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Reading Response: Technology and Literacy

In Cynthia L. Selfe’s “Technology and Literacy: A Story About the Perils of Not Paying Attention” she addresses the widening gap between those who are “literate” and those who are “illiterate” exacerbated by the Clinton-Gore administration’s 1996 national project to expand “technological literacy.” Throughout her essay, Selfe stresses that we *pay attention* to the social implications of increased use of technology in the classroom. She illustrates a disturbing disconnect between the amount of money spent on bringing technology into the classroom and the accessibility of this technology to white students versus black students. Selfe says “in our educational system, and in the culture that this system reflects, computers *continue to be distributed differentially along the related axes of race and socioeconomic status* and this distribution contributes to ongoing patterns of racism and to the continuation of poverty” (1170). The question arises: How do we properly *pay attention* to the use of technology in the classroom?

Selfe encourages us to “resist the tendential forces that continue to link technological literacy with patterns of racism and poverty” and “to insist on and support more equitable distributions on technology” (1182). However, earlier in her essay, Selfe mentions the necessity of both “literate” and “illiterate” workers in the Clinton-Gore project. Technologically literate citizens will work in more technology-rich fields and also be consumers of technology at home. Technologically illiterate citizens are confined to the “low-paid labor necessary to support the system” (1177). If computers and technology were equally distributed among schools like Selfe suggests, we would naturally see and increased number of literate workers as well as home-technology consumers. Rather than perpetuating the link between technological literacy with racism and poverty, it could be eliminated completely; equal accessibility to technology among all students would produce a large number of technologically literate individuals. Of course, a surplus of literate graduates would create a problem in itself.

Assuming technology and computers were to be evenly distributed in both affluent and poor schools, we could produce a significantly smaller number of “illiterate” workers. In this case, there would not be a sufficient number of workers to fill the positions in low-paid labor jobs. I expect what would happen is an automation of low-paid jobs; where jobs once held by technologically illiterate workers, made so by their inability to access technology during schooling, these tasks could be completed by machines. If everyone received the same access to technology during schooling, we would add an increased number of technologically literate workers (or only technologically literate workers) to the work force, doing which would ultimately create a push towards a more technologically advanced society.

While is it unlikely that an even distribution of technology would eliminate racism and poverty, giving every student, regardless of the socioeconomic status, access to the same technologies could certainly lessen it in addition to providing more opportunity for social mobility.

Selfe, Cynthia L. "Technology and Literacy: A Story about the Perils of Not Paying Attention." *College Composition and Communication* 1999: 411. *JSTOR Journals*. Web. Nov. 2014. (Norton 1163-85).