

Jennifer Gibson, 2000

## **Literacy On-Line**

The purpose of this paper is to set forth and discuss major innovations in the availability and efficiency of adult literacy learning resources on the Internet. Given the increasing demand placed on limited instructors and relevant learning materials, the Internet proposes an exciting alternative or supplement to ordinary classroom activities.

Given, Internet access is not yet widely available to everyone, yet this will not be the major focus of this paper. Rather, it is the aim to examine the quality of that which is available, and to what extent this information implements the favored pedagogical approaches of that originally discussed in the Review of Understandings (November, 1999). Current computer technology poses unlimited potential. It is the intention of this review to inspect how well this technology is being put to use, if current literacy goals are being facilitated, and if suggestions for improvement can be made.

Where does one begin? Just some of the resources available on-line include postings of live discussion forums for both learners and instructors, teaching material resources, comprehensive course package outlines, and interactive learner contribution sites. In addition, there exists numerous sites which offer teacher / learner strategy self-evaluation exercises. These in particular may provide excellent suggestions for tailoring specific strengths in approaching instructing and learning. These sites are numerous and designed for instructors and learners of various levels of experience and skill. With such variety, possibilities exist to enrich the activities of the most elementary learners, to those of someone who feels that they would benefit by self-

directing a further continuation of studies. Naturally, the amount of assistance needed in navigating the Internet will vary in accordance to the needs of each particular learner or learner group.

There is no limit to the quantity of information available on the Web, however, the real task lies in wading through vast quantities of sites and programs in order to find truly appropriate and meaningful offerings to support one's work. At first this may seem fairly daunting, even to the most qualified computer user, though given the right direction, the search proves to be very intriguing, as well as rewarding. It may be suggested, to facilitate one's efforts (for learner and instructor alike), to begin with sites offered by national literacy organizations. This tends to give the simplest, most direct route. According to one such site<sup>1</sup> at the US Public Broadcasting Service, "Everyone is in a frenzy to place educational materials on the Web. The Adult Learning Service can help you through this process..." These sites make it a priority to select some of the most up-to date, reliable sources, and normally aid in categorizing prospects according to user preference; the most common divisions being 'Learner,' 'Instructor,' and 'Visitor.' Once a selection is made, the search can be further tapered according to the learner / instructor needs, desired level of activity, and preference of materials. In this fashion, much time and precious energy may be spared, as a national site for literacy acts as a trusted guide and filter of multitudinous, sometimes even useless, information. Some of the most valuable, current

---

<sup>1</sup>PBS Adult Learning Service @ [www.pbs.org/als/createcourse](http://www.pbs.org/als/createcourse) (December, 1999)

offerings are those in Canada<sup>2</sup>, Australia<sup>3</sup>, and the USA<sup>4</sup>, and will be the main source for much of the material comprising this paper.

Once the direction of a search is established, the Introductions, or Home Pages of most sites dedicated to adult literacy are usually sufficiently well designed for any user, with simplified key terms and bold, clearly illustrated logos and graphics which help to make most features of the page easily identifiable. Once one is identified as a learner, instructor or visitor (usually by one point and click on a large logo<sup>5</sup>), the software directs the participant to appropriate sectors of the web site, geared to indicated interests and, with specific consideration of learners, varying levels of ability.

In a recent exploration of the Internet, many new sites have been created, even within the last month (November - December 1999). Unfortunately, several of these are presently only partially functional, or under various states of construction and enhancement. This has posed some difficulty in comprehensively evaluating the functional capabilities and relevancy offered by the sites. However, it may be noted that even those in the primary stages of development show much promise in regards to implementing the fundamental aspects of research pertaining to the development of RWTL (reading and writing, and their teaching and learning). In particular

---

<sup>2</sup>Canada: NALD (National Adult Literacy Database), Laubach Literacy of Canada (Resources, Links, and Assessments)

<sup>3</sup>Australia: ARIS (Adult Education Resource and Information Service)

<sup>4</sup>USA: Western/Pacific Literacy Network, PBS Adult Learning Service, NOAL (National Center on Adult Literacy)

<sup>5</sup>PBS Adult Learning Service (please see supplementary materials - "Literacy Link - Welcome," and "Lit Learner -Summy Chan's Home Space.")

