PART II: LITERACIES FOR A NEW WORLD OF WORK

A Series for K-12 Educational Administrators to Use with their Teams and Stakeholders

By Will Richardson and Rob Mancabelli
Preparing Students For A New World Of Work In The 21st Century

Part I: Five Realities of Work in the 21st Century

Part II: Literacies for a New World of Work

Part III: Shifting Practice for a New World of Work

This three-part series by Will Richardson and Rob Mancabelli is written for school administrators to drive meaningful conversations about schools in the 21st century with building-level and district-level teams, boards of education, parents and other community members. It’s intended to be a thought-provoking, resource-filled starting point for discussing the evolving world of work in the 21st century and how our schools need to evolve to prepare students for these new realities.

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PART II: LITERACIES FOR A NEW WORLD OF WORK

Last month, the brand consultants Sparks and Honey published a list of “20 Jobs of the Future,” and while many of them sounded a bit “out there” on first blush, they actually might not be as crazy as they first seem: “Personal Digital Curator” for people needing help keeping their digital lives in order. Or a “Curiosity Tutor” to teach the art of discovery and provide inspiration. Or a “Digital Detox Therapist” for all those folks who can’t seem to step away from the network any longer. It’s a creative list, no doubt, but it speaks to the new potentials and challenges of flourishing in a ubiquitously connected, digital world.

But whether you find those job titles plausible or not, this much is certain: traditional ways of thinking about jobs and careers and the ways we prepare our students for the workplace are going to have to change. In fact, they already are. In the second part of this series, we’ll explore the kinds of new literacies, skills, and mindsets that will prepare young adults to flourish in a new world of work. We’ll ask, (and answer) questions like: In an era of global connections, overwhelming information, and powerful digital technologies, what skills will be prized by the market? If those skills are enhanced versions of the traditional ones we’ve prized, then how must we rethink our traditional conceptions of skills and literacies to fit the modern world? And, most importantly, what new literacies and dispositions do each of us have to acquire in order to keep pace with the massive changes we’re experiencing?

Later, in our third report, we’ll share a number of best practices from real schools preparing students for the modern workforce.

RETHINKING TRADITIONAL SKILLS AND LITERACIES FOR THE MODERN WORLD

Many of the fundamental skills and literacies that we’ve identified over the last 100 years or so are still crucial for success, though the ways they are put into practice are quickly and profoundly changing. For example, the ability to read and write at high levels is the most basic of all literacies, but today, we need to rethink reading and writing in the digital age.

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“My generation had it easy. We got to ‘find’ a job. But, more than ever, our kids will have to ‘invent’ a job.”

Thomas Friedman, *The New York Times*
Active, successful participants in this 21st century global society must be able to:

- Develop proficiency and fluency with the tools of technology;
- Build intentional cross-cultural connections and relationships with others so to pose and solve problems collaboratively and strengthen independent thought;
- Design and share information for global communities to meet a variety of purposes;
- Manage, analyze, and synthesize multiple streams of simultaneous information;
- Create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multimedia texts;
- Attend to the ethical responsibilities required by these complex environments.

For schools, this is a much different, and much higher bar than the more traditional definitions of literacy that were created for an analog, unconnected, technology-scarce time. To be clear, we don’t blame teachers and students for struggling with this redefinition. After all, this is, perhaps, the most disruptive moment in the history of education and learning, greater even than the invention of the printing press. Our concern, however, is our slow pace to embrace these benchmarks in both our professional and personal practice. To be blunt, now almost two full decades into the explosion of technological change that the Web initiated, we’re shocked at the exceedingly low numbers of educators at all levels who are literate by the guidelines above.

In schools that are trying to keep pace, we hear more and more discussion surrounding the importance of “The 4 Cs”: creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, and communication. We applaud this. While those skills have always been crucial to our success (regardless of the century) they are no doubt even more important now as we gain more and more access to information, knowledge, and people via the Web. For instance, in a 2010 survey of 1,500 global CEOs conducted by IBM, respondents reported that “more than rigor, management discipline, integrity or even vision—successfully navigating an increasingly complex world will require creativity.” And few would argue that in a globally networked world, being able to work with others, share ideas, and make sense of vast storehouses of information are the fundamental requirements to flourish in the workplace.

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2010 IBM Survey of 1,500 global CEO’s
So, whether it is reading, writing or the 4Cs, there is no doubt that we need to think hard about how traditional skills and literacies are changing. But that still begs the question—what, then are the “new” skills and literacies that are required by the modern world of learning and work? And, importantly, what dispositions or mindsets do we need to nurture in our students (and ourselves) in order to be fully prepared for work success?

