Dedication

To all teachers and students who approach the teaching and learning of English as a nonnative language with unbounded imagination and creativity through technology integration.
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Preface

It is a privilege to write a Preface for this inspirational book. In its chapters, we relive the experiences of learners and teachers who have used emerging technologies of literacy, particularly involving the visual medium, to create cultural artifacts that embody their insights, knowledge, aesthetic experiences, and critical analyses of social realities. These educational experiences involve the generation, sharing, and mobilization of knowledge in ways that stand in stark contrast to the one-way transmission of information and skills that has been the traditional *modus operandi* of schools.

In these pages, we also see glimpses of the future of teaching and learning, not just for English language learners (ELLs), but for all learners. We are rapidly approaching a tipping point where multimedia digital presentation of curriculum will replace textbooks. This process is being driven by simple economics rather than by the increased affordances for teaching and learning intrinsic to these digital devices. As tablets, netbooks, cell phones, and other forms of information and communication technologies (ICT) drop in price and, in more affluent countries, become as universally accessible as televisions are today, it will become increasingly more economical to provide students with digital access than to continue the printing and distribution of hard-copy resources.

Caution, however, is in order before we proclaim the emergence of a more enlightened digitally mediated educational future. It is appropriate to recall Larry Cuban’s (2001) description of computers in the classroom as “oversold and underused” as he reflected on the fact that massive spending on technology in North American and European schools during the late 1980s and 1990s resulted in no measurable increase in school achievement. Part of the reason computers were “underused” was that access to the computers themselves and to the Internet was frequently limited, particularly in schools serving low-income students, and the equipment itself was often unreliable in performance. These hardware issues seem likely to be resolved within the next decade as relatively inexpensive hand-held devices with Internet access become ubiquitous.

However, less easily resolved are the pedagogical issues that have played at least an equal role in limiting the impact of ICT in the recent past. The pedagogical
issue can be stated quite simply (see Cummins, 2004, and Cummins, Brown, & Sayers, 2007, for reviews): Regardless of how powerful or user-friendly the ICT is, it will exert minimal impact on teaching and learning when it is implemented only within a transmission orientation to pedagogy.

Numerous educational theorists have drawn distinctions similar to those between transmission, social constructivist, and transformative orientations to pedagogy. Briefly stated, colleagues and I (e.g., Skourtou, Kourtis-Kazoullis, & Cummins, 2006) have conceptualized these different orientations as nested within each other, reflecting the relative narrowness of their curricular focus. Transmission orientations are concerned simply to transmit information and skills articulated in the curriculum directly to students. Social constructivist pedagogy incorporates this narrow focus on the curriculum but broadens it to include the development among students of higher-order thinking abilities based on teachers and students co-constructing knowledge and understanding. Finally, transformative approaches broaden the focus still further by emphasizing the relevance not only of transmitting the curriculum and constructing knowledge but also of promoting social awareness and critical literacy among students.

Within the context of these three broad pedagogical orientations, we can ask whether the powerful affordances of emerging forms of ICT will push schools, particularly those serving low-income and ELL students, to expand their instructional focus beyond transmission of information and skills; or will the persistence of transmission approaches and intensive standardized testing stifle the efforts of progressive educators to enable low-income and ELL students to use these powerful tools to generate knowledge and engage in critical literacy? Obviously, time will tell. However, the projects and theoretical discussions in this book, together with descriptions of similar projects elsewhere (e.g., Hull & Katz, 2006), do enable us to sketch the pedagogical deep structure that will determine the success of technology-mediated teaching and learning activities.

THE POWER OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Constructs that are clearly operating in the case studies to enhance the power of new technologies for developing language and (multi)literacy skills are parallel to those that have emerged in syntheses of the research on print literacy development for ELL students in more typical school contexts (see Cummins, 2011; Cummins & Early, 2011):

- **Engaged participation** in (multi)literacy tasks and projects is key to the development of competence. As John Guthrie (2004, p. 8) noted with respect to the research on the centrality of engaged participation for all forms of human performance, including literacy achievement: “certainly some initial lessons are valuable for driving a car or typing on a keyboard but expertise spirals upward mainly with engaged participation.”
• **Scaffolding** of both input (comprehension) and output (production) plays a crucial instructional role. For example, the various forms of readily available graphic supports in digital media (images, videos, drawings, etc.) facilitate participation; additionally, writing initially in the home language can help students transition to English writing (with the help of both human supports and technological translation tools). The role of these “external” scaffolding supports is similar to their role in supporting ELL students’ learning in regular classrooms, but the scaffolding available in a digital environment is abundant and multidimensional (as documented in chapters in this volume) in ways that are typically not the case in classroom contexts.

• The projects undertaken by students in the case studies connect to their past, present, and future lives in ways that are virtually impossible in a transmission-oriented instructional environment. Students’ background knowledge is activated as they engage in creating new meanings and insights. They are encouraged to pursue tasks and projects that interest them and to incorporate their knowledge and interests (e.g., in popular culture) into their productions. The projects in the case studies also stimulate students to use their imaginations to envisage new possibilities (e.g., through writing poetry or exploring solutions to social problems). These **connections to students’ lives** operate as “internal” scaffolds that enable students to perform beyond their current levels of competence.

• The case studies document how participation in digital meaning making **affirmed students’ identities** and enabled them to develop what Patrick Manyak (2004) has termed **identities of competence**. Although identity is a term that rarely appears in educational policy documents or in research reviews focused on students’ academic achievement, there is extensive research documenting its centrality to academic engagement, particularly for students from low-income and racialized communities (see Cummins & Early, 2011). An implication of this research, which applies equally to regular classroom contexts, is that students will engage actively with literacy only to the extent that such engagement is identity-affirming. In this regard, creative writing and other forms of cultural production (e.g., art, drama, video creation) assume particular importance as expressions of identity. **Projections** of identity into new social spheres, and **re-creation** of identity as a result of feedback from and dialogue with multiple audiences. We have used the term **identity text** to capture essential aspects of this process. Students invest their identities in the creation of texts which can be written, spoken, signed, visual, musical, dramatic, or combinations in multimodal form. The identity text then holds a mirror up to students in which their identities are reflected back in a positive light (Cummins & Early, 2011).
In conclusion, the research documented in this volume is important and powerful because it describes (a) how the pedagogical affordances of digital technologies promoted engaged participation in language and literacy learning on the part of ELL students and (b) the extent to which academic outcomes were superior to those typically observed in more traditional pedagogical environments (the Li and McComb case study in this volume is a particularly compelling example). Obviously, these findings cannot be generalized to other contexts—no such claim is being made. However, they do establish phenomena that require explanation and any theory of teaching and learning that cannot account for these findings must be modified. Two of the explanatory constructs which I have highlighted in this Preface, namely, engaged participation and identity affirmation—are largely absent from the transmission orientations to teaching and learning currently operating in many schools serving low-income students. I would argue that neglect of these explanatory constructs represents a major reason why almost 50 years of compensatory transmission-oriented schooling for low-income and racialized students in the United States have produced such disappointing returns on human and economic investment. My hope is that the emerging technologies of literacy, vividly evoked in this volume, will reduce the pedagogical divide between affluent and poor students and shift the instructional focus in schools towards social constructivist and transformative approaches.

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