those theories popularized by Paulo Freire<sup>6</sup>, Barbara Bee<sup>7</sup>, Sally McBeth<sup>8</sup>, David Barton<sup>9</sup>, and collectively, Margaret Atwood<sup>10</sup> and political activist, Nawal El Saadawi<sup>11</sup>. If we adhere to the suggestions proposed by those previously mentioned (see “Review of Understandings” - November 1999), and apply these in practice through the resource services of the Internet, we can truly see how the NCCC’s outline of literacy<sup>12</sup> may be expanded and built upon to reach out to a truly global audience. The NCCC defines literacy as a tool for education which is:

- many-sided and of many kinds
- to be shared with others (not stored)
- a means for gaining decision-making power in one’s community
- shaped by history and society, but also by personal experience and cultures
- strong enough to act upon forces blocking other life goals

The NCCC goes further, and breaks down the outline into several carefully crafted points. However, as mentioned in the introduction, it will not be the aim to merely reiterate previously discussed theories. Rather, it will be purpose of this paper to endeavor to illustrate the potential of the most popular approaches when applied in the context of the “wired classroom.”

---

<sup>6</sup>Freire, Paulo. “Towards a Pedagogy of the Question,” 1985.

<sup>7</sup>Bee, Barbara. “Critical Literacy and the Politics of Gender,” 1993.

<sup>8</sup>McBeth, Sally. “Creating Curriculum - A Learner-Centered Approach,” 1989.

<sup>9</sup>Barton, David. “The Social Basis of Literacy,” in Literacy: An Introduction to the Ecology of Written Language. 1994.

<sup>10</sup>Atwood, Margaret. Second Words: Selected Critical Prose. 1982.

<sup>11</sup>Saadawi, Nawal El. The Nawal El Saadawi Reader, 1997.

<sup>12</sup>NCCC’s Working Group on Literacy and Basic Education. Education for All: A Decade of National Literacy Efforts Around the World, 1978.

Literacy is empowerment. It is a process by which “men and women can learn to organize themselves and to help to change the lives and conditions which hinder their lives and quality of life.” As we shall see, literacy, like the Internet, is revolutionary. When we begin with the learner’s goal, literacy “can set people free from all kinds of oppression.” That is, “literacy brings power as well as understanding.”<sup>13</sup>

Many sites will serve to benefit both students and teachers alike. The main key in making the most efficient use of this material is in first narrowing down the intended use of the gathered data. Instructors may find it useful to enrich their quest through researching many different sites, as well as their varied applications. Much can be acquired from investigating learner sites and discussion boards, as well as from actually participating in activities as a ‘learner.’ Doing so will allow one to garner the most comprehensive insight and understanding of that which potential students will possibly be in contact with, as well as the opportunity to make suggestions for improvement. It may be taken for granted, yet none the less remains true, that every learner and every instructor possesses unique skills and strengths, as well as individual reasons for undertaking their chosen tasks. In exploring as many applications as possible, it is hoped that one may discover new ideas, and perhaps, offer enlightening additions to the rapidly advancing resources becoming available “on-line.”

Two excellent Web locations which will interest instructors hoping to fine tune their skills and hone in on their particular strengths will appreciate PBS’s “Learning for a Lifetime” page<sup>14</sup>, which offers practical advise and exercises for the progressive teacher, as well as

---

<sup>13</sup>Education for All: A Decade of National Literacy Efforts Around the World (1978)

<sup>14</sup>PBS, [www.pbs.org/als/](http://www.pbs.org/als/)

Canada's own resource site, "Working: Assessing Skills, Habits, and Style,"<sup>15</sup> a service provided by the National Adult Literacy Database. Aimed more at written submissions, this site should not be overlooked, as it offers many strategic guidelines for teachers who seek to gain a better understanding of what will work best for both themselves as well as their learners, applicable to either an in-class or an on-line environment. Several direct links to similar locations are also provided to simplify efforts.

