Reprint: Beliefs for Integrating Technology into the English Language Arts Classroom

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This statement, formerly known as "Beliefs about Technology and the Preparation of English Teachers," was updated in October 2018 with the new title, "Beliefs for Integrating Technology into the English Language Arts Classroom" on the National Council of Teachers of English website at http://www2.ncte.org/statement/beliefs-technology-preparation-english-teachers/

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Preamble

What it means to communicate, create, and participate in society seems to change constantly as we increasingly rely on computers, smartphones, and the web to do so.

Despite this change, the challenge that renews itself — for teachers, teacher educators, and researchers — is to be responsive to such changes in meaningful ways without abandoning the kinds of practices and principles that we as English educators have come to value and know to work.

That's why we created this document — a complete update and overhaul of a 2005 document published on behalf of the Conference on English Education, "Beliefs about Technology and the Preparation of English Teachers: Beginning the Conversation," published in *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education.*

With some members of that original working group, as well as with many colleagues who have emerged in our field since that time, we offer a layered framework to support colleagues in their efforts to confidently and creatively explore networked, ubiquitous technologies in a way that deepens and expands the core principles of practice that have emerged over the last century in English and literacy education.

We begin by articulating four belief statements, crafted by this working group, composed of teachers as well as teacher educators and researchers. Then, we unpack each of the four belief statements in the form of an accessible summary paragraph followed by specific suggestions for K–12 teachers, teacher educators, and researchers. We conclude each section with a sampling of related scholarship.

As you read, you will notice that the beliefs are interwoven and echo each other necessarily; they are recursive but not redundant. We anticipate that as you read, you will see ways that they complement (or even conflict with) each other in theory or practice. Our field is complex, as is human experience. Our goal is to offer the field something well researched, usable, and empowering. If any of those words occur to you while reading, we will have considered our task complete, for now.

All contributors have offered their time, talent, and energy. Without the people noted at this document's conclusion, this simply would not have happened. Moreover, we thank our four external reviewers whose feedback was thorough and thoughtful, and contributed with expertise, collegiality, and aplomb.

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Beliefs for Integrating Technology into the English Language Arts Classroom

1. Literacy means literacies. Literacy is more than reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing as traditionally defined. It is more useful to think of literacies, which are social practices that transcend individual modes of communication.
2. Consider literacies before technologies. New technologies should be considered only when it is clear how they can enhance, expand, and/or deepen engaging and sound practices related to literacies instruction.

3. Technologies provide new ways to consume and produce texts. What it means to consume and produce texts is changing as digital technologies offer new opportunities to read, write, listen, view, record, compose, and interact with both the texts themselves and with other people.
4. Technologies and their associated literacies are not neutral. While access to technology and the internet has the potential to lessen issues of inequity, they can also perpetuate and even accelerate discrimination based on gender, race, socioeconomic status, and other factors.

The Beliefs Expanded

Belief 1: Literacy means literacies.

Literacy is more than reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing as traditionally defined. It is more useful to think of literacies, which are social practices that transcend individual modes of communication.

In today's world, it is insufficient to define literacy as only skills-based reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing. Even though common standards documents, textbook series, and views on instruction may maintain the traditional definition of literacy as print-based, researchers are clear that it is more accurate to approach literacy as literacies or literacy practices. (We'll use the former here.)

There are multiple ways people communicate in a variety of social contexts. What's more, the way people communicate increasingly necessitates networked, technological mediation. To that end, relying exclusively on traditional definitions of literacy unnecessarily limits the ways students can communicate and the ways educators can imagine curriculum and pedagogy.

Understanding the complexities of literacies, we believe:

1. K–12 English teachers, with their students, should

   • engage literacies as social practices by sponsoring students in digital writing and connected reading to collaboratively construct knowledge, participate in immersive learning experiences, and reach out to their own community and a global audience.
   • encourage multimodal digital communication while modeling how to effectively compose images, presentations, graphics, or other media productions by combining video clips, images, sound, music, voice-overs, and other media.
   • promote digital citizenship by modeling and mentoring students' use of devices, tools, social media, and apps to create media and interact with others.
   • develop information literacies to determine the validity and relevance of media for academic argument including varied sources (e.g., blogs, Wikipedia, online databases, YouTube, mainstream news sites, niche news sites).
   • foster critical media literacies by engaging students in analysis of both commercial media corporations and social media by examining information-reporting strategies, advertising of products or experiences, and portrayals of individuals in terms of gender, race, socioeconomic status, physical and cognitive ability, and other factors.

2. English teacher educators, with preservice and inservice teachers, should

- critically evaluate a variety of texts (across genres and media) using a variety of theoretical perspectives (e.g., social semiotics, connectivism, constructivism, post-humanism).
- consider the influence of digital technologies/networks in English language arts (ELA) methods courses to help preservice and inservice teachers foster use of digital/multimodal/critical literacies to support their students' learning.
- model classroom use of literacy practices for creating and critiquing texts as well as for engaging with digital and networked technologies.
- design assignments, activities, and assessments that encourage interdisciplinary thinking, community and civic engagement, and technological integration informed by theories relevant to ELA.

