Those considered to be literate are able to proficiently use the media sources within their world to acquire information through reading and listening, and to share information through talking and writing.

When one thinks of the term “new literacies,” the plurality of the term immediately suggests that there are multiple forms of literacy that include broadened situations and texts. New signals a realization of expanded epistemologies, methods, contexts, and meaning-makers. New literacies, therefore, are those ever-expanding literacies that one needs to navigate both personal and professional life—Internet literacies, computer literacies, digital literacies, new media literacies, multiliteracies, information literacy, and ICT literacies.

Think about the following list of new literacies practices, and evaluate your literacy performance as compared with your students’: emailing; blogging; instant messaging; chatting online; maintaining a website; conducting and collating online searches; processing and evaluating online information; participating in online social networking spaces; manipulating and sharing images; podcasting and videocasting; creating and sharing music videos; shopping online; digital storytelling; reading, writing, and commenting on fan fiction and graphic novels; and creating and sharing digital mashups (Gainer & Lapp, 2010). How well did you rate? How about your students? Were they more literate than you?

If you’re like us, you may agree that it’s exciting but difficult to keep pace with all of the new literacies. Since the advent of the Internet, change is what has defined instructional classroom literacy practices—not just because of what is being taught, but also because of the literacies students are choosing to learn outside of the classroom. Like many of you, our school careers primarily involved paper, pencils, books, and typewriters. And then it happened—remember the floppy disks of the early 1970s, the word processors of the late 1970s, the 1980s friendly wars between Apple and Microsoft for the home computer that we could all afford and learn to use? And don’t forget the laptops of the 90s. Do you remember the release of Windows 98 and your first personal computer that allowed you to browse the Internet? Do you remember your first digital camera or camcorder? And most of all, do you recall the first time you enjoyed listening to music through your iPod? Since then, technology has not stood still. In addition to your laptop, camera, and iPod, you now use your smartphone and iPad to share messages, ideas, and photos, and to gain information through sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Linked-In, YouTube, Flickr, Second Life, Delicious, and your blogs and wikis.

While many of these spaces are used for social networking, consider the precision of literacy that is additionally demanded in the workplace as one uses information and communication technologies (ICTs)—the Web, blogs, video editors, multiple sites, online spreadsheets, listservs, presentation media, and many others—to conduct business. “Education as usual” no longer applies, since the new literacies demanded by ever-changing technologies continue to expand.

Our reason for asking you to create a mental timeline of your engagement with new literacies is to remind you that the more technologies one
encounters, the more new literacies will evolve to shape our manner and methods of communication. In order to support the continuous learning of our students, our professional development must include both learning new literacies ourselves and learning how to include them in our everyday instruction (Fisher, Frey, & Gonzalez, 2010). Within the classroom, it is essential that we support students as they develop the... skills, strategies, and dispositions necessary to successfully use and adapt to the rapidly changing information and communication technologies and contexts that continuously emerge in our world and influence all areas of our personal and professional lives. These new literacies allow us to use the Internet and other ICTs to identify important questions, locate information, critically evaluate the usefulness of that information, synthesize information to answer those questions, and then communicate the answers to others. (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004, p.1572)

Drawing from a vast knowledge base of work in this area, the authors of the articles selected for this issue of Voices help us to acquire insights about how to support our students by further defining and pushing our understanding of new literacies. Through their experiences, we view the power of new literacies to motivate, inform, and support instruction and evaluation. The examples offered illustrate how new literacies can be remixed with the best instructional practices for adolescent learners. Rather than being replacements for the literacies that have traditionally enabled students to communicate and collaborate, both within and outside of their school communities, these articles help us to better understand:

- The role played by the active teacher in this new remix of learning.
- How teachers are broadening their personal knowledge bases through the outside-of-school literacies they are inviting their students to incorporate into school tasks.
- How the development of these new literacies can be accommodated through intentional instruction that supports collaborative and independent work.
- How new literacies are requiring teachers to expand their personal reflection and bases of professional development.