In specific consideration of adult learners who wish to make a self-assessment, or begin a self-directed learning plan, perhaps the most comprehensive and promising site (many features are flagged as either 'under construction' or 'coming soon') is offered by PBS.<sup>16</sup> At the home page, one is presented with a brief introduction to the entirety of the site, which reads "Welcome to the site that helps adults build their personal success. Choose a button on the left that best describes who you are to begin your journey." At left are located three icons which represent Adult Learners (signified by a stack of three text books), Educators (signified by a red apple), and Visitors (signified by a clipboard). Each simply designed logo is fairly misleading in the amount of information it represents, however, the simplicity of the design makes navigating the site more direct, and possibly more enjoyable for learners. Once one selects the 'Adult Learners' icon, an immediate transfer to the 'LitLearner' page is executed (It should be noted that the Educators' icon is discussed in the previous paragraph, and that the 'visitors' icon initiates a quick guided tour of the site's main highlights). Here, a short explanation accompanies each new logo.

---

<sup>15</sup>NALD, [www.ca/resource/rsc2114.htm](http://www.ca/resource/rsc2114.htm)

<sup>16</sup>PBS, "Learning Plan," <http://litlink5.pbs.org/litlearner/learn>

Additional links of interest are located at the bottom of the page, and toll-free numbers for the Literacy Helpdesk<sup>17</sup> are provided, should any difficulties be encountered.

The new logos indicate a general information page, a registration page, and a personal homepage page (for returning users). As a registered user (free of charge for any participant), students are prompted to create a user name and password. In addition, they are given the opportunity to select from a list their preferred instructor. The instructions for proceeding to enlist are fairly clear and concise, and appear in a step-by-step sequence with new prompts appearing only after the previous selection has been confirmed. Once registered, learners have at their disposal a variety of on-line resources. This includes a 'Home Space' where they will have access to a personalized portfolio. Here, learners may respond to unit assignments, with the option of opening their portfolios to their instructors and receiving feedback on-line. As stated at the site, this "may prove a valuable resource to learners as they work through the LitLearner materials," as in a regular classroom setting, such one-on-one attention is ideal, but rarely a reality. In this fashion, a learner is not limited by his/her schedule, nor is the instructor. By having the ability to communicate on-line, either party may make submissions at any time, with posted remarks being available only seconds after the original transmission. A collection of Internet resources (for example, on-line dictionaries, encyclopedias, calculators, thesauruses) is also readily accessible to learners from their 'Home Space.' Retrieving such aids need not be complicated by having to depart the work area; these tools are always directly available from a pictorial toolbar at the side of the page. Another great feature of the PBS LitLearner site is the on-line journal. This resource enables learners "to record private notes, thoughts on their work,

---

<sup>17</sup>Literacy Link Helpdesk, Toll-Free in North America only (888-548-5432). Service available outside of North America at (703)739-8484

useful Web sites that they have encountered, and so forth.” Finally, the “Goals Planner helps learners develop a personalized instruction plan.”<sup>18</sup>

In addition to the ‘Goals Planner,’ which is located under the main ‘planning and assessment’ bar, are three more features - Custom Learning Plan (set a course for learning that fits your goals), Practice Tests (practice online), and Self-Guided Assessments (explore your learning styles and strengths). Unfortunately, at the time of this paper’s production, not one of the three was up and running, though it was noted that the expected launch date for several of the programs is January / February of 2000. A trial of the Goals Planner proved to be satisfactory, which suggests that the aforementioned categories may prove to be an eagerly anticipated arrival. The Goals Planner is fairly comprehensive and, justifiably, takes some time to complete. The purpose of this tool is to serve as a means of self-discovery and exploration that will help (as narrated by the Web page) to “plan your life, work, and education goals.” The planner helps to:

- set goals that reflect individual/group interests, strengths, and needs,
- see progress toward those goals,
- revise and set new goals over time, and
- plan learning to match goals

To identify these goals requires that the learner follow a number of steps, achieved through the development of a “personal inventory” by completing five learning activities in different areas. The first, ‘Skills,’ involves assessing one’s abilities and setting forth a statement of expectations. The second is ‘Visioning,’ wherein one proposes what it is that he/she would desire to do in the future, and the third, ‘Interests,’ which involves identifying what “one likes to do.” The fourth division, ‘Values,’ requires exploring what is important to oneself, and the fifth

---

<sup>18</sup>PBS, “LitLearner” <http://litlink5pbs.org/litlearner>

and final category, 'Reflecting,' is just that. Reflecting on one's life while reading "what others have written about themselves."