3. English and literacy researchers should

- study literacies as more than general reading and writing abilities and move toward an understanding of teaching and learning within expanded frames of literacies and literacy practices (e.g., new literacies, multiliteracies, and socially situated literacies).
- question how technologies shape and mediate literacy practices in different scenes and spaces for activating user agency and making change.
- examine to what degree access to and support of digital tools/technologies and instruction in schools reflects and/or perpetuates inequality.
- explore how students and/or teachers negotiate the use of various literacies for various purposes.
- make explicit the ways technologies and literacies intersect with various user identities and understandings about and across different disciplines.
- articulate how policies and financial support at various levels (local, state, and national) inform both the infrastructure and the capacities for intellectual freedom to engage with literacies in personally and socially transformative ways.

Some Related Scholarship

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Belief 2: Consider literacies before technologies.

New technologies should be considered only when it is clear how they can enhance, expand, and/or deepen engaging and sound practices related to literacies instruction.

In news releases and on school websites, it is not uncommon for educators to promote new technologies that appear to be more engaging for students or efficient for teachers.

Engagement and efficiency are worthwhile pursuits, but it is also necessary to ensure that any use of a new technology serves intentional and sound instructional practices. Further, educators must be mindful to experiment with new technologies before using them with students, and at scale, in order to avoid overshadowing sound instruction with technical troubleshooting.

Finally, many new technologies can be used both inside and outside school, so educators should gain a good understanding of both the instructional potential (e.g., accessing class materials from home) and problems (e.g., issues of data privacy or cyber-bullying) of any potential technology use. Technological decisions must be guided by our theoretical and practical understanding of literacies as social practices.

Understanding this need to focus on instructional strategies that promote mindful literacy practices when using technologies, we believe:

1. K–12 English teachers, with their students, should

    - identify the unique purposes, audiences, and contexts related to online/e-book reading as well as digital writing, moving beyond historical conceptions of literature and composition in more narrowly defined, text-centric ways.

- explore an expanded definition of "text" in a digital world which includes alphabetic text as well as multimodal texts such as images, charts, videos, maps, and hypertexts.
- discuss issues of intellectual property and licensing in the context of multimodal reading and writing, including concepts related to copyright, fair use, Creative Commons, and the public domain.

2. English teacher educators, with preservice and inservice teachers, should

- recognize the role of out-of-school literacies and consider the place of students' own language uses in mediated spaces, including the use of abbreviations, acronyms, emojis, and other forms of "digitalk."
- model instructional practices and engage in new literacies that teachers themselves will employ with their own K–12 students such as composing, publishing, and reflecting on a video documentary or digital story.
- focus on affordances and constraints of technologies that can be used for varied purposes (e.g., the use of a collaborative word processor for individual writing with peer feedback, for group brainstorming, or for whole-class content curation) over fixed uses of limited tools such as online quiz systems, basic reading comprehension tests, or grammar games.

3. English and literacy researchers should

- consider how existing paradigms such as New Literacy Studies, New Literacies, and the Pedagogy of Multiliteracies can help to understand how students themselves experience technology, as well as how to use technology to enhance student learning.
- develop research agendas that examine best practices in K-12 classrooms where teachers leverage the power of literacies and technologies to help foster student voice and activism.
- build on a rich ethnographic tradition in our field to discover how literacy practices—for teachers and for students—change across time, space, and location.
- focus on inquiry that balances the novelty of digital tools with the overarching importance of teaching and learning for deep meaning-making, substantive conversation, and critical thinking.

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Belief 3: Technologies provide new ways to consume and produce texts.

What it means to consume and produce texts is changing as digital technologies offer new opportunities to read, write, listen, view, record, compose, and interact with both the texts themselves and with other people.

As digital technologies have become more ubiquitous, so too has the ability to consume and produce texts in exciting new ways. To be clear, some academic tasks do not change. Whether a text is a paper-based book or a film clip, what it means to create a strong thesis statement or to ask a critical question about the text remains consistent. Further, some principles of consumption and production transfer across different types of texts, like the idea that an author (or a filmmaker, or a website designer) intentionally composed their text using specific techniques.

However, some things do change. For example, students can collaborate virtually on their reading (e.g., annotating a shared text even when not in the same physical space) and their writing (e.g., using collaborative document applications to work remotely on a text at the same time). Educators should be always aware of the above dynamics and plan instruction accordingly.

