

Ep. 038: Expand Notions of Literacy

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What do our students need to acquire knowledge and make new meaning in our disciplines? What kind of literacies do they bring to the learning space that we must understand in order to guide them on their educational journey? In this episode, we discuss the theme of the 2018 University-Wide Teaching & Learning Symposium, Expanding Notions of Literacy.

Claire, Dana, and Jim sit down and explore just what “new literacies” means and how this year’s annual conversation about student learning will encourage faculty to not only look beyond reading and writing, but also to consider how the perspectives of other disciplines can inform our own teaching. The Symposium aims to bring together colleagues from across campus and across disciplinary siloes.

Plus, we discuss Claire’s grammatically formal text messages, Jim’s (more learned and famous) namesake, and the important intersection of teaching, learning, and wine.

Transcript

JIM: Hi there. I'm Jim.

DANA: I'm Dana.

CLAIRE: I'm Claire.

JIM: Let's Talk Teaching.

JIM: Welcome to Let's Talk Teaching a podcast from the Center for Teaching Learning and Technology here at Illinois State University. I'm Jim Gee; joining me today, two of my colleagues here at CTLT. Dana Karraker is a coordinator for faculty development. Hi, Dana.

DANA: Hello.

JIM: And our director returns, Claire Lamonica.

CLAIRE: Hi, Jim. Hi, Dana.

JIM: Hello, hello. Wow, it's all three of us. It's the first time we're recording three of us at once.

CLAIRE: I see I've got new equipment. And he's so excited.

JIM: I am.

CLAIRE: Well, look, I have three microphones.

JIM: Well, actually, it was a while ago, but I was feeling guilty that we haven't used them all yet. But we also have something to talk about today that both of you can provide some perspective on. So today, we want to talk about the theme for our 2018 Teaching and Learning symposium that's coming up. And this is an annual event we have here on campus. So, Claire, start with you. What's kind of the history behind the symposium and what's the aim of it all,

CLAIRE: The aim of the teaching and learning symposium is to give our campus community a chance to gather in one place and talk about teaching and learning on our campus. So I always refer to it as the largest single conversation about teaching and learning to happen every year at Illinois State University. And to that, and it's been going on since before I came to see TLT if since before there was a CTLT. So the Center for the Advancement of Teaching was organizing teaching symposia, for a number of years before I ever came on board. So one year we build ourselves is like the 10th annual and everybody was like, oh, no, it's much older than that. So it's like, okay, we're not numbering anymore.

JIM: That's pretty good. Yeah. And Dana, this year, you're kind of taking the lead on getting the symposium organized. Right. So what does that conversation look like throughout the day

DANA: We have a theme every year, which we're going to talk about during this podcast. One of the conversations is faculty submit proposals to present either panels or individual presentations or posters. And so those are breakout sessions, where they're sharing their promising teaching practices. And those promising teaching practices, often the proposals for those often build on our theme. So that's one thing that happens, we also have keynotes that come we have a nationally recognized keynote every year, this year, we have two which I'll be telling you about soon as well. And they do a morning 75-minute workshop, then do a keynote at lunchtime, and then have a continuing conversation, which just opens up an opportunity to talk more about the topic. And then we have a poster session at the end of the day. And we also have oh yes, there's a reception in an idea cafe. So we start the morning with an idea Cafe Cafe, which is just roundtable discussions, for people to ease into the morning, talk about several topics that they might be interested in this year, we're talking about challenging misconceptions around identities of international students will be one, using literature circles to encourage discussions of social issues. So, another so that's just kind of a way to have more of an informal conversation. And then at the end of the day, with our poster session, we have a reception. So that's just kind of a celebratory way to end the day and go around and, and view posters and listen to those poster presentations.

JIM: Kind of a way to ease out of the day. Today, and then we ease out of the day. So yes.

CLAIRE: And easing out comes with wine.

DANA: This is true. I can see that.

CLAIRE: we can say that. We can't say

JIM: No, I think we can say that.

CLAIRE: Yeah, I think I can say that. Yeah, it's it's-

JIM: If we were saying we were drinking wine now, I think it'd be more problematic. No, I don't.

CLAIRE: Yeah, that would be against some rule.

JIM: Yeah, we wouldn't admit to it. So, it's a big day. So that's the nuts and bolts of the symposium. That's great. But I'm really excited about this year's theme, which isÉ

DANA: Expanding notions of literacy,

JIM: We had a lot of proposals that kind of really fall into this. What does expanding notions of literacy mean to you?

DANA: Okay, it means a couple of things. So, in, in our digital age, the ways we interact with texts and communication is expanding. So, we have different modes in order to, to communicate our messages or even receive our messages. And then the other one is, as literate beings, we have to expand our notions of literacy, our understandings of how we interact in the world as well.

JIM: Because we're, yeah, that makes sense because we're doing things differently, right? You know, I, I get a communicate with people differently than I then I used to, I used to get a phone call and now I get a text message, or I used to get a letter and now I get an email. And in fact, I'm encouraged to do this, to stop, stop getting paper and stuff like that.