Once these five steps have been completed, the learner is asked to "chart a course" by undertaking two additional activities. 'Goals and Planning' is designed for the recording of short and long-term goals, and the development of a plan for reaching these goals. 'Life Story' is an activity which allows the students to use what they already know about themselves to construct their own life stories.

Though a concerted effort is required on behalf of the student ( work may be saved in the password-protected homespace at anytime to be resumed at a later date), the product of such a commitment may be very rewarding. Through "the action plan" and the "life story," the learner will be given effective practice in communicating desired goals in writing. As well, the exercises can bolster one's confidence in presenting themselves to different audiences and will help the student to examine personal history, and to consider the future.<sup>19</sup>

Yet another excellent site available on the Net is the CNN San Francisco site, offered in partnership with the Western/Pacific Literacy Network.<sup>20</sup> This learning resources site defines itself (on the link specified under "Instructor Page") as offering "web-delivered instruction using current and past CNN San Francisco bureau" news stories. "The Western/Pacific Literacy Network and ... CNN SF bureau have partnered to develop an online literacy site" that will benefit "all learners and instructors." The presented material is intended for adult literacy and educational purposes, and though "the intended audience is adults, instructors and learners (of all ages) are encouraged to use this material to promote better literacy." Ideas and suggestions are

---

<sup>19</sup>PBS "LitLearner Web Site"

<sup>20</sup>CNN SF Learning Resources, <http://literacynet.org/cnnsf/>

welcomed by students and teachers alike, and throughout the site, a toolbar with an icon for “feedback” provides instant access to a response card which may be sent directly to the originating server. It is helpful to mention, as well, that the ‘toolbar’ never disappears from the screen, so that regardless of where one may travel to within the site, instant access to any page can be granted with the click of a button ( the pages included are Help, Story of the Week, Instructor Page, Story Archives, Feedback, CNN SF Homepage, and Western/Pacific Literacy Network).

The CNN site is comprised of three main features. The first, around which the whole site is centered, is the “Story of the Week.” This story is usually taken from a recent news head liner, and is broken down into three modules for learning. The first form is the original provided by CNN SF. This story is selected to reflect the needs of learners with moderate reading and speaking comprehension skills, “including advanced ESL or non-native English speakers.” The second module is an abridged version of the original, wherein modification of the original story text is carried out “by simplifying complex ideas and sentences, exchanging advanced words with less difficult ones,” and by changing “difficult concepts into precise terms.” The abridged, or ‘Simple English’<sup>21</sup> form is “intended for adults with low reading comprehension skills including beginning ESL or non-native English speakers.” The final supplement is a “story outline.” This outline summarizes the main plot structures through chronological development, and presents the “basic edited story elements” in point-form notation. Along with the text, most of the story modules contain multimedia features, including full streaming video of the broadcast,

---

<sup>21</sup>Barton, David. “The Social Basis of Literacy,” in Literacy: An Introduction to the Ecology of Written Language, 1994.

full audio recording of the broadcast, a narrated version of the text “read by Greg Leftover, CNN SF Bureau Chief and Correspondent,” as well as additional video clips of relevance.

Comprehension activities are the supporting focus of the site, and a variety of exercises have been designed to interactively test learner reception of the story. These sections involve a “point and click” process of testing, and include such methods as “Word Selection,” “Multiple Choice,” “Vocabulary,” “Sequencing” (chronological numbering of events), and “Questions and Answers.” Unfortunately, these questions merely test comprehension and are marked by a software program. As a result, the marking is judged on a correct or incorrect basis, and the submissions are not reviewed by an instructor. In this case, it may be helpful for learners to save their work to be commented on by a qualified individual, if possible. On a positive note, the results are instantaneous, and the student can immediately rework the responses. The score is updated continually as one progresses through the modules, and the story is kept at the side for easy access to scroll through if need be. A final feature, entitled “Your Turn!,” enables the learner to write their own responses to questions posed regarding their feelings on the subject matter. Once they have submitted their answers, they may view a response board of learner submissions, and also have the additional opportunity to comment on anything they may have read within the forum.

