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Abstract

This paper takes the position that the Web and online reading have not created new literacies. Rather, what the Web has done is to make explicit aspects of reading and text comprehension that have always “been there” but which have gone largely unattended in traditional curricula, large-scale standardized accountability testing, and most reading research. It is argued that characteristics of the literacy practices of disciplinary specialists and experts have clear parallels to Web-enabled reading. Specifically, both the Web and disciplinary reading involve purposeful use of resources to accomplish specific tasks that frequently involve multiple texts, multiple media, and collaborative communities that introduce consistent but also conflicting information on the same topic. From both the cognitive and social perspective, it is not that Web-enabled learning-through-reading has introduced *new* literacies. What *is* new is that all citizens need to engage in advanced literacy practices and need opportunities to learn them. Thus, the Web and the online resources it makes available are redefining what it means to be literate as a citizen in the 21st century. The chapter examines the impact of this perspective on the Web on reading research, instruction and assessment, including the need to expand models of comprehension, broaden the methodologies used to study it in the laboratory and in classrooms, and develop process accounts of search and selection of information resources. Implications for assessments and teacher professional development are presented.

Implications

Web-based information access has created the press for reading instruction to encompass a broader and deeper range of knowledge, skills, and practices than ever before. A re-examination of the what and how of current approaches to reading comprehension instruction, especially in the content areas, is needed. As well, teachers need opportunities to deepen their own understanding of the demands of disciplinary reading and their pedagogical implications.

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