

REVIEW OF *TECHNOLOGY FOR LITERACY TEACHING AND LEARNING*

Technology for Literacy Teaching and Learning

William J. Valmont

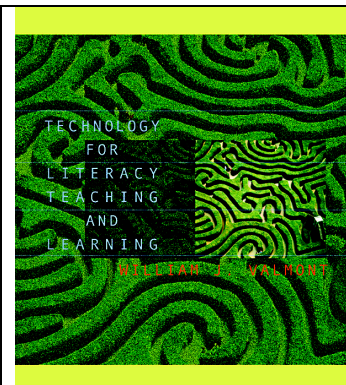
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While today's undergraduate training programs for future educators often require at least one class in technology, it seems almost impossible to keep up with the pace at which technology changes. Attempting to integrate technology and learning can be an overwhelming prospect, since teachers have so much on their plates with curriculum standards, paperwork, discipline issues, and lack resources due to budget constraints. More experienced educators may not have adequate training in technology, causing them to be more reluctant or even fearful to use it. Each and every teacher has a different level of technological knowledge, aptitude, and familiarity. Until now, I had not come across a text that could effectively speak to educators with such a broad spectrum of skill and experience. As an experienced teacher who enjoys incorporating technology into the foreign language classroom, I first thought that this particular text would be too basic and would not have much to offer those who are more comfortable with technology. However, William J. Valmont's book offers such a variety of resources that beginning and advanced teachers, as well as those studying to become teachers, will profit from this text. Valmont's style is perhaps the most positive feature of the text. He writes in a clear, easy-to-follow, unassuming manner. He makes sure to define necessary terminology without being overbearing or droning on in techspeak. Valmont begins with the basics and then moves on in a logical fashion as he develops each concept. I appreciate his discussion of techniques and theories apart from technology as well as merged with technology.

Valmont begins the first chapter, "Contexts for Literacy and Technology Interactions in Your Classroom," by reminding the reader that the definition of what it means to be literate is constantly changing. The focus of his book is to assist elementary and middle school teachers in their endeavor to help students to become telecommunications literate: "telecommunications literate people can use the unique features of digital technologies both to construct meaning for themselves and to create communications for others" (p. 1). Valmont claims that the advent of computers and the technological savvy of current students demands a continuous change in our methods of instruction. Without question, present-day students are more visual and more accustomed to the use of technology in virtually all aspects of their daily lives. While it is possible that we might not find as many tech-savvy students in schools with fewer resources, I believe that even the most economically-challenged students do have access to technological tools outside of the classroom (thereby enhancing their skill and comfort levels). The author maintains that today we utilize more innovative techniques such as collaborative learning, inquiry strategies and constructivism. According to J. Snowman and R. Biehler (2000), "meaningful learning

occurs when people actively try to make sense of the world- when they construct an interpretation of how and why things are- by filtering new ideas and experiences through existing knowledge structures" (p. 291). One might make the argument that this new type of literacy merely allows educators of the 21st century to apply existent pedagogical principles (available in the pre-Internet, pre-computers era) in a more efficient, consistent manner. At the same time, one must not overlook the importance of availability. Technology transcends boundaries of time and space, thereby allowing access to all students and all teachers. Valmont then follows with a list of useful Web sites grouped by techniques teachers can employ to become familiar with using technology for literacy teaching and learning (e.g., metasearch engines, online tech glossaries, Web sites for parents, telecollaborative learning experiences, etc.). The author comments on each site and also gives a brief description of each technique. At the very end of the chapter, Valmont provides an exemplar thematic unit from *National Educational Technology Standards for Students -- Connecting Curriculum and Technology* by the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE). At the conclusion of virtually every chapter, the author summarizes the content in bullet form and provides a list of activities (to better internalize the concepts covered in the chapter). These activities might involve students and/or other teachers, or could represent an individualized project. He often lists sources "For Further Reading," as well as various software resources with a short description of each. The author frequently refers to the book's Web site (<http://college.hmco.com/education/valmont/technology/1e/students/>), which contains even more resources.

