

Using TECHNOLOGY *to Enhance* Reading

Innovative Approaches *to* LITERACY INSTRUCTION

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Introduction

Here we sit in the middle of the second decade of the 21st century. Isn't it amazing how some things have changed since we ushered in the new millennium? Shifts in technology and our use of technology have been breathtaking to say the least. We have seen the introduction and widespread use of online bookstores, social media applications, interactive whiteboards, smartphones, tablets, and other devices and applications that allow us to communicate, take and share photos and videos, play sophisticated games, access and search the Internet, and perform many other tasks. No longer are we tied to a computer workstation in our office or classroom. More changes are sure to follow in the coming years, leading to both a feeling of excitement and a slight sense of being overwhelmed. Just when we have mastered one application or device, a new one emerges.

At the same time, it is interesting to note what has not changed. One of these is reading achievement among our elementary, middle, and secondary students. Despite significant investments of money and other resources by the federal, state, and local governments, student achievement levels in the United States have hardly budged. Take, for example, Reading First—President George W. Bush's reading initiative that was supposed to raise reading achievement of third-grade students in the United States. Reading First was based on state-of-the-art effective reading instruction, as reported by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD; 2000). Yet, the results of Reading First were hardly encouraging. Reading achievement among U.S. students has remained largely stagnant, and Reading First produced no statistically noticeable effects on reading achievement when compared with non-Reading First schools (Gamse et al., 2008).

Clearly we need new solutions for and new ways of thinking about the problems of literacy education. In a world that is becoming increasingly competitive, maintaining the status quo simply will not cut it. However, even maintaining the status quo has become a challenge. Since the financial crisis of 2008, budgets for schools have been reduced, class sizes have increased, and curricular demands have expanded. “Do more with less” seems to be the current policy mantra.

Technology may offer some solutions to the problems we confront in literacy education. We would never suggest that computers could or should replace good teachers, but we do think technology can be a multiplier—it can allow teachers to create new methods of instruction and cover more content than they could without technology. Essentially, technology provides teachers with tools for developing novel approaches for engaging students and effective instruction for literacy learners. Moreover, it is becoming increasingly clear that technology is changing how we read, what we read, and how we respond to what we read. In this age of reading education, technology cannot be avoided.

Despite the ever-expanding influence of technology on reading and reading instruction, many teachers simply do not feel completely comfortable embracing technology for teaching reading. They may be so overwhelmed with the growing curricular demands (for example, changing curriculum and instruction to align with the Common Core State Standards [CCSS] or other state standards) that there is not enough time or expertise to consider how technology can impact their teaching of reading. The rapidly changing technology environment may sway some teachers to hold off on implementing technology solutions in their reading classrooms. Regardless of the reason, we cannot stand still when it comes to technology and the teaching of reading. For our sake, and our students’ sakes, it is imperative that we begin to explore ways teachers can make good use of technology to improve their literacy teaching and students’ reading outcomes.

That is what this book is all about. We have brought together many thought leaders on the subject to offer practical insights into how they have used technology to improve their literacy instruction. Our contributors range from classroom teachers who put technology to work daily, to college professors who have explored the power and potential of using technology to solve many of the problems in literacy education. Our hope in developing this book and its companion volume, *Using Technology to Enhance Writing: Innovative Approaches to Literacy Instruction*, is to provide you, the classroom teacher or literacy interventionist, with practical reading instruction strategies that you can easily implement or adapt today in your own instructional environment. Additionally, we hope that this book will inspire you to think outside the box and begin creating your own technology-oriented approaches for reading instruction.

We want to emphasize that this book is not about technology per se; rather, it is about how reading instruction at all levels can be made more effective and engaging through the thoughtful and intentional employment of technology. Reading is the heart and soul of this book; technology is simply one way to improve reading.

How This Book Is Organized

Research has identified essential factors or competencies associated with success in learning to read. If teachers help students develop mastery in these areas, students are likely to become proficient readers. We have organized our book, then, around several of these key reading competencies, which have been identified by the National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000), the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices [NGA] & Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2010), *Handbook of Reading Research, Volume IV* (Kamil, Pearson, Moje, & Afferbach, 2011), and other scholarly reports. We group the chapters into the following eight parts.

- I. Reading Foundations
- II. Reading Fluency
- III. Reading Vocabulary
- IV. Comprehension of Informational Texts
- V. Comprehension of Literary Texts
- VI. Reading Across Disciplines
- VII. Motivation for Reading
- VIII. Reading Assessment

Each part focuses on existing, research-based instructional practices that have been adapted with technology applications or novel strategies to take advantage of currently available technological features. Although specific chapters may focus on a particular range of grade levels, we feel that readers should be able to easily adapt the strategies for any grade level or audience.

Each part begins with a brief introduction written by the editors to provide background information. Following each introduction are three chapters that emphasize instructional approaches for teaching the focal competency or topic of the part. For example, after the introduction to Reading Foundations, you will find chapters that explore how technology can be applied to teaching phonemic awareness, phonics, and other related competencies to emerging readers. We wish to emphasize that the instructional approaches and technological tools presented in each chapter could fit into other parts or span across multiple parts or grade levels. Thus, we challenge you,

the reader, to adapt the presentations in the individual chapters to create instructional applications that address the specific needs of your students.

Each chapter focuses on a specific pedagogical practice implemented with technology or digital tools. As we mentioned earlier, the chapters have been written by exemplary educators and scholars who have used the technology with students, conducted research related to the technological application, made professional development presentations and presentations at professional organizations on their topic, or have written in professional journals about their particular use of technology in reading. The authors have published in leading literacy journals such as *The Reading Teacher* and the *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*. Moreover, these authors have worked extensively in real classrooms with students and teachers. The chapters provide first-hand accounts of how particular instructional approaches work and include specific suggestions to adapt and implement them in other instructional settings.

Each chapter is organized in a similar manner so that you can more easily negotiate the various topics and look broadly and comparatively at the variety of approaches for reading instruction. We hope you will be able to analyze the instructional practices across multiple contexts and populations. After an overview of the theoretical perspectives and research bases for the particular instructional approach presented, each chapter is structured more or less as follows.

1. **How Do I Do It?:** The authors provide a rich description of the pedagogical practice.
2. **Classroom Example:** Specific examples from the authors' personal experiences highlight how the instructional approach works and how it advanced students' reading and knowledge and use of technology.
3. **Your Turn:** The authors invite you to explore how you might adapt the particular pedagogical practice for your own classrooms.

We commend the chapter authors for their enthusiasm and dedication in sharing their knowledge of reading instruction and technology. Each of the authors could easily have written more extensively about their classroom experiences; however, they worked to provide a succinct presentation of some of the most promising research-based, pedagogical strategies. We also commend you for choosing this book. Teaching is tough, and there are many books that claim to improve how teachers teach reading. We truly believe that this book has great potential for transforming the way you look at technology and literacy and, more importantly, how you use technology to benefit your students' literacy development.