Technological literacy: Innovation and practicality

As technology becomes an ever increasing part of our lives, technological literacy must become an increasing component of our learning. Integration of technology into our learning institutions must reflect its social and vocational uses; avoiding innovating purely for innovation's sake. Cuff-linked to the challenges of integration is a resistance to change amongst educational practitioners. A perception that substantial up-skilling is required and that new technologies and techniques means discarding what they know can often be the reason for their hesitation. The recent emergence of Web 2.0 offers key opportunities to respond to these complications and to take practical steps toward integrating technological literacy.

At present, approaches to integrating technology have been largely deterministic in nature; viewing ICT as a resource while largely ignoring its influence on the context of our lives and our learning institutions. Early approaches saw ICT as advanced, improved pens; and they assumed that dropping technology on mass into schools, universities and public libraries, would automatically improve outcomes. Technological literacy emerged in the form of computer classes where the emphasis was on structure rather than function.

There is a lot of chatter online and in literature about how Web 2.0 may finally deliver on the internet's early promises of democratising information access and production. Perhaps more salient to us are the underpinning structures that provoke these types of suggestions. In simple terms, Web 2.0 is based on context rather than hardware; responding to users and processes, rather than infrastructure and products.

Technological literacy with Web 1.0 tends to focus on learning the application. Web 2.0 attempts to reduce the intellectual load of running the application so that literacy can focus on the communication and its context. Web 2.0 integrates willingly because it responds to context. Several benefits are immediately apparent. Integration mimics social and vocational use and innovation is contextual, instead of being at political or industrial whim. There is also less technical up-skilling required, and how it fits in to existing models is more easily apparent to resistant practitioners.

So where do these new technologies fit with existing schemas? Aside from medium, traditional book review brochures share a lot in common with blogs, as do new releases notices and advertisements for author visits; and all of these can be RSS fed to a single dynamic library news page. Maps and directions can be preset on Google Maps for reading or print out. Subject finders and the frozen books trolley in a school library are a lot like an online subject gateway, except one of them is more accessible. Lecture notes and updates can be posted on a subject blog instead of forming mountains of paper waste outside your office. Essay drafts can be posted to a forum for peer review any time, rather than just tutorial time. Forums and chats are ideal environments for information sharing, and as archives become knowledge silos. Group projects can be planned and constructed using a wiki, which is really just butcher's paper on the internet.

These techniques are simple, yet innovative. Above all they are practical examples of how technology can be integrated with existing learning systems rather than imposed. With adequately resourced support, the resistance to new 2.0 technology is greatly reduced because users feel that it is serving rather than restricting, making them more willing to approach it.

Once its mysterious numerical name is overlooked, Web 2.0 offers the perfect opportunity for technology finally to be integrated in to everyday learning and for technological literacy to acquire deeper contextual meanings than 'how do I turn on this beige box?'

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Book review

Skills for Work Book 4 – Rights and Responsibilities
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www.phoenixeduc.com
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This is the fourth in a series of books aimed at teens and young adults who have low literacy skills. The focus of the series is on supporting teachers who work with these students by providing age appropriate, Australian resources which are interesting, appealing and relevant to a modern workplace environment.

This book is geared towards young people who are moving into a workplace for the first time, and who need to understand the basics of getting along at work. It looks at areas related to rights and responsibilities of both workers and employers, covering topics such as:

- Getting started at work – understanding the basics such as forms, work arrangements, responsibilities and rights of workers and employers

- Staying safe – occupational health and safety and related issues

- Workplace relationships – getting along with others, working as part of a team, managing problems at work

- Planning for the future – helping young people plan their career and gather the skills they need to manage in the longer term at work.

The book is written in an 'easy to read' format, with clear, simple text, appealing stories and case studies. It is aimed at young people who are attending secondary school, or are learners at TAFE or other educational settings. It could also be used effectively with young adults, particularly those with limited workplace knowledge and experience. It uses Australian laws and examples where relevant in relation to modern workplaces. The book can be photocopied, making it appealing and easy to use for teachers in a range of settings.