We’d like to suggest four more Cs to add to the mix.

NEW LITERACIES AND DISPOSITIONS—FOUR MORE Cs

The growth of both the power of computers and devices and the connections we can now make online are leading many in education to extend the definition of literacy into totally new areas. We’re quickly moving well beyond the 3 Rs in terms of articulating the basic abilities needed to compete in the modern workplace. In fact, author and Stanford University visiting lecturer Howard Rheingold argues that technology and the Web require a host of new literacies, including attention, participation, collaboration, and critical consumption. Similarly, University of Southern California professor Henry Jenkins offers up a dozen “new media literacies“ that include topics such as multitasking, collective intelligence, and visualization.

In other words, the conversation around literacy is expanding (if not exploding).

For our purposes, however, we’d like to focus on a set of four decidedly new Cs that we think are now absolute components of modern learning and success in the future world of work: change mindset, computing, continual learning, and connection. With five billion people expected to be connected to the Web by decade’s end, with more and more content coming online each day, and with the marked increase of the power of computers to solve problems and create authentic, meaningful work that can affect the lives of millions, those who don’t excel in making the most of these new literacies and dispositions will be behind those that can.

CONNECTION

What do we mean by connection literacy? It’s the ability to find and be found by others online and off who can support and extend our potential to continually learn, create, and collaborate at a global level. Simply put, while our face-to-face interactions are still important and powerful for all kinds of...
reasons, it’s now imperative to be able to develop extensive networks in online spaces built around our shared interests and needs. Not surprisingly, these virtual interactions require a different knowledge base and skill set to navigate effectively. First and foremost, it requires the ability to assess the identity and motivations of potential online connections. And, importantly, it also requires that we maintain a level of transparency in our own work and personal lives that will allow others to assess our potential value as a connection.

Connection literacy also draws on traditional expectations of information literacy but with an added digital component. It’s still important to be able to find relevant information in the literal ocean of content we now find ourselves swimming in, and to assess its accuracy and the motives of the author. But in this more transparent world, we take on a curatorial role in the sense that we share out the best information we find so others in our networks can benefit as well. Understanding what to share, how and where to share it, and monitoring the responses to that sharing all become a basic part of connecting with others and managing those connections.

**COMPUTING**

Computing literacy deals with our understanding the potentials of computers and new technologies to “develop the capacity to do things that have never been done before” (Gary Stager). There has been a rising chorus of voices advocating for a basic skill set in programming for problem solving and for creating and inventing at a scale previously impossible. In fact, next year the United Kingdom will implement a programming curriculum starting at five years old. This new push for a computing literacy is also being seen in the nascent Maker Movement which is defined by the use of computers large and small to innovate and prototype solutions to real-world problems. We’re convinced that those most successful moving forward will have a solid understanding of how to use computers as a material for invention, not just a productivity tool.

**CONTINUAL LEARNING**

Those of our students who will deal most effectively with massive, rapid change will be those who are constantly learning and upskilling. Their “professional development” will not be an event so much as it will be a flow of learning opportunities most likely created by their network.

“Those of our students who will deal most effectively with massive, rapid change will be those who are constantly learning and upskilling.”
interactions. They will have developed a mindset that learning never stops, especially in an age of abundant information, resources, and teachers, and that to rest on yesterday’s knowledge and skills is a dangerous plan. This is a new expectation that comes on the heels of our increasing access to content, knowledge, and teachers.

CHANGE MINDSET

No question, our students will have to have the resilience and steady disposition to embrace change, be comfortable with failure, and be constantly reinventing their roles. As we mentioned in our first paper in this series, estimates are that our students will be switching jobs every four years on average, meaning our students will constantly be confronted with what Yvette Cameron of Gartner calls “more intensity, more pressure, more change, and more risk.” Their ability to keep moving forward and to hold frustration at bay will be crucial to their success.

NEW EXPECTATIONS

These new literacies and enhanced dispositions will require a fundamental revision in the way we prepare our students for the future workforce. In many schools across the country, curriculum and practice are being rewritten to build in the types of experiences and projects that develop these modern literacies in a deep and sustainable way. In our next and final white paper in this series, we’ll look at how the new future of work is informing classroom teaching and learning in transformative ways.
ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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A parent of two teen-agers, Will Richardson has spent the last dozen years developing an international reputation as a leading thinker, speaker, and writer about the intersection of social online learning networks and education. His latest book, *Why School? How Education Must Change When Learning and Information are Everywhere*, is the top selling TED book ever, and is based on his 2012 TEDx Talk in Melbourne, AU. He is the CLO of Modern Learner Media, a company dedicated to changing the global conversation around education reform.

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