CLAIRE: Well, and I think also thinking beyond literacy as simply reading and writing, right? So, you know, we all we need to be literate in a lot of ways and in a lot of fields, a lot of disciplines, as well as in sort of our social lives. So, I have a great nephew, who over the over the weekend saw me over the Thanksgiving weekend saw me shuffling a deck of cards, and said, Oh, you're randomizing which was awesome. He's nine years old. I was like I absolutely am. When we're playing cards, we call this shuffling. And so, he knew the word randomizing. He didn't know the word shuffling. So, you know, it worked in one context. But if he wants to be literate in the world of card playing, he needs to know the word shuffling.

DANA: So, so what you just described there is this navigating of social spaces? And how our how we have to adjust our ways of being to to fit those contexts. So, in that case, it was he had an idea, but his vocabulary for it was right was randomizing and was shuffling-

CLAIRE: -and shuffling. Yeah. And I had never thought of shuffling as randomizing. So I thought it was actually pretty cool when he applied. I mean, because that's, of course, exactly what I'm doing.

JIM: It could be that there's something that he is literate in, we're randomizing is the term that you would use that there's probably something on a smartphone, I'm guessing.

- CLAIRE: I am not literate, yet some contexts in which I am illiterate. Yes.
- JIM: So, literacy is in these notions of literacy pervade all of us, all of our disciplines. But we don't usually sit around and talk about them in terms of literacy unless perhaps our discipline is specific to education. So, like in communication, we would we come up with, we would be talking about schema and all this other stuff. But what we're really talking about here are, like you said, literacies, beyond reading and writing. So, the idea of expanding notions that are symposium, what are some of the topics that that have been proposed that will be covered at the symposium to kind of break open this idea of literacy?
- DANA: Well, there's nothing like the past year or less socio-political environment that really opens up this need for having a conversation about literacies. So, we have a session on fake news in the post truth world. So, enhancing 21st century news literacy. So how do we navigate those spaces? And what literacies do we need in order to fully understand what's happening there? Oh, we have number library is doing several, I think this just kind of opened up a nice forum for them to them. Right, right. Yes. So they're doing a session on how to use the archives, in your classes, pop culture, and using pop culture in your courses, educating students through accessible media. Now that we are moving into online spaces, we have to think about how people interact in those spaces, and what support some people might need how technology can make information accessible to people that may not have had that information beforehand, preparing civically engaged graduates. So that's part of it, too. So, a lot of different ones.
- JIM: So, and I think, you know, what is attractive about this for me is that we are talking about technology. But we're not doing the Gadget Show. Yeah, this isn't this isn't you know, Claire, you and I have talked a lot about our name here, his Center for Teaching Learning and Technology, and people think we're just IT support. And while we do something kind of tangential to that. It's really more about the thought and the pedagogy behind using that technology.
- CLAIRE: Why are we using that technology? Yeah. So, I mean, and that, that, in itself is a kind of pedagogical literacy is the ability to select a tech, you know, to identify a desire or a problem and select a technology that will allow you to address that. And then to use it, to become conversant with the technology in a way that allows that allows you to use it in effective ways, teaching.
- JIM: Well and you know, for many, many years now, we've been talking about digital natives. And clear you and I in past episodes have talked about the misconception that they are all excellent computer users because they grew up with a computer in their crib or something like are next to the crib. But it really, I think this idea of literacy is being I'm getting, I'm getting a nod from Dana here. This idea of literacies, I guess, is his effect. that these digital natives have grown up with different literacies in their, at their disposal.
- DANA: And some of those literacy skills that they have and are very efficient using, yeah, don't translate into other context, right. So, what I think we want faculty to start thinking

about is their own literacies in their own disciplines, because each discipline, you know, has their own, how do you read, write and communicate as a philosopher, as a biologist, as a information technology person. So, they all have very different ways of doing and when our students come to us, they don't always know what that is, and think they can bring a particular set of tools from another area of their life into this one. And that doesn't always work for them. So, when we're experts in our own field, those literacies just come as second nature, we don't really think about how we are interacting with our text, how we're writing how we're speaking. So, we have to kind of think about that in our own disciplines, those those nuance skills for our own disciplines.

JIM: I think nuance is a really good way of putting it, it's not, it's not something you can necessarily just pick up a book, of course, and that's one type of literacy. So, it may not work for everyone to begin with. So, so before we get on to talk about the keynote speaker and whatnot, which obviously is related to all this, Claire, the faculty members you talk to after a symposium when they come and talk to you and say, hey, I had a really good time. We'll concentrate on those. Okay, um, what what did they-?

CLAIRE: The bulk of the conversations?

JIM: Yeah, I think, you know, we do a lot of- we do surveys, and we get a lot of feedback. And I think the the, the stuff that we've adjusted over the years have been more procedural things about how the day goes, how we print up the schedule, that sort of thing. But as far as people who actually get something meaningful out of a symposium, what are they doing? What should they bring metaphorically to the symposium?

