



21st Century Literacy: Constructing & Debating Knowledge

J. M. Beach

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While a liberal education is arguably just as important as it ever was, all higher education students need to be proficient in a new 21st century literacy. This new literacy includes traditional literacy skills, such as reading, writing, and arguing, and also new literacy skills, such as critical thinking and scientific reasoning. Like older forms, the new literacy requires both the "effective use" of language and "large amounts of specific information" that are deemed important by existing curriculums. But 21st century literacy also includes training students in the concept and methods of science, which are developed and practiced in the research university. Higher education students need to learn both specific knowledge, and also how knowledge is actively created, especially how the most reliable knowledge is made by scientists. Thus, students should be exposed to not just one, but both of the traditional scientific methodologies because they have both become the primary tools of the knowledge economy. Students need an understanding of both qualitative and quantitative literacy. And while knowledge of scientific methodology does require advanced mathematical literacy, students with only minimal mathematical knowledge can still be introduced to both qualitative and quantitative scientific methods through an understanding of key concepts, theories, and data. But in order to do introduce students to scientific methodology, they must first be introduced to the research university and the specific work of different scientific disciplines. Only then will they be able to concretely grasp how knowledge is created and refined through the scientific process. Students need to know "forms" in order to understand content and master practice. What are these basic formal elements? Students need to be taught threshold concepts in order to theoretically understand the both purpose and practice of writing and thinking. Psychologists call this understanding "metacognition," which is thinking about thinking and thinking about doing so as to promote self-regulation and goal-oriented behavior. Students also need to learn concrete writing and thinking practices. Students need to be able to do and not just know. Finally, students need a conceptual framework that can help integrate threshold concepts and can help apply concepts within multiple contexts. This book will utilize all three learning tools. Threshold concepts and concrete writing and thinking practices will be explained through a conceptual framework focused on communicating knowledge in order to integrate the various interdisciplinary topics of reading, writing, arguing, critical thinking, and scientific reasoning. These core topics will be combined into a single process set within a specific social context, which is the sub-title of this book: constructing and debating knowledge in multicultural societies. This focus on process, rather than products, is based on the concept of social interaction through language as the fundamental basis for learning and knowledge creation

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