

Language learning and autonomy in the age of ‘new literacies’

Philip Benson
The Hong Kong Institute of Education
Hong Kong

‘New literacies’ refers to a range of literacy practices that are primarily, but not exclusively, internet-based and are now strongly identified with the idea of Web 2.0. It has been argued that the ‘new’ literacies are, in contrast to the ‘old’ print-based literacies, interactive, collaborative and distributed. There is also a strong association between new literacies and engagement with popular culture. While most studies in this area cover first language literacy, there has also been research in second and foreign language learning contexts. In this paper, I want to explore the significance of this research for our work on autonomy in language learning. One area of common ground lies in the idea that many language learners now engage in new target language literacy practices on their own initiative out of school. A second area concerns the growth of ‘globalized’ internet spaces, which are, in a sense, reconfiguring the landscapes of language learning and everyday life. In view of the rapid growth of these spaces, I want to ask whether we may be moving into a period where it will be difficult to think of autonomy in language learning without reference to new internet-based literacy practices.