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W. Douglas Baker
Eastern Michigan University

Kia Jane Richmond
Northern Michigan University

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Becoming Literate with New Technologies

W. Douglas Baker
Eastern Michigan University

Kia Jane Richmond
Northern Michigan University

Co-Editors

At least once a week we hear about some new piece or aspect of digital technology that could be incorporated in classrooms, and just when we comfortably implement a “new” technology, e.g., constructing a website to update students about the class, we hear others ask, “Have you tried *podcasting*? *wikis*? *webcams*? *IMing* or *texting*? *YouTube*? And after you learn what these sample technologies mean or do, you might ask questions about incorporating them in your classroom: “Why would I post/download an audio clip? Why would I create or use a wiki? Is my computer compatible with a webcam? Can’t I just use the phone or email? Why would I post or have my students post a video clip? Hey, wait: How much more do I have to do, and where is the financial and technological support?” Good questions, and ones for which many teachers are developing answers, although support continues to be an issue, and ones that many students answer through daily actions.

The Fall 2007 issue of *LAJM* provides a range of articles focused on exploring how teachers can incorporate developing technologies in classrooms, and why they should. **Kathleen Yancey**, the keynote speaker for Michigan Council of Teachers of English’s annual conference in October (2007) and incoming president of the National Council of Teachers of English, opens with a “meditation” on scenarios and questions about what it means to be literate in the twenty-first century. She states that a literate person will need to be able “to choose the appropriate technology in order to communicate with a particular audience,” tap

into new resources offered through social networking and other online sites, and reflect on and “navigate... through technologies and media and purposes and audiences and sources of information.” Obviously, these goals have implications for English Language Arts teachers (at all levels), the people who organize classroom instruction, provide literacy opportunities for students, and select technologies to guide students to reach course objectives. If students will be expected to achieve the objectives Yancey outlines, teachers as the classroom leaders will need to continue developing technological knowledge and incorporating it.

Troy Hicks and **Dawn Reed** state, “In a time of multiple, and multiplying technologies, it is comforting to know that people are still at the center of our digital world.” (However, later in this issue **Nancy Patterson** rekindles the image of Hal from Arthur C. Clarke’s *2001: A Space Odyssey*, as she examines claims about computerized writing assessment.) Hicks and Reed believe that although teachers may feel they are entering the digital world as “immigrants,” compared to our often tech-savvy students, or “natives,” teachers have a responsibility to learn and continue to guide students “through the use of newer technologies, *even as we learn them*” (italics added). **Meredith Graupner** says that many students do enter classrooms “capable of communicating fluidly” with social networking tools such as Instant Messenger, and that teachers can learn how to incorporate these types of tools for multiple purposes as they become more adept with the technology.

Included in this issue of *LAJM* are examples of teachers and students taking risks and opportunities to experiment with digital technologies for a variety of pedagogical purposes. **Bethany Erickson** and **David Knapp** (with **Robert Rozema**) demonstrate qualities of another online social network and how it offers students tools and viable space in which to explore aspects of literary texts, e.g., characters in the novels *Feed* by M. T. Anderson and *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald. **Val Johnson** describes how she purchased a webcam and led students in her “bad class”

to engage in digital storytelling, craft short movies, and learn rhetorical strategies for multiple modalities. **Christine Tracy** presents what she calls “The Trilogy,” a rhetorical approach to designing online texts that students can adapt for their own purposes and learn how to build their own “trilogy” list. **Rose Cherie Reissman** turns us towards emergent readers and the opportunities of video games. She offers examples of how two four-year olds “drove” racecars towards becoming writers and readers. In the final example in this section, **Greg McVerry** discusses the concept of literacy as social practice and how it plays a role in composing and reading digital texts, and he demonstrates how students can combine technologies to design texts, ones that illustrate multimodal literacy.

The next three articles focus on preparing teachers. **Elizabeth Brockman, Christine Luoma and Shae Potocki** provide a “no-holds barred classroom narrative” about taking a risk with a potentially “cool” Internet site for a research assignment, and demonstrate how by breaking the silence of our struggles as teachers, we can reflect and grow professionally. **Connie Miettlicki** describes *Micro-teaching*, or “mini teaching experiences that pre-service teachers engage in prior to their student teaching semester,” and presents three case studies to illustrate its effectiveness. **Patricia Cavanaugh** describes “new literacies” as “almost anything digital,” and she urges teachers and educators to not only “hop on the technology train,” but suggests that teachers need to be the “engineers.”

As we continue to learn more about new technologies and literacies and explore the possibilities of incorporating them in classrooms, three of the writers present caveats. **Nancy Patterson** warns, “Computerized writing assessment is little bit like Hal. It seems innocuous at first,” even promising “relief for teachers from the drudgery of grading essays.” But it takes the professional assessment of teachers to evaluate student writing—or any assessment system chosen to aid teachers (or students). **Rita Paye** provides a brief historical overview of state legislation and local actions that have informed issues of computer and Internet access for students. If students are to achieve literacy as Yancey outlines, they must have access to digital technology. **William Vande Kopple** reminds us that doublespeak appears daily in students’ lives, particularly on the Internet, and that we must continue to help them read texts critically. Finally, **Sandra Plair** offers a review of a book that

discusses the creation of multiliteracies within the contexts of technological, social, cultural change and a global economy, including applications for classrooms.

Note on Editing. Citing online sources provided an interesting aspect of editing this issue of *LAJM*. As digital technology evolves, we continue to learn the language of and for it, and this language informs how we approach teaching. For example, English teachers instruct students about conventional ways to cite sources, and technological developments create challenges in this effort. How do we cite (verify or consult) Internet sources that shift or change periodically? How do (should) we cite texts retrieved from the Internet when we have previously read the text in hard copy? Documenting sources can be challenging when even authorities on the subject disagree on formatting.

Another example is the choice we made to capitalize Internet and Web. Our editorial decisions about capitalization further illustrate the challenges teachers face. Although it is conventional according to MLA (and APA, among others) to capitalize these two examples, it “makes no sense” to some people in the tech world who view *internet*, for example, as a medium similar to radio or television (Long). We followed the trend of others who do not capitalize or separate the word *webmaster*, or *webcam*, among other similar words (“MLA Style”); and, we chose not to capitalize *website* because it can be viewed as similar to a book, magazine, or other site that consists of texts; and e-mail became the emerging *email*. From reading the fifteen manuscripts in preparation for publication, we observed a range of alternative choices made by the writers. Our hope is that the editorial decisions we made will add to current conversations about digital technology, writing, and the teaching of English.

Finally, we thank **Jonathan Bush** and **Allen Webb** for their service as editors of *LAJM* these past four years, and for their support with our transition as editors.

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