

Foreword

The Digital Age has arrived, and with it, e-mail, blogs, World Wide Web access, unedited information and misinformation, hackers, and an incredible range of communication possibilities, both locally and internationally. We as literacy educators have no choice but to accept our responsibility to help students negotiate these new forms of communication. Although some of us may still feel inadequate when using computers, especially regarding the technical skills needed to take advantage of the myriad of possibilities that confront us, we do know a great deal about communication. It is this expertise that is desperately needed by young Digital Age enthusiasts. How can they determine the author of texts? How can they construct the meaning contained in electronic messages? How can they identify the subtle emotional intents and messages contained in the visual and verbal presentations? How can they most honestly and effectively present themselves and their ideas to audiences they meet electronically? How can we, their teachers, most effectively guide them in reading, responding to, and composing messages?

On my way to the library in an elementary school recently, I became intrigued by the hall bulletin board. At the top was the question, "What do we mean when we say appropriate use of the Internet?" Large sheets of paper contained lists of students' responses to the question. Heading their lists were: Don't use chat rooms without teacher's permission, don't be mean, don't send viruses, no swearing, don't chat with strangers, no naughty sites, don't give out personal information, and don't pretend to be someone else. These statements of caution by children sobered me. What responsibilities this generation of young people has to assume. Every form of seduction and persuasion can be accessed easily via the computer. Students are more vulnerable than ever before to unidentified and unregulated messages, and they have all the more reason to take literacy seriously—what an opportunity to explore with them key concepts like authorship, voice, and critical evaluation.

They also have access to an incredibly rich resource via electronic communication with people across the globe and information and documents unavailable locally. The new technology enables them to collaborate in new ways in researching, writing, illustrating, and presenting information and ideas. They deserve teachers who can help them use this potential effectively.

Into this new reality comes R. W. Burniske's refreshing message to literacy educators. What a treat it is to read! Here is a book that puts the possibilities of computers in perspective for literacy educators. Burniske examines both the potential and problems of the Digital Age technologies

for literacy educators. Instead of a technologically focused guide, this book takes a philosophical and communications perspective. Readers are challenged to expand our concept of “literacy” as we follow his examination of the various aspects of literacy from civil to pedagogical. Burniske has constructed a wonderful bridge for us and leads us to the new age by building on what we know and do well. He shows us how to expand our instruction so that electronic literacy becomes an essential component of our classrooms. He challenges us to realize our commitment to develop our students as critical and reflective language users. In the process, both our students and we, their teachers, will compose ourselves online.

This is a book all serious literacy professionals need to read and discuss with colleagues. My thanks to Burniske for providing such an inviting guidebook for the journey.

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