-mediated communication (CMC), computer science, and other related areas that find new online literacies to be an important area of investigation. Graduate students in these disciplines will also find the collection of research reviews to be useful. The final section, where we provide reprints of central studies in this area along with commentaries by leading scholars, reflects a special commitment to our readers who are graduate students. We believe these commentaries will

demonstrate the benefit of bringing multiple perspectives to bear on the interpretation of research and show students how leading scholars analyze research methods, results, and interpretations. Finally, given recent interest in data-driven public policies around the world, another important audience for this volume will be policy makers and school administrators who seek summaries of the latest research to inform their own important decisions. We believe the research reviews in this volume will be especially useful to their work.

### Authors and Structure

Authors have been selected on the basis of their leadership and/or innovative research in their special area of investigation. Each has a clearly established reputation in his or her research area. We include leaders from around the world in the areas of social semiotics and multimodality, online research methodology, ethnographies of new literacies, multimedia studies, cognition and instruction, blogging research, instant messaging (IM) research, gaming, information science, computer-mediated communication, e-learning and learning management, cultural influences on learning technologies, online navigation, reading comprehension research, child and adolescent literacy studies, qualitative methods, experimental methods, and many other important areas of inquiry that are taking place today.

It is far too early to neatly categorize new literacies research into orthogonal topics, each with clearly defined constructs. As with any newly emerging field, the work can be conceptually messy and inchoate. Thus, we are convinced that the structure of this volume will change in subsequent editions as topics, constructs, and perspectives become much more precisely defined. In this volume, we have tried to permit current work to logically cluster itself into categories.

After an initial chapter by the editors, the next five sections represent the principal areas in which significant developments are occurring at the present time. Part I, *Methodologies*, addresses issues introduced by the broad range of methodologies with which research on new literacies is currently taking place. The sweep of these chapters demonstrates the extensive range of current work, from ethnographic approaches to experimental studies. In Part II, *Knowledge and Inquiry*, the authors introduce a number of different perspectives central to understanding how best to use the informational potential of the Internet and other digital contexts to acquire knowledge. Contributors to Part III, *Communication*, review the latest research occurring in new communication contexts such as blogs, instant messaging, and other social networking tools. Articles in this section also explore the roles that gender and language play during new online literacy practices. Part IV, *Popular Culture, Community, and Citizenship: Everyday Literacies*, addresses research in new literacy spaces such as the online and offline worlds of gaming, anime, manga, and fan fiction, as well as the range of challenges

associated with issues of popular culture, identity, citizenship, online collaborative community projects, and other aspects of everyday literacies. New ways of thinking about classroom instruction and assessment are introduced in Part V, *Instructional Practices and Assessment*. This section covers new literacies research in classrooms ranging from elementary school to higher education and addresses ways in which we might consider assessing the new literacies beginning to appear in educational contexts.

Finally, a special section, *Multiple Perspectives on New Literacies Research*, concludes the volume. Part VI includes five reprinted articles that have been identified by the editors and section contributors as central to the fields in which they work, one from each of the main sections. It also includes commentaries on each study by two leaders in the area of new literacies research, each of whom brings a different perspective to the task. Thus, we invite the development of multiple perspectives to ensure that we begin to build richer, more diverse, and more complexly framed research in this area. We seek to take advantage of the benefits that diverse lenses provide as we collectively build this area of inquiry.

### The Editorial Team

Besides a wonderful collection of authors, an important advantage we possessed on this project was a diverse editorial team, each of whom takes a different theoretical and methodological stance in relation to issues of literacy and technology. The important research issues today have become far too complex for any single person to navigate; they require teams of people, each of whom brings their special expertise and theoretical perspective to the research enterprise. This is what we were fortunate to have. From a frenetic meeting over dinner in Melbourne after a long motorcycle ride, to lengthy working sessions in Mystic, Connecticut, and Granada, Spain, the *Handbook* was completed in a truly global fashion as the editors managed their obligations in different parts of the world. Each of the editors contributed equally to the work on this volume, though in different ways and at different times. As a result, both editor order and author order for the initial chapter were determined by the alphabetical order of our last names.

### Distinctive Features of The Book

We sought to include several distinctive elements in this volume:

1. *A Diverse International Editorial Team.* The editors come from New Zealand, Australia, and North America. Their backgrounds include work in out-of-school literacies, in-school literacies, professional development, online reading comprehension, instruction, assessment, teacher education, public policy, and a range of different technologies.

2. *International Contributions.* The contributions in this volume include 34 authors from North America, 10 from Australia, 7 from the United Kingdom, 2 from the Netherlands, and 1 each from Norway and South Africa.
3. *An Extensive, Rich, and Diverse Collection of Research Reviews.* This volume contains 43 reviews of research, including ten commentaries to five selected research studies. As such, the scope of this volume represents many different areas and topics that are now being looked at from a new literacies perspective.
4. *Multiple Theoretical Conceptualizations.* Many handbooks of research appear to privilege one, or several, theoretical perspectives over others. We attempted to avoid this limitation. We deliberately sought out disparate theoretical orientations to shake up traditional psychological, cognitive, social, and cultural divisions and encourage interdisciplinary thinking. We believe it is essential to include as wide a range of research as possible that is being conducted at a broadly construed intersection of digital technologies and literacy practices and processes. Our belief is that the changes taking place to literacy today will require the richest possible theoretical foundations in order to understand them.
5. *The Commentary Section.* Our final section is unique. We reprint central research studies, nominated by each section's authors and selected by the editors. In addition, we have two prominent researchers provide a commentary/review of each selected work written from their particular theoretical position, each of which is quite different. We believe this provides the field with both a sense of the diverse lenses that can be brought to bear on research as well as the benefits that accrue when we do so. Such an approach is central to the process we believe will advance research in this area. It should also model for new scholars, just entering the field, the importance of bringing multiple perspectives to the study of an area as complex as new literacies research.



## Acknowledgments

We want to acknowledge the generosity of all our contributing authors. We know the extent to which producing invited work adds to already demanding workloads. It is rarely, if ever, convenient to receive such invitations, let alone to accept and meet their deadlines. For this generosity, we are deeply appreciative. We also want to acknowledge the leadership they provide to this emerging field. Their research, insights, and reviews of the work being conducted in their areas are the driving force behind the rapidly emerging area of new literacies research.

In addition, we wish to thank Naomi Silverman from Lawrence Erlbaum Associates for her unstinting moral and practical support for this project. Naomi encouraged this handbook from the outset, when it first began with Erlbaum, and helped keep us on track at crucial points along the long road to its final production. We also thank Naomi's assistant at Erlbaum, Erika Kika. She made our lives much easier with her careful work. In addition our appreciation goes to Project Editor Michele Dimont and Editorial Assistant Mary Hillemeir at Taylor & Francis for their work at the main stages of production.

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The Editors

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