Learning in Information-Rich Environments: I-LEARN and the Construction of Knowledge in the 21st Century

Delia Neuman

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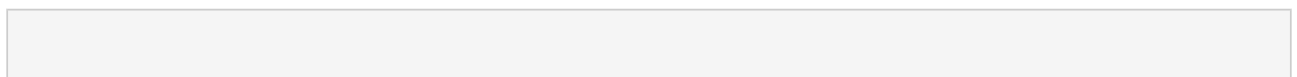# Learning in Information-Rich Environments: I-LEARN and the Construction of Knowledge in the 21st Century

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The amount and range of information available to today's students—and indeed to all learners—is unprecedented. Phrases like "the information revolution", "the information (or knowledge) society", and "the knowledge economy" underscore the truism that our society has been transformed by virtually instantaneous access to virtually unlimited information. Thomas Friedman tells us that "The World Is Flat" and that we must devise new political and economic understandings based on the ceaseless communication of information from all corners of the world. The Bush administration tells us that information relating to the "war on terrorism" is so critical that we must allow new kinds of surveillance to keep society safe. Teenage subscribers to social-computing networks not only access information but enter text and video images and publish them widely—becoming the first adolescents in history to be creators as well as consumers of vast quantities of information.

If the characteristics of "the information age" demand new conceptions of commerce, national security, and publishing—among other things—it is logical to assume that they carry implications for education as well. In fact, a good deal has been written over the last several decades about how education as a whole must transform its structure and curriculum to accommodate the possibilities offered by new technologies. Far less has been written, however, about how the specific affordances of these technologies—and the kinds of information they allow students to access and create—relate to the central purpose of education: learning. What does "learning" mean in an information-rich environment? What are its characteristics? What kinds of tasks should it involve? What concepts, strategies, attitudes, and skills do educators and students need to master if they are to learn effectively and efficiently in such an environment? How can researchers, theorists, and practitioners foster the well-founded and widespread development of such key elements of the learning process?

This book explores these questions and suggests some tentative answers. Drawing from research and theory in three distinct but related fields—learning theory, instructional systems design, and information studies—it presents a way to think about learning that responds directly to the actualities of a world brimming with information. The book is grounded in the work of such key figures in learning theory as Bransford and Anderson & Krathwohl. It draws on such theorists of instructional design as Gagne, Mayer, and Merrill. From information studies, it uses ideas from Buckland, Marchionini, and Wilson (who is known for his pioneering work in "information behavior"—that is, the full range of information seeking and use). The book breaks new ground in bringing together ideas that have run in parallel for years but whose relationship has not been fully explored.

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