

# VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

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## Nicola Davies

Back in 2004 in ‘Technology and Writing’, Warschauer outlined how ‘*new forms of audio-visual communication complement, or challenge, the importance of the written word in a variety of realms*’. He predicted that in the future ‘*computers will not be used in the English language classroom to teach the same types of writing as before in a new way, but rather to teach the new types of writing that are emerging in the online era*’. In this he included four aspects of electronic literacy: computer literacy; information literacy; multimedia literacy and communication literacy.

Warschauer believed that changes in technology would not only transform the EAL classroom and EAL syllabus but also the nature of the research that supports the development of our notions of ‘best practice’. Thinking about the development of second language learning research, he noted that the easily searchable nature of electronic texts allows for far more sophisticated forms of linguistic and corpus analyses, including comparisons of L1 and L2 writing, developmental comparisons among groups of L2 learners, and comparisons among different categories of L2 learners, for example, those from different language backgrounds or taught through different instructional methods. Warschauer argued that the ‘*online era is just beginning*’ and that as it continues to develop and expand, ‘*it will pose challenges not only to how we teach writing, but also to our very conceptions of what it means to write*’.

I am not sure that the continuing and rapid change in what it means to write is yet wholly reflected in our thoughts around how to teach writing to EAL learners in the classroom. For every lesson that incorporates one or more of Warschauer’s four aspects of electronic literacy, there are many more that would resonate with Catharine’s recollections of her own schooldays. One important aspect which has however changed forever is the ease of access to information and the possibilities this allows for both collaboration and engagement through a variety of media. Cummins and Sayers (1995) in their portraits of email exchanges between students from different language backgrounds concluded that such projects amplify students’ literacy and intellectual skills by providing new opportunities for the engagement of students and teachers through collaborative critical enquiry around issues which are of importance to their lives. Which brings me round, rather neatly, to developments in the NALDIC website.

Anyone who has attended a NALDIC conference, seminar or regional group meeting will know that there is no shortage of desire within the NALDIC community to

discuss, talk over and search for answers to questions that continue to concern us. However, as an organisation, NALDIC has at times struggled to engage members in the development of policy and national responses. In some ways, there has been a sense that NALDIC is someone else, when in reality it is all of us. Over the past couple of months, we have therefore been working on developments to the NALDIC website to allow for a more direct way for members to ‘get involved’, particularly in policy discussions. We do not wish to undermine the success of existing forums such as the eal-bilingual, but want to enhance opportunities for members to be involved directly and easily in the formulation of NALDIC policy and responses.

From now on, if you log on to the members’ area of the site <http://www.naldic.org.uk/docs/members/index.cfm> you will find a range of news items and communications and the option to comment on these and read posts. Access to viewing posted comments and the ability to post your own is limited to members and will require you to log on using the email address which we have stored for you in our members’ database. Lynne Cameron’s article on complexity theory in this issue suggests we cannot know at this point whether this new development will create a termite’s nest or a traffic jam, but whatever, we look forward to hearing from you.

## References

- Cummins, J and Sayers, D (1995) *Brave New Schools: Challenging cultural illiteracy through global learning networks* New York: St Martin’s Press
- Warschauer, M. (2004) Technology and Writing in Davison, C. and Cummins, J. (Eds) *Handbook of English Language Teaching* Kluwer:Dordrecht, Netherlands