Understanding that there are dynamic literacy practices at work in the consumption and production of texts, we believe:

1. K–12 English teachers, with their students, should

    -   teach students the principles of design and composition, as well as theories connected to issues of power and representation in visual imagery, music, and sound.
    -   introduce students to the idea of audience through authentic assignments that have shared purpose and reach beyond the classroom to other youth as well as across generations.
    -   ask students to repurpose a variety of digital media (e.g., images, video, music, text) to create a multimodal mashup or explore other emerging media genres (e.g., digital storytelling, infographics, annotated visuals, screencasts) that reflect concepts in literature such as theme, character, and setting.
    -   direct students to use a note-taking tool to post text and images connected to a piece of literature they are reading in the form of a character's diary or a reader response journal.

- immerse students in the world of transmedia storytelling by having them trace the origin and evolution of a character, storyline, issue, or event across multiple online platforms including a photo essay, a timeline, and an interactive game.
- invite students to investigate their stance on social issues through the multimodal inquiry methods involved in digital storytelling, documentary video, or podcasting.

2. English teacher educators, with preservice and inservice teachers, should

- harness online platforms for collaborative writing to invite teacher candidates to examine the composing practices of students and create peer feedback partnerships.
- read, annotate, and discuss both alphabetic and visual texts, leading to substantive discussion about issues of plot, theme, and character development.
- explore how practicing teachers are facilitating multimodal composition and sharing student writing with audiences beyond the classroom.
- encourage teacher candidates to design instruction that integrates digital composing and multimodalities with canonical literature.

3. English and literacy researchers should

- examine the affordances and constraints of multimodal composition, points of tension with traditional academic literacies, and the role that teachers of writing play in assessment and evaluation of multimodal compositions.
- describe and articulate ideas related to authentic writing experiences beyond the classroom, including a better account of audiences for whom students are writing and purposes other than academic argument.
- explore what constitutes critical literacy—paying attention to the construction of individual and cultural identities—when composing multimodally with visuals, music, and sound.

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Belief 4: Technologies and their associated literacies are not neutral.

While access to technology and the internet has the potential to lessen issues of inequity, they can also perpetuate and even accelerate discrimination based on gender, race, socioeconomic status, and other factors.

It is common to hear digital technologies discussed in positive, progressive, and expansive terms; those who speak with enthusiasm may be doing so without an awareness that technology can also deepen societal inequities. Students who have access to technology at home, for example, might appear to understand a subject presented with a digital device faster than those who do not have access to similar devices outside of school.

As another example, some technologies that enable systems like "credit recovery courses" and remedial literacy software — which are frequently used more heavily in "struggling" schools that serve students who are poor and/or of color — can often reduce pedagogy to the mere coverage of shallow content and completion of basic assessments, rather than providing robust innovation for students to creatively represent their learning.

Understanding the complexity of learning how to use technology, and one's own social, political, and personal relationship to issues of gender, race, socioeconomic status, and other factors, we believe:

1. K–12 English teachers, with their students, should

    *   promote and demonstrate critical thinking through discussion and identification of the rhetoric of written and digital materials (e.g., political propaganda and groupthink through social media posts and commentary).
    *   introduce research skills that complicate and expand upon the trends of online authorship and identity (e.g., censorship, fair use, privacy, and legalities).
    *   explore and measure the impact of a digital footprint on readers by analyzing different online identities (e.g., fanfiction, social media, professional websites).
    *   choose technology products and services with an intentional awareness toward equity, including the affordances and constraints evident in free/open source, freemium, and subscription-based offerings.

2. English teacher educators, with preservice and inservice teachers, should

    *   demonstrate how inequality affects access to technology throughout communities (e.g. policies, funding, stereotyping).
    *   advocate for technology in marginalized communities through, for example, grant writing, community outreach programs, and family-oriented workshops.
    *   model research-driven practices and methods that integrate technology into the English language arts in ways that underscore the learning of conceptual, procedural, and attitudinal and/or value-based knowledge (e.g., lesson and curriculum planning).
    *   define and provide exemplars of technology use for educational equity that expand beyond gender, race, and socioeconomic status to include mental health, ableism, immigration status, exceptionality, and (dis)ability.

3. English and literacy researchers should

- design research studies that problematize popular assumptions about the nature of societal inequity, as well as issues of power and authority in knowledge production.
- introduce, examine, and question theoretical frameworks that provide principles and concepts which attempt to acknowledge and name inequality in society.
- build methodological frameworks that attempt to account for hidden issues of power and stance in research questions, methods, the role of researcher(s), and identification of findings.
- advocate for equitable solutions that employ technology in culturally responsive ways, drawing on students' and teachers' existing funds of knowledge related to literacy, learning, and using digital devices/networks.

Some Related Scholarship

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Summary

In offering these four belief statements and numerous examples, the scholars and educators involved in writing this document recognize that we, too, are both informed — and limited — by our own experiences, assumptions, and daily literacy practices. It is our sincere hope that this substantially revised document can be a tool for opening up new conversations, opportunities for instruction, and lines of inquiry within the field of English language arts.

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