In chapter 2, "Putting Technology to Use in Your Classroom," Valmont stresses the importance of creating "both online and offline applications for students to use computer technology in literacy learning" (p. 31). He asserts that it is our job as teachers to "model how to use technology to locate information, to demonstrate effective reading and thinking strategies and to build online teaching and learning opportunities" (p. 31). The author then reviews what teachers need to do in order to prepare to utilize technology. He examines the Internet, servers, e-mail, creating Web sites, publishing online, software, and designing classroom projects with webquests and multimedia. He suggests learning activities that merge literacy and technology (e.g., book reports, trading cards), and real-life projects that integrate literacy and technology (e.g., Web cams, writing and illustrating books, talking software).

Throughout the book, Valmont offers useful "teaching tips" penned by various teachers in their own words as to how they integrate technology and literacy. In addition, "tech tips" help the reader to "understand a term or use of technology" (p. xvi). In chapter 3, "Managing Technology in Your Classroom," Valmont proposes recommendations about issues governing the integration of technology and the Internet. He touches on "district and school considerations," such as technology plans, acceptable use policies, Internet filtering software, parental permissions, and Internet safety. He then moves on to "classroom considerations," in which he addresses administrative and environmental concerns. In this section, the author covers a number of different sub-themes such as placement and care of computers, limiting wasted time, establishing teacher routines to maximize student use, teaching students to become independent users and providing equity of access, handling software properly, using the Internet safely, and, most importantly, communicating a positive attitude. Valmont suggests that educators utilize available technology and literacy standards (such as ISTE's) as guidelines, and that teachers work with one another to set progressive goals for students as they move from one grade to the next. A helpful feature called "Amphi Teachers Respond" surfaces in chapter 3 and throughout the text. The technology director of the Amphitheater school district in Tucson has prepared a series of proposed solutions to common problems and questions. Each sheet deals with a particular question, such as: "What do you do when students don't finish a task that requires a computer?" (p. 77). Following the question is a list of possible ways to resolve the conflict.

In chapter 4, "Using Technology to Develop Reading and Thinking Strategies," Valmont stresses the need for strong critical thinking skills when using the Internet. Not only must students be able to wade through the huge amount of material that is available, but they must also be able to compare what they see with

their own beliefs and community, state and national standards. Students must then determine the accuracy and suitability of the material. Valmont underscores the Directed Reading-Thinking Activity (DRTA) as "a major overarching strategy" (p. 87) to increase comprehension, independence, and discretion. He reiterates the changing nature of literacy that necessitates effective listening, writing, speaking, reading of print and electronic format, and comprehension of nonverbal systems. The majority of the chapter concentrates on teacher-facilitated DRTA, developed by Russell G. Stauffer, in which the reader directs the process (based on his purpose, reasoning and judgments). Valmont reviews the basic framework of group and independent DRTAs with examples and then describes electronic DRTAs. In chapter 5, "Using Technology to Develop Word Recognition, Vocabulary, Reference and Study Skills," Valmont discusses ways in which word-processors, databases, and the Internet can help teachers to use both new and old word recognition strategies successfully. In addition to using word banks, cloze activities, puzzles, and games to improve word recognition and vocabulary, educators must also encourage students to develop electronic reference skills and study skills.

In chapter 6, "Using Technology to Develop Writing Abilities," Valmont addresses the need to produce clear and well-written messages and creative work. Due to the limitless boundaries of the Internet, today's printing capabilities and multimedia production, circulation of our students' materials is boundless. The development of strong writing skills begins early on with keyboarding. The author identifies five stages in the writing process and proposes assorted pieces of software and technological tools that one could use in each stage. Later on in the chapter, Valmont supplies a list of ways in which we can foster writing with technology, such as making commercials, creating e-zines, e-cards, and so forth. Valmont also speaks to computer-mediated communication (e-mail, chat, etc.) and the need to help our students express their thoughts in an articulate and prudent manner.

