

BOOK REVIEW

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Literacy in a Digital World: Teaching and Learning in the Age of Information, by Kathleen Tyner

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Literacy in a Digital World: Teaching and Learning in the Age of Information, by Kathleen Tyner. (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 1998, 291 pages, \$32.50).

In her book, *Literacy in a Digital World*, Kathleen Tyner makes a successful attempt to illuminate the ideological and methodological disconnect between literacy scholars and communication researchers, in terms of both how they utilize competing methodologies and the ways in which each discipline has treated the technological revolution. She argues that “alphabetic” literacy (i.e., the literacy of the written and spoken word), has been researched from a mostly qualitative and contextual standpoint, thus leading to limited attempts to generalize beyond specific settings and circumstances, while mainstream communica-

tion research has been highly focused on quantitative analysis designed to generate effects, with little distinction between form and content.

She goes on to make the case that digital literacy, as that which is advanced by electronic computer technologies, transcends these distinctions and has the potential to create a needed synergy between these two respective disciplines. She argues for “interactive” media education, as a chance to provide educators with new “literacy tools” that have demonstrated the ability to overcome time, space, and distance so as to ensure greater access to learning for students and more opportunity for researchers to enhance their scholarship.

Generally, Tyner’s book provides a unique and much-needed perspective on the intersection of literacy, communication, and digital

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technology. Useful for those looking for a well-researched perspective on these themes, and suitable as a text for a new media and/or educational technology class, Tyner's book does a good job of drawing together diverse strands of research while making her case for a new emphasis on media education as a way to provide synthesis and cohesion for teaching and learning experiences.

Tyner organizes her argument carefully, starting off with a recounting of San Francisco's New Main public library's attempt in 1996 to abandon the old card catalog system in favor of a new computerized system. Tyner recounts how the computer-savvy librarians were taken aback by the strong protests from traditional users, who objected to the cards' re-purposing as part of an "art wall" designed to simulate the "accidental juxtapositions that users of the old system experience while thumbing through the catalog" (p. 11). Tyner uses the story as a metaphor for her central thesis, that literacy, as a technology or set of technologies utilized to decode meanings, encompasses oral and written, as well as digital technologies. As these technologies change, so does our notion and conceptualization of what it means to be "literate." Further, each technology, as it develops, does not necessarily subvert and replace previous ones; they

"overlap, coexist and exchange in symbiotic ways."

Digital communication is particularly relevant in this context because digital technologies have the potential to enhance convergence of other forms of literacy, yet this, Tyner argues, could also be problematic, as such inevitable "mixing of media" could cause unanticipated social outcomes. In such an environment, the role of media education may be critical, in that such education, focused on access and application of information in all its forms, could serve to transform schools, re-engineer curriculum and significantly impact the teaching and learning process.

In the final third of the book, Tyner provides a historical backdrop for media education in the U.S. since the 1970s, when the focus was on integrating broadcast technologies into the educational process, to today, when the goal of media education, Tyner says, is to develop an interactive education model comprised of educational strategies that "blend critical literacy, experiential education and critical pedagogy," a mix that has the potential to fundamentally shape the course of modern education. Tyner quotes Hollis Frampton, an American experimental filmmaker: "Once you can read, you cannot *not* read."