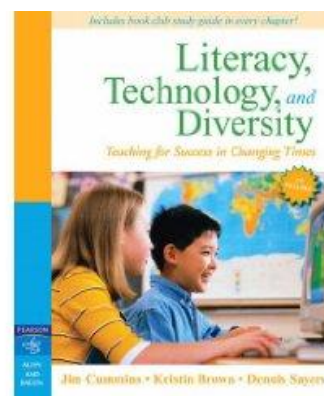




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***Literacy, Technology, and Diversity:  
Teaching for Success in Changing Times***  
Jim Cummins, Kristine Brown, and Dennis Sayers (2007)  
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*Literacy, Technology, and Diversity: Teaching for Success in Changing Times* by J. Cummins, K. Brown and D. Sayers offers a fresh and much-needed perspective on how to reconsider literacy and technology in today's diverse classrooms. Authored by some of the most inspirational researchers in the field, this treatise is based on several longitudinal studies and provides a blueprint for implementing pedagogical approaches that promote literacy engagement among low-income and minority students. The book is a must read for teachers, graduate students, and researchers in the field of literacy and TESOL. Graduate courses on the pedagogy of literacy and technology should consider the book as one of the required readings.

*Literacy, Technology, and Diversity* is divided into three parts. Part 1, "Changing Times, Changing Schools," establishes the background to the project, highlighting the issues concerning literacy, technology use, classroom instruction, and testing practices. This part actually forms the argument for the proposed approach to literacy and technology use in schools. The authors discuss how the proclaimed literacy crisis in the US has created a panic for the last 20-years or so, thus resulting in so-called educational reforms. These educational reforms have hindered more than helped in closing the achievement gap between economically advantaged and disadvantaged students. The authors point out that current reform effort in the United States depends on three strategies: (1) rigorous reading instruction, (2) technology as a means of instructional delivery and (3) high stakes testing to monitor success of the reform. However, they assert, these potent tools are not being used effectively because of the lack of information and awareness in the teachers as well as administrators of these programs.

In chapter one, the authors point out that the analysis of the causes of the so-called literacy crisis, foregrounded in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, is inadequate because it ignores some relevant contemporary research in the field. They criticize the report of the National Reading Panel, which is the basis of NCLB, as neo-conservative. They criticize NCLB for neglecting two important factors in literacy development supported by the empirical research: first, poverty which accounts for health and cognitive well-being and access to technology; and second, *affect* and *identity*, two critical dimensions of literacy and learning.

Arguing that the prescribed pedagogical approach has failed to bring about any improvement, especially in the disadvantaged students' literacy because it ignores the demands of the information-age (e.g., globalization and technological change, the authors argue in chapter two that schools must aim to develop critical literacy by adopting a multiliteracies and transformative orientation to pedagogy. Acknowledging the role of standardized tests in establishing equity and transparency, in chapter three they criticize the aspects of high-stakes tests that undermine this purpose. In the fourth chapter, they point out that a cause of the failure of current approach to literacy instruction is not integrating technology in instruction. They present evidence from large empirical research to highlight that school access to technology has increased remarkably, yet without effecting a considerable improvement in the required literacy skills of students.

The most important part of the discussion in the first part of the book is where they present the design principles for technology-supported instruction. This design is based on contemporary research in literacy and learning technologies and proposes six features desirable in literacy programs:

1. cognitive challenge and opportunities for deep processing of meaning;
2. active self-regulated collaborative inquiry;
3. relating instruction to prior knowledge and experiences;
4. extensive engaged reading and writing;
5. explicit instruction of literacy learning strategies; and
6. affective involvement and identity investment.

The second part of the book (from Chapter 5 to 10), "From Literacy to Multiliteracies: Narratives from the Frontier," documents technology-supported examples of the kinds of pedagogy that will resolve this crisis. In these six chapters, they tell the stories of the projects that depart from the rote memorization of content unconnected to students' experiences and life aspirations. These stories contain powerful portraits of the educators who "involved their students in challenging projects to promote academic growth, foster identity development and encourage critical awareness necessary for effective social action" (p. 114). The concept of pedagogical techniques, rather than methods, to employ different technologies as learning tools forms the background theory for these projects. Most interesting is the account of the project of sister classes in Chapter 5, that spans three quarters of a century, connecting different parts of the world. Others include the accounts of Proyecto FRESA project (Chapter 6), an oral history project (Chapter 7), a partner school project on biographies that integrated math with language arts and social studies, and the story of a Spanish-English dual immersion program. These stories are heart-warming and inspiring for the teachers who wish to bring about change in spite of the limitations the curriculum offers.

Part 3, "Imagining Educational Futures," presents their proposed pedagogical framework (Chapter 11) and discusses how we can implement the instructional changes required to provide successful literacy to everyone (Ch.12). This part is linked with the discussion in Part One of the book and presents a convincing case for the pedagogy that has enough evidence to be successful with limited resources (e.g., with one computer in a class).

Although it is based on extensive empirical study, the book reads with the fluidity of a narrative and presents a strong argument for a pedagogy that is the need of the day. Cummins, Brown, and Sayers' master plan of literacy instruction is appropriate for an increasingly diverse information-age society because it provides powerful alternatives to the present practice. The

teachers of low-income and linguistically diverse students are called upon to build consistently on the cultural and social capital that students bring to the classroom and engage them cognitively by focusing on the topics of relevance to student lives. The photographs of the classrooms and students, and references to resources that teachers can use add to its attraction. As a teacher of English from an underdeveloped country which suffers from lack of technological resources, I think this book has enhanced my understanding of literacy and how it can be made possible in spite of all the lacks and wants.

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