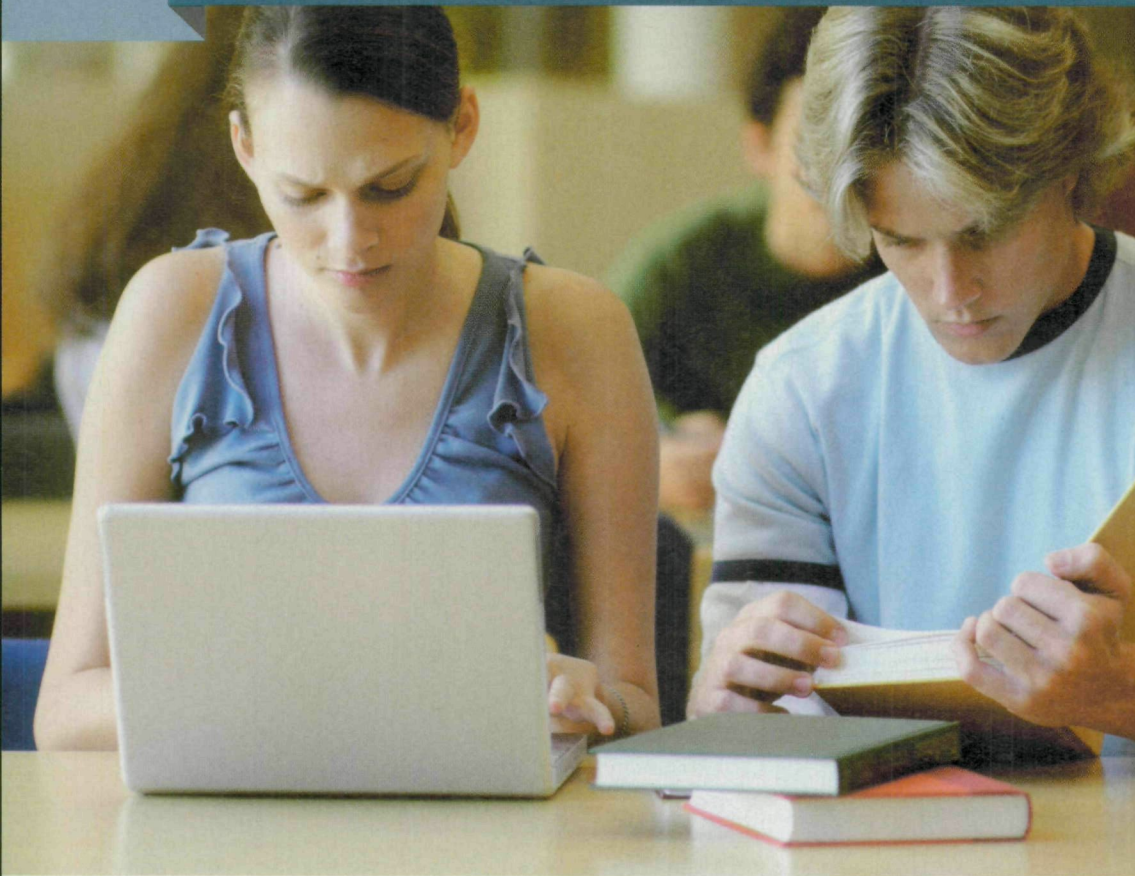


# TRANSLITERACY—NEW LIBRARY WHAT IT MEANS FOR INSTRUCTION



Reading is now unpredictable as most reading is done outside of school on an electronic medium and is now three dimensional. Hyperlinks can bring students deeper or foster surface skimming, depending on the skills and speed that the reader applies to a website.

## LITERACY AND TRANSLITERACY

Two hundred years ago, when Thomas Jefferson and John Adams wrote our founding documents, literacy meant being able to read and write. The literacy rate in America was low, and no one cared about cultural literacy, family literacy, financial literacy, technology literacy, or information literacy. Our founding fathers wanted education to be accessible and to help develop productive members of society.

Today we find ourselves with many literacies in a nation that is considered ninety-nine percent literate. The plethora of literacies has just given birth to another term—transliteracy. **Transliteracy is the ability to read, listen to, view, understand, synthesize, and apply what we gather across differing platforms.** This new label is important to cultural literacy, financial literacy, technology literacy, and information literacy as we teach flat-world students.

Transliteracy is a term that was born out of a need to describe how communication has changed. Alan Liu and Susan Thomas were some of the biggest advocates of the idea that communication has officially evolved into a new multi-communication modality. We have traveled down a communication road that has grown from orality to art, to print, to movies, to musical messages, to multimedia presentations, and to combinations of all of the above. Our mode of communication has officially changed. **Print is no longer a dominant force. However, our instruction still is anchored around print literacy as that is the biggest building block of communication.**

**We now have to read across electronic platforms, apply previous knowledge to a new application, broaden our scope of reading to include critical evaluation for credibility, and apply rules of**

**decoding and encoding to new content platforms, such as video, Skype, blogging, and online discussions to become productive members of society.** Doug Ackerman suggests that teachers may be “less literate than their students” as students are able to adapt more readily to new transliteracy models. Therefore, we must make an effort to embrace this new mode of operation.