In chapter 7, "Using Technology to Develop Listening and Speaking Abilities," Valmont points out that technology affords our students more opportunities to listen and to speak to others, so it is crucial to develop effective skills. Learners need to have structured/ formal and spontaneous opportunities to speak. As educators, Valmont affirms the need to serve as model listeners and speakers and teach our children how to handle constructive criticism. He suggests that we can grow critical listeners by reading aloud to them, using stories with streaming audio or cassettes and CD-ROMs, and utilizing news and music over the Internet. It is essential to teach students strategies to use before, during, and after listening. A listen-thinking activity (LTA) is just like a DRTA but the story is read aloud by a teacher or a recorded voice. Valmont recommends an assortment of speaking activities, such as role play, storytelling, school news, plays, publishing their presentations (PowerPoint, HyperStudio, Wiggleworks, etc.), and Readers' Theater, among others. Although some of these activities have been implemented without the availability of more recent computer-related technologies, these newer technologies permit more individualized instruction and allow students to progress at their own rates.

In chapter 8, "Using Technology to Develop Graphic and Visual Literacy," the author speaks to the issue of training students to become visually literate and media literate in what he calls a "multimedia, polysymbolic world" (p. 217). Critical thinking is indispensable to accurately interpret messages and the motives behind them. One way we can improve students' visual literacy and predicting skills is via Seeing-Thinking Activities (STAs), in which students "examine visual, nonverbal information as the basis for thinking" (p. 220). Educators can create Simple STAs, Single-Frame STAs, Alternate-Ending STAs and Multiple-Frame STAs with multimedia software such as PowerPoint, HyperStudio, Digital Chisel, and so forth. Via the use of comic strips, cartoons, art lessons, online museums, and photos, arts and crafts may enhance visual literacy. Valmont dedicates a section of this chapter to the hows of student webpage development. Again, some might question the need for computer-related technologies in the analysis of visual information, as it seems quite possible to do such analysis without them. However, Internet technology, in particular, is not bound by time or distance, and therefore it provides students and educators with limitless opportunities to learn, review, and re-access information. In the past, for

example, learners might not have been able to re-examine a particular topic or assignment outside of class because the teacher could not physically copy all the necessary materials for every student. Others might contend that video and TV are sufficient for the development of visual literacy. I do not support this position, as the Internet and computer-related technologies afford more creativity and individualization via the development of personal Web pages, dialogue with others (e-mail, chats), and so forth. I would submit that less than one percent of the people actually control what the majority of us may watch on TV on a given time or day.

In chapter 9, "Using Technology With Children's Literature," Valmont makes the case for e-texts, as they permit access to those with little resources, and they transcend time and distance. He proposes that e-texts can increase comprehension because they may include graphics, photos, and animation. In chapter 10, "Assessment of Student Learning and Achievement," the author suggests that assessment has become more complex, particularly because technology offers multiple options. Furthermore, teachers now have to "assess not only traditional print literacy abilities, but emerging electronic literacy abilities and students' use of technology tools as well" (p. 269). Assessment has become easier in that there are many electronic test-taking options available, and teachers have the ability to craft their own means of measuring student ability and comprehension. Technology also helps teachers to track their students' progress over time by way of electronic portfolios, journals, checklists, conferences and observations. Educators and students face heavy pressure today in the area of district, state and national standards that drastically shape and govern assessment.

This text is largely informative in nature. The author provides a useful starting point to which experienced and novice educators can turn for clear explanations and beneficial examples. The text is not discipline-specific in its recommendations, so teachers of all disciplines can incorporate its suggestions. I believe that technology and curriculum directors alike would find it to be a practical guide for the teachers with whom they partner in education.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

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