

New Strategies for Assessing Digital Literacy: Connecting Research and Policy

Symposium participants:

Margaret Honey and Cornelia Brunner,
Directors, Center for Children and Technology, Education Development Center

Diny Golder-Dardis
Executive Director, JES & Co.

Cheryl Lemke
CEO, Metiri Associates

Joyce Malyn-Smith,
Senior Project Director, Center for Education, Employment and Community,
Education Development Center

This symposium will bring together a diverse group of organizations that are taking complementary approaches to defining and assessing "digital literacy" and promoting high-quality assessment of digital literacy skills at multiple levels of the education system.

What do we mean by digital literacy?

A range of business, government, and research organizations are calling for students to master a critical approach to technology use that moves *beyond* the mastery of technical skills and includes knowing how to:

- Analyze new media messages critically,
- Create media products that present information accurately and persuasively, and
- Take full advantage of technology's capacity to support effective communication.

It is increasingly necessary for students to attain these skills if they are to become successful members of society and thoughtful citizens.

Increased accountability pressures are also pushing educators to demonstrate the impact of technology on student achievement. During the past ten years, over \$37 billion dollars has been spent on bringing technology and Internet connections to America's schools (Benton, 2002). Legislators and the public are now expecting to see returns. The recently passed "No Child Left Behind" education bill requires states to demonstrate that "every student is technologically literate by the time the student finishes the eighth grade, regardless of the student's race, ethnicity, gender, family income, geographic location, or disability" (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

Comprehensive articulations of the range of conceptual and technical skills that constitute digital literacy are just beginning to emerge. Such a framework is needed to guide the teaching, learning, and assessment of digital literacy skills. Helping teachers to bridge this gap between traditional and digital literacy is vital if we are to justify and capitalize upon the tremendous investment that has already been made in school technology (CEO Forum, 1999, 2000). In turn, policymakers need to be informed about the importance of developing adequate and appropriate assessments of digital literacy.

Tying assessment to improvements in learning requires building *coherence* across multiple levels of the system, which will require new ways for district and state administrators to assess the impact of new technology-related pedagogy. Unless all concerned parties have the resources to understand and use information on digital literacy skills, efforts to change the way that students learn with technology will falter.

Structure of the symposium

Each of the participants in the proposed symposium has created tools to help teachers, schools, districts and states foster teaching, learning, and assessment of digital literacy skills. The session will begin with very brief overviews of the work each participant is pursuing in this area. The majority of the session will be a discussion of the opportunities for, and challenges to, introducing these tools and strategies into state and federal efforts to assess students' digital literacy.

The strength of this session will be the mix of participants, each of whom has a long history of working at the intersection of research and policy.

Diny Golder-Dardis is the Executive Director, JES & Co. and a leader of the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, an organization which builds on five years of work by the CEO Forum to support and promote the high-quality use of technology for teaching and learning. The Partnership will help the Department of Education, states, districts and schools define 21st Century skills, ensure they are included in state standards, and identify the best methods for teaching and assessing them.

Margaret Honey is the director of the Center for Children and Technology/Education Development Center (<http://www.edc.org/CCT>). CCT is developing a Digital Literacy Toolkit to support teachers and school districts assess and report students' attainment of digital literacy skills. The complete suite includes tools for teaching and assessing digital literacy at the 4th – 8th grade levels; professional development programs; and web-based reporting tools.

Cheryl Lemke is the CEO of Metiri Group. In a recent report, “enGauge 21st Century Skills: Digital Literacies for a Digital Age,” the Metiri Group (<http://www.metiri.com>) outlines a set of 21st Century Skills that will be increasingly important to students entering the workforce. They argue that these skills are not at odds with traditional educational skills, but are in fact extensions of those skills, adapted to new technologies and new work environments.

Joyce Malyn-Smith is a Senior Project Director, Center for Education, Employment and Community, Education Development Center. Dr. Malyn-Smith was a member of the International ICT Literacy Panel, convened by the Educational Testing Service, which recently published “Digital Transformation: A Framework for ICT Literacy” (<http://www.ets.org/research/ictliteracy/>). This report provides a framework to guide the assessment of students' ICT competency and their ability to function successfully in a knowledge-based society.

References

Benton Foundation (2002). *Great Expectations: Leveraging America's Investment in Educational Technology*. Washington, D.C.: Benton Foundation.

CEO Forum. (1999). Year 2 Report: Professional Development: A Link to Better Learning. <http://www.ceoforum.org/reports.cfm>

CEO Forum. (2000). Year 3 Report: School Technology and Readiness. <http://www.ceoforum.org/reports.cfm>

U.S. Department of Education. (2001) Enhancing Education Through Technology Act of 2001. Sec. 2402. Purposes and Goals. <http://www.ed.gov/legislation/ESEA02/pg34.html>