## LITERACY AND THE COMMON CORE STANDARDS

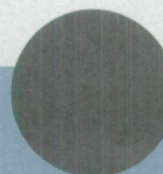
For years librarians have supported and enhanced literacy instruction, but now the warning bells are ringing: **New literacies require focused awareness across mediums, so we must teach students differing techniques for analyzing and synthesizing information.**

Race to the Top (RTTT) has given literacy a prominent role as a Common Core objective. The Common Core states, literacy is not English class. “Pedagogy focused only on ‘higher-order’ or ‘critical’ thinking is insufficient to ensure



# LINGO AND

By Paige Jaeger



that students were ready for college and careers" (Common Core State Standards 2).

Common Core Standards acknowledge that students arrive at college unprepared to read and comprehend difficult text. Our goal as educators is to graduate college-ready and career-ready seniors, and we are failing this task (Jaeger). Students cannot comprehend difficult material. Please read the Common Core English Language Arts anchor standards regarding reading:

"10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently."

That is vastly different from the online habits we observe of "super-squirreling" and "website kangarooing." We must model how to slow down, read, comprehend, and analyze for credibility and accuracy on an electronic platform. We need to teach students to be skeptical of all information heard on the Internet so that they innately take the time to evaluate the source appropriately (Jaeger). School librarians now have reason to ask teachers to avoid the "free for all" searching methods on the Internet because Common Core has asked us to focus on more complicated texts. This does not align itself with the habits of the hyper-connected!

## TRANSLITERACY REACHES ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Literacy reaches across the curriculum and should be everyone's focus. Since all disciplines now use technology, we need to focus on transliteracy. Reading is only half the problem—reading for meaning is the missing half. Reading for meaning is manifested in differing forms. We must embrace the same reading principles of coding and decoding information on different platforms. The old keystone of education—literacy—has evolved into an animal with many diseases, disguises, new forms, appendages, and offspring. Reading for meaning, understanding, and application is now more difficult and more important than ever. Therefore, the role of the librarian in the transliteracy process is now imperative as we teach students to critically evaluate material for meaning as well as credibility, accuracy, reliability, and bias. Teachers who weave this 'deep understanding of literacy issues' into frequent instructional collaboration with teachers will influence literacy instruction among the entire teaching staff and contribute to the literacy gains of hundreds or even thousands of students each year," says Doug Ackerman.

## READING PRINT VS. READING ONLINE

Skills needed to read online and read traditional print are significantly different. Traditional reading instruction was predictable. Reading was top-down, left right, black and white. We read a passage, found meaning, and were expected to answer questions. Reading is now unpredictable as most reading is done outside of school on an electronic medium and is now three dimensional. Hyperlinks can bring students deeper or foster surface skimming, depending on the skills and speed that the reader applies to a website. Transliteracy is the elephant in the room.

The fact that students operate in a virtual world, more than print, should tell us that we need to understand this platform and use it in our instruction. At any time, students are clicks away from migrating from the printed language to

media. Media must be decoded, analyzed, and synthesized also, but this comes naturally to this media-focused generation.

It is almost common knowledge now that we have lost control of reading. David Warlick rings this warning bell in most all his work as he encourages educators to teach children how to control their reading and information. Students need to learn to set direction for reading on the Internet. Inquiry-based learning will guide students to evaluate all the information gathered for meaning and synthesis. Much like the way a GPS works, we must suggest that students have a destination—

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If your vital signs show your circulation is off, your shelves are plagued with old books, you do not have much money to spend on subscriptions, and you are in a state of depression, then your program needs a prescription for change.

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## We must model how to slow down, read, comprehend, analyze for credibility and accuracy on an electronic platform.

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goal oriented; otherwise there literally is no end. If there is no question, how will a student know when to quit? Therefore, students must have a question to answer . . . inquiry-based learning.

### **SLOGANS TO KEEP STUDENTS FOCUSED**

To help foster stronger transliteracy skills in our students, we “sloganized” working mantras. The following slogans were used for print as well as electronic environments. We actually printed many of these in plastic banner format and hung the slogans in classrooms, the library, and computer labs. Slogans are effective and the students absorb the concepts through this guerrilla marketing tactic.

**Pick, don't click.** Point out that, unlike reading a book, which is linearly organized by page numbers, information on the Internet spreads out from your library to the moon. If you remind students that they are responsible for evaluating which page they should be on, they might scrutinize what they are reading, listening to, or watching. When this happens, they will innately slow down to an evaluative speed. If students slow down, they are more likely to take the time to understand as well

as evaluate. If they are speeding, they are not taking the time to decode unknown vocabulary words.