These articles offer myriad classroom examples of the ways in which teachers have engaged and motivated literacy development among their students by incorporating new literacies into the instructional mix.

To begin the issue, Margaret Hagood’s article illustrates how many teachers are choosing to spend instructional time as seen through the eyes of nine middle grade teachers’ explorations of new literacies, including digital technologies and pop culture, and their implementations in content area instruction. Hagood also discusses how developing new literacies can at first be a daunting task, making it important to share your knowledge and successes with others.

William Kist also helps us realize the value of sharing understandings of new literacies that must become common in the classroom. He identifies the evolving new literacies that he sees as necessary for successful functioning in middle school classrooms, thus giving us the perspective of privileged insiders. He encourages educators to maintain a sense of openness to the ever-expanding possibilities that exist through constantly changing technologies.

Middle school teachers Amy Schechter and Jennifer Denmon illustrate the whys and hows of students’ social networking activities. Through an action research project in which their students created online communities, they found that validation of students’ social networking practices greatly enhanced motivation and engagement.

Chris Leland, Anne Ociepka, and Kate Kuonen also addressed the value of validating social networking as a means of communication among eighth graders. Their project began when one of them was concerned about her students using MySpace without being able to critically evaluate what they were reading. In an interesting twist, one author learned that she was being unfairly characterized in her students’ MySpace discussions. With university colleagues, she used the incident to teach critical literacy.

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Allen Teng’s fascinating article gives validity to the voices and interests of students. He also invites us to consider if and how teachers should be involved with their students’ Facebook walls. Collectively, these three articles offer insights and suggestions about students’ and teachers’ engagement with social networking.

Student motivation is also enhanced through engagement with new literacy instruction, as described by Mohammed Choudhury and Jeff Share, who invited sixth graders to use digital media to take photos of people in their community. Their task was to photograph persons of interest to them and then to analyze the photos in relation to themselves. Their insights revealed the depth of their engagement.

As media literacy has expanded, so too has the appreciation for and use of the graphic novel. It has certainly become a text of choice among many middle schoolers who, in this medium, are able to better understand themselves as they visually connect with others who share their uncertainties. In their article, Nanci Werner-Burke, Bobbi Button, Melissa Morral, Jessica Spencer, and Jane Spohn provide a detailed, easy-to-follow lesson that other teachers will be able to implement to determine if graphic novels are also motivating reading for their students.

Drawing on the strengths of eighth-grade students, Adrienne Costello illustrates the power of combining informal classroom drama and digital composing. The urban middle schoolers engaged in this project had enhanced views of themselves as producers of information through shared collaborations that unified their traditional and new literacies while merging their in- and out-of-school communities.

Nick Kremer and Harlow Sanders also offer insightful support to English teachers about student engagement by presenting an argument for teaching Shakespeare using a multimedia approach. They offer examples that illustrate how to get students hooked on Shakespeare. These two articles and this poem would be wonderful companions to share during collegial conversations among literacy and English teachers.

Is all of this new literacies instruction just fun or are students really learning? This is the question that is continuously asked. Phil Nichols shares an answer as he goes beyond just teaching and, instead, invites students to use technology. In the classroom, eighth-grade students come to know audience and voice through their Ideal Society Project. After reading Animal Farm, groups of students created and then marketed their versions of an ideal society. Ninth graders, who had completed this project the year before, judged which group they believed had most effectively designed and marketed their society.

Hearing the voices of one’s students as a means for evaluating the strength of one’s instructional program was also echoed by Joan Fingon as she discussed the importance of identifying students’ interests. By doing so, she found that middle schoolers are very interested in reading nontraditional texts and diary book series.

Through these articles, we have heard the voices of outstanding educators and researchers who are intent on understanding and sharing new literacies instruction. In summary, these articles illustrate that purposeful instruction of new literacies must be very intentionally designed through continuous evaluation of students’ strengths and needs and careful consideration of what to teach and how to teach it. We hope you find value in these articles, and we invite you to share your thoughts, questions, and recommendations with the authors and with us. Only through our collective reflection and conversation will we all continue to grow as an educational community.

References