CLAIRE: Well, I think I think the first thing you have to bring is an open mind or an inquiring mind, but also just a willingness to connect with colleagues, colleagues beyond your discipline, primarily. But also, you know, a lot of times interestingly, we this is a great day, I mean, we have just this plethora of breakout sessions, and all of these different activities going on. And frequently, people say to me, that it's the hallway conversations that that actually bring about, that spurred them to action in some ways. And I think often those hallway conversations are spurred by sessions that they've been in. But we often hear about people who had a hallway conversation with a colleague, and that, that led to some change in their teaching, or it led to a partnership, a collaboration of some some form. So, you know, people really do appreciate that chance to talk to each other, to get outside their own disciplines, and I think have this chance to really explore other literacies we, you know, we tend to say, oh, you know, students, students can't read and write, they, their, their papers have emojis and more, they're using text speak or whatever. So, you know, what we don't think about is that as a separate literacy, so somebody like me, who uses semi colons and texts, is really sort of a laughingstock, you know, for people who are more. Well, okay, so for my children, or people who, who are, who are natural to the world, that texting is a more natural form for them. Right.

JIM: And also, you're putting semi colons in your texts-

CLAIRE: I am, I- you're calling in my texts? Yes, I do. And, you know, I mean,

DANA: The other James Team would have something to say.

JIM: Oh, yeah. Well, we'll have to talk about that in a moment, too. Yeah.

CLAIRE: So, I mean, you know, it's just a matter of, you know, realizing that it's, it's trying to take something that's familiar to you and bring it into an unfamiliar context. And it's not a good fit, and it wouldn't be a good fit going the other direction either, right. So, you know, this just for this, this is expanding our own minds to take in these ideas that oh, you know, this student who's an English major is not doing well in her accounting class. I don't know why an English major would be taking an accounting class, but they were they might be, you know, if they're, they are thinking of opening a small business or whatever. Because there are these different you know, the, the right in a completely different way in an accounting class than you do in an English class. What you're describing is called Capital T discourse.

DANA: Oh, so thank you very much.

JIM: And I know that the segue into talking about who our keynote speakers are because yes, and I think these keynote speakers are going to be, I think they will also be spawning a lot of those hallway conversations. Yes. So yeah, Dana, tell us about that.

DANA: All right. So, we are very excited to have William cope, and Mary Colossus. They are now at the University of Illinois, and they're in their school of education policy. And the two of them are architects of one of the seminal worse works on multi literacies, which is called a pedagogy of multiliteracies. Designing social futures. So, they were in the New London group who who put that that work together back in the late 90s.

JIM: And and you kind of alluded to before so when this comes up on a Google search, because we're talking about new literacies, and my name is Jim Gee. I'm not that Jim- Do you know I go to we're a pod a couple weeks ago, we were in Canada at the at the National Conference, and someone said, are you and I said no. So, I am not the Jim Gee who is James Gee to go by James. I think I think he goes like Jim. But anyway, doesn't matter. Well, he's Jim to me.

CLAIRE: James to me. Yeah,

JIM: Well, have the same middle name too. So that's even a Jim Gee. Anyway, so I am not here. So anyway, but they'll be giving the keynote the keynote speech at lunch. And then there's a continuing the conversation afterwards. So that, and of course, they're doing the morning workshop as well.

DANA: Multi literacies meaning making and literacy learning, and an era of digital text is their morning workshop, okay? And then at lunch, they're going to be talking about big data comes to school implications for learning, assessment and research. And they are going to frame that in writing. And they say, because writing is significant, not only because it is central to the core subject area of literacy, it's also an ideal medium for representation of deep disciplinary knowledge across a number of subject areas. So.

JIM: Writing across the curriculum. We just got a year off from, from Claire. Claire, just don't drop the microphone, please.

CLAIRE: Would be Dana, mic drop. Yeah. Awesome.

JIM: So, we will have all of that up on our website very soon. And we will link that to the Show page. And if you go to our website, you can it's kind of hard to miss information about the symposium at this time of year. We also should kind of mention that there is a deadline to register for the symposium It is December 15. It is it is coming right up. To register, you can go to CTLT.IllinoisState.edu. And the symposium itself is Wednesday, January 10, 2018. And we hope to see as many members of the ISU community there by the way, this is not just for faculty, it's also for staff. Right. And graduate students. I think we can seat about 400. Right?

CLAIRE: Yeah, we can seat about 400 For lunch, so and we generally do.

JIM: All right, Dana, Claire, thank you so much.

CLAIRE: Thank you, Jim.

JIM: And that's all the time we have for this week's episode of Let's Talk Teaching. You can find out more about our symposium by going to our website CTLT.Illinois state.edu. You can also find out more about this podcast, just click the podcast link in the upper right of the page. For Dana Karraker, and for Claire Lamonica and all of my colleagues here at the Center for Teaching, Learning and Technology, until we talk again, Happy Teaching!