The CNN SF site may be particularly relevant and stimulating for adult learners of varying degrees of skill. The information conveyed addresses the real and present needs of learners everywhere, and provides the opportunity to approach this information with confidence. The material is presented with adult experience in mind, and avoids the use of over-simplified themes. It is intended to appeal to the intellect of students, challenging them, yet offering many supplementary materials to aid in the undertaking of sometimes unfamiliar subject matter.

Finally, the students are not mere receptacles for this information, but are given the opportunity to express their reactions to the stories, as well as discuss and provide feedback on the contributions of fellow learners. One is free to reject or to identify with the often controversial material at hand, therefore encouraging an open dialogue, discussion, analysis and interchange, all of which are necessary in gaining critical insight and personal strength in one's abilities.<sup>22</sup>

On a slight departure, Oregon Weather<sup>23</sup> is an interesting alternative for learning materials and exercises, and is provided as a link from the Western/Pacific Literacy Network.<sup>24</sup> At this site, nine interactive online weather lessons and activities are offered. Developed for "adult learners in basic skills development programs," the site includes "instructor notes, weather links and hints on adapting the lessons regionally."<sup>25</sup> As mentioned on the "What's New" page of the Western/Pacific Literacy Network, the exercises are particularly relevant to the needs of adult learners, as "all of the project's authors are adult education teachers" whose areas of expertise include "basic skills, G.E.D. preparation, reading and writing." The current topic of investigation chosen for this review was an exploration of weather disasters, their causes, effects and anticipation, and is guided by author and featured instructor, Alice A. Whitenack. The learning is geared to using the Internet for an exploratory tool, and several direct links are supplied to a variety of phenomenon, including earthquakes, flood, comets, and global warming. A worksheet is provided at the bottom of the page, and is designed to guide the student through his/her research. Hints are provided for navigating one's investigation, and several of the links contain

---

<sup>22</sup>Freire, Paulo. "Towards a Pedagogy of the Answer," 1985

<sup>23</sup>The Oregon Weather Web Site, <http://literacynet.org/orweather/disasters.html>

<sup>24</sup>Western/Pacific Literacy Network, <http://literacynet.org/whatsnew.html>

<sup>25</sup>Western/Pacific Literacy Network

“a road map or story map to help you get around,” as well as glossaries “that will tell you the meaning of new words.”<sup>26</sup> Some examples of questions on the worksheet include “1.Name of the natural disaster you are studying”, and “2. Definition.” Further questioning probes “what kind of damage is likely to occur,” and asks the student to describe, “in simple words, what causes the disaster.” The information covered is thought-provoking, and encourages the learner to rely on a self-guided approach. Much of the material is rather in-depth, yet the worksheet proves to be a fairly solid, well-structured aid in seeking out appropriate information to what could otherwise become an avalanche of data overload. The worksheet may be completed and submitted on-line, though its design allows it to be easily printed out for a ‘hands on’ application as well.

Here shall conclude this particular review of adult-learner oriented education sites. However, it is necessary to stress that only an outline of the most well-rounded approaches have been provided. There are multitudinous, well-qualified submissions available, though it would be virtually impossible to mention them all. The general intent here is to suggest what a comprehensive site should include, and to provide suggestions in seeking these out to suit a variety of levels from a plethora of offerings.

From here, two further mentions will be made, though please note that the sources quoted have rather broad applications, and are perhaps best suited as a supplementary aid to instructors, rather than a specific resource centre for materials.

The first, a Canadian site entitled “CanTeach”<sup>27</sup> is self-described as “a non-commercial site created to assist teachers in finding and using resources online.” It is noteworthy to mention

---

<sup>26</sup>Oregon Weather, “Weather Disaster Worksheet,”  
<http://literacynet.org/orweather/disasters.html>