I told my students that their success or failure relates to the quality of information they find on the Internet. Holding up a copy of the *New York Times* and the *Weekly World News* (with some alien form on the front page), I asked them, “Which paper would your teacher want you to use for your report?” They got the point. The *New York Times* might get them to college when the *Weekly World News* will only engage them in the task.

**We need to read, not speed.** Students spend only two seconds to evaluate or assess whether an article or website is worth their time. To counter this tendency, we taught students to slow down. We would announce periodically in the lab, “We need to read—not speed.”

**Evaluate rather than regurgitate.** What does this information mean? Mindless facts may help us win Jeopardy or Trivial Pursuit, but the student who finds meaning in reading or watching a video, will grow his mind and achieve not only on state tests, but in life. This phrase was

suggested by a teacher at an AASL conference in 2010 when we spoke on Marketing Information Literacy. I returned and used this suggestion effectively to help students find meaning while operating online.

**Know your destination.** Reading on the Internet is akin to traveling down the road without rules. When your students know the purpose behind their information exercise, chances are they have a target to reach, a question to answer, and information to find and make sense of. When a student is guided by a question, the time they spend on the Internet moves from entertainment to searching for meaning and understanding. The student has to believe there is meaning in why he is searching.

**Where's your knowledge mode?** The Pew Internet Study reports that our teens exceed five hours on the Internet every day. If we assume that most of that is for entertainment, then it is imperative that we point out to our students that their “research” time is not entertainment. They actually need to be reminded that, while they may work in entertainment mode at home, at school their time should be spent in knowledge mode, moving from entertainment to engagement.

**Print is important.** This generation is infested with media from dawn to dusk. **Video has become the information channel of choice.** We can teach students how to cite videos via MLA or APA style, but that to some extent is feeding their disease. Since Common Core Standards raise the bar on literacy, it is far more important to encourage



them to read nonfiction pieces that need real thought to comprehend.

**Virtual presence.** Research states that students should be no more than three clicks away from information. Start with your school page and count the number of clicks that a student would have to travel to get quality information from your virtual reference resources. If this exceeds three, consider asking for a more prominent position on your school website, such as a spot on the menu bar. Consider posing the solution positively when you approach administration. Your request will be well received if you point out that:

- Today's millennial generation is looking for instant delivery.
- Students gravitate toward easier-to-access information (Google wins for speed and access, but not necessarily for credibility).
- Students should be able to access information within three clicks. This is called the "three clicks rule" according to website designers.
- Common Core Standards are touting "rigor," and rigor is not Google. Rigor is accessing quality information and evaluating it for assignment relevance, credibility, accuracy, and constructing meaning. Rigor is migrating from the transliterate media mode where students want to quickly explore and now require the reading, re-reading, and digestion of more complex text (quality sources). This actually requires stepping outside the transliterate box.
- Virtual presence is imperative for quality research projects.
- You are willing to design the pages for ease of use—less verbiage and more media, images, and access.

#### FOCUS ON TRANSLITERACY AND REVITALIZE YOUR PROGRAM

If you love to read and wonder why everyone else does not want to, perhaps you should question whether you are operating in a paradigm of the past. If your vital signs show your circulation is off, your shelves are plagued with old books, you do not have much money to spend on subscriptions, and you are in a state of depression, then your program needs a prescription for change. Literacy will always be important, and we librarians hope to instill a love for reading, but program revitalization can begin with a focus on transliteracy. Our role of librarian needs to change to one of cybrarian, focused on transliteracy and embracing varying forms of information.

#### THE ROLE OF CYBRARIAN AND THE FRAMEWORK OF TRANSLITERACY

As I assumed the responsibilities at a local middle school, I was asked, "How do you expect to increase library usage and encourage the kids to read?" My answer was appropriately vague, allowing for weasel room and flexibility. "Optimism and ideas," was my response.

In reality I was asking myself, "How was I truly to diagnose a problem without ever having seen the patient present his symptoms?" It took almost half a year to diagnose and assess the chronic illnesses. The illness was that the library was being run in yesterday's paradigm. Times were changing and the program had to evolve to keep pace with the changes in society, culture, and reading habits of the millennials. Transliteracy is proof that reading and literacy have evolved. We must evolve. By embracing this new paradigm, our students will be better equipped to operate as productive members of a flat world working in trans-world mode.

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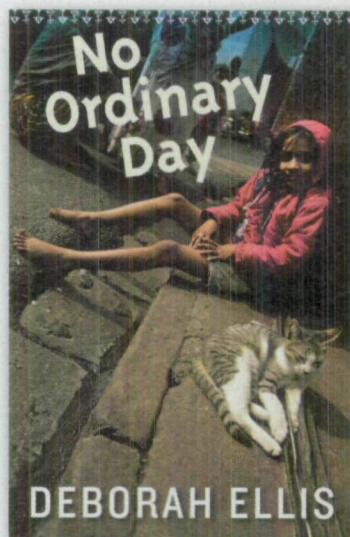
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