<sup>27</sup>CanTeach - Resources for Educators, <http://persweb.direct.ca/ikhan/index.html>

that as the site is non-commercial, it relies significantly on user-input for contributions and suggestions, thus allowing the site to “grow to reflect the needs of all educators.” CanTeach has “resources which all educators will find useful,” though an attempt has been made “to place emphasis on lesson plans, resources, and links which have a Canadian focus since there is a need for such materials on the web.” CanTeach’s site is divided into two main categories - Elementary Resources and a Links section. The Elementary Resources division is made up of lesson plans and resources. The contributions are numerous, and instructors will be grateful to discover here many unique approaches for a variety of learner types and skill levels. The Links section is almost overwhelming in its sheer capacity of information, and thankfully, is subdivided into a main index. From the Main Index, it is possible to tailor one’s search via select key terms, ranging anywhere from “English Language Arts” to “Technology Education,” “First Nations,” “Recipes,” “Second Languages,” “Personal Planning,” “Home Schooling,” “Illness, Diseases, Disabilities, Disorders, Syndromes,” “Songs and Poems,” and countless other topics.

The second site, “Create an On-Line Course” is from the PBS Adult Learning Service<sup>28</sup>, and, unfortunately, is not yet available. Like the previously discussed “LitLearner” service from PBS, the scheduled date of launch is January/February 2000. Once up and running, the “Create an On-Line Course” page will offer instructors the opportunity to gain personalized advice in course planning and design, as well as the fabulous opportunity to contribute to the ever-growing community of Adult Literacy on-line. Depending on one’s specific interests, two links are provided - the first is for materials, and is entitled “Development Network.” The second is for course design and on-line implementation, and is identified as “SERF Course Management

---

<sup>28</sup>PBS Adult Learning Service, “Educators - Create an On-line Course,”

<http://www.pbs.org/als/createcourse/index.html>.

Software.” As many material resource links and sources have already been discussed in great depth, the focus of the “Create” site will be on Internet Course Creation, as it is the only such development observed in this exploratory investigation of Internet literacy applications.

Completely innovative and original, this particular site has intriguing, and definitely exciting potential. Developed by the University of Delaware<sup>29</sup> as a “Web-based teaching and learning environment,” SERF is an acronym for “server-side educational resources facilitator.” SERF is described by PBS as being “equally as easy for students to navigate through as it is for an instructor to create the course.” The assertion is that “one does not have to be a computer programmer” to make use of the software, though to be fair, the program has not yet been implemented and subjected to open review, therefore no conclusion shall be made. However, optimism is high given the initial trial and inspection.

In greater detail, PBS describes the system as being entirely “based on both Netscape Navigator and Internet Explorer browsers.” With it, students will have the ability to “read the syllabus, access instructional resources, take examinations, communicate, and submit assignments over the Web in unique and powerful ways.” In addition, it will be possible, “at any time,” to “click a button to see a progress report, along with comments from their instructor and a prediction of their final grade.”

A more detailed description of what the program will offer goes on to elaborate that “it is as simple to develop a course as it is to take a course built with SERF. The SERF environment can be used to deliver courses anywhere via the World Wide Web through an Internet browser.” This technology will enable instructors to offer a course that is presented in a “self-paced, multimedia learning environment,” created with the aid of being able to choose “items from

---

<sup>29</sup>PBS, “Create an On-Line Course,” <http://www.pbs.org/als/createcourse/index.html>.

various menus. Instructors can even access and grade the assignments via the SERF grade book.” January of 2000 is the expected date that SERF software will be available for licensing from PBS; further details were not at this time available for comment.

In the composition of this paper, the quantity of information and technology was sometimes overwhelming, and the extent to which the Internet is transforming our world at this very moment became readily apparent. Perhaps Don Tapscott, in a recent article from *Netlife*<sup>30</sup> magazine, sums up our present situation best - “As we begin the year 2000, what we know is this: The Internet will profoundly alter every aspect of our lives. The World Wide Web is penetrating our homes, schools, factories, offices, storefronts, hospitals, governments and all other institutions. No technology has ever brought with it such enormous change.” Tapscott urges us to “look at our schools,” which, for centuries, have “remained impervious to change.” Education, he says, “was built around the broadcast model of learning, with the teacher transmitting information to kids who are supposed to absorb and spit it out on demand. The assumption is that through repetition, rehearsal and practice, facts can be molded into knowledge.” Paulo Freire addresses this problem as the “pedagogy of the answer,”<sup>31</sup> wherein instructors impose answers upon students “without listening to their questions.” Freire claims that such an approach “reduces learners to mere receptacles for prepackaged knowledge.” In his view, this “cannot stimulate and challenge learners to question, to doubt, and to reject “that which is part of one’s reality.” It may, in fact, serve in the learners’ rejection of learning itself.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup>Tapscott, Don. “The Future Starts Here.” *Netlife Magazine*, November/December (1999)

<sup>31</sup>Freire, Paulo (1985)

<sup>32</sup>Delpit, Lisa. “The Politics of Teaching Literate Discourse,” 1985

Freire's proposed alternative, a "pedagogy of the question," is one which "challenges the learners to break the chains ... imposed upon them." He elaborates that the notion of literacy as "simply a mechanical process" that is "still the basis of many literacy programs, especially competency-based programs which overemphasize the technical acquisition of reading and writing skills" should be avoided. Instead, we should focus on a pedagogy which is "both empowering and humanistic," one which enables learners "to think critically, and to adopt a critical attitude towards the world."<sup>33</sup>

Literacy on-line is beginning to achieve such goals, and has the potential to "transcend the boundary of any one medium."<sup>34</sup> Tapscott agrees. In "The Future Starts Here,"<sup>35</sup> he writes "with new Internet enabled media, the centre of the learning experience is transformed, shifting from the teacher to the student. Interactive software tailors the learning experience for each student, after evaluating his or her abilities, learning style and social context." He goes on to explain that "the learning process is more active, with students discussing, debating, researching and collaborating on projects." Importantly, it too is noted that "by no means does the Net make teachers passe'." To the contrary, "they are essential for creating and structuring the learning experience. But rather than being a factoid fountain at the front of the class, the teacher becomes each student's co-navigator."

Today, as stated by Ric Mazereeuw in his article, "The Way We'll Live,"<sup>36</sup> "the Internet is becoming as commonplace in classrooms as the chalkboard. But as important as it is for

---

<sup>33</sup>Excerpt from "Review of Understandings," 1999, and Freire, Paulo (1985)

<sup>34</sup>Mazereeuw, Ric. "The Way We'll Live." Netlife Magazine, November/December 1999

<sup>35</sup>Tapscott, Don. "The Future Starts Here" (Nov/Dec 1999)

<sup>36</sup>Mazereeuw, Ric. "The Way We'll Live" (Nov/Dec 1999)

schools and libraries, the Net has changed education even more dramatically” for those “who want the power, control and responsibility of charting their own course” of schooling.

Mazereeuw adds that learners are “no longer isolated, without the tools and resources of the traditional school structure.” Now, “wired ... schoolers can connect with thousands of others” who share their situation. He concludes that “a modem and Internet access can open up a world of learning resources and lesson plans that would make even the best-equipped institutions proud.”

Finally, it is necessary to quote Mazereeuw one last time, as he presents an inspirational vision of how the Internet may be harnessed as a means of connecting to others.

“The Internet has always been about making connections and bridging distances. But while it linked computers and scientists in the early days, it’s now connecting millions of people as we share our experiences, concerns and interests with others around the world and around the corner. Some critics feel that such interaction makes us closer to our monitors than to people. However, the truth is that the Net also has the power to turn virtual communities into real ones.”

Indeed, there remains much to be done. However, the primary intent of this paper has been more than satisfied. While one may expend countless hours sifting through useless information, given the right direction, priceless resources do exist and can be found. It is these sources which provide much inspiration, for they are striving to adhere to, and implement, those favoured pedagogical approaches to RWTL originally discussed in the Review of Understandings. It is difficult to envision what the future may hold in regards to ‘literacy on-

line.’ One can only hope that current efforts continue, making the best use possible of that technology which is now, and will soon be, available.

“Education must be reconceived, not as merely a preparation for maturity (whence our absurd idea that it should stop after adolescence) but as a continuous growth of the mind and a continuous illumination of life. In a sense, the school can give us only the instrumentalities of mental growth; the rest depends upon an absorption and interpretation of experience. Real education comes after we leave school and there is no reason why it should stop before death.”<sup>37</sup>

John Dewey, 1916  
Educational Philosopher

---

<sup>37</sup>ARIS Website Link, [www.collegexpress.com/admissions/continuing/index.html](http://www.collegexpress.com/admissions/continuing/index.html)