

Book Review / Recension d'ouvrage

Courtland, Mary Clare & Gambell, Trevor (Eds.). (2010). *Literature, Media, and Multiliteracies in Adolescent Language Arts*. Vancouver, Canada: Pacific Educational Press. 438 pages, ISBN 978 - 1 - 89576 - 696 - 7

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“The teaching of English language arts has never been as complex, or as difficult, as it is today.” (Jeff Park, p. 173 in this collection).

Park’s sentiments reflect those of many of my graduate students, all of whom are practicing teachers. The *complexity* for them derives, in large part, from the rapid proliferation of technologies and their attendant literacies or discourses (Gee 2008). In their attempts to make sense of these changes, my students (and I suspect they aren’t the only ones) often equate technological competence with literacy. As a consequence, rather than seeing digital technologies as part of new ways of knowing and doing, they tend to see the new technologies and the new literacies as additional instrumental skill sets to be cultivated, as more curricular ‘stuff’ to be added to their already burgeoning “to deliver” or “outcome” lists. The *difficulty* for them comes from what they see as an unwinnable battle for the attention (hearts and minds to follow) of their students. How to compete with Twitter, Facebook, World of Warcraft, Second Life, anime and so on? And their angst is exacerbated by the antediluvian pace of change in the cultural and institutional practices – curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and professional development – in public education systems including universities and teacher education programs.

Park’s opening statement captures, in broad terms, the condition of contemporary adolescent English language arts education and frames the challenges to which the editors and authors of this collection have turned their attention and considerable experience as scholars and teachers.

It’s clear from this collection that New Literacies or postmodern literacies are *not* synonymous with technology; that the *new* is really about new ways of thinking about what and how it means to be literate and what counts as evidence of literateness in our increasingly digitized, multimodal, worlds filled with rapidly mutating genres and text forms.

This is a very fine forward-looking collection that explores issues and practices in contemporary adolescent literacy and literacy education through myriad and diverse configurations of “postmodernism, sociocultural constructivist pedagogy, multiliteracies, and multimedia, within a reader response framework of multiculturalism and multimodality” (p. 19). No modest undertaking, but one deftly realized by an accomplished, perceptive, and thoughtful group of 17 scholars over the course of 16 chapters.

In a superb opening chapter, Courtland and Gambell provide a cogent summary of influential intellectual forces that have helped to shape current and projected thinking and practices in English literary and literacy education over the past decade. This summary maps the theoretical and pedagogical terrain that the authors traverse in subsequent chapters — not in lock step but clearly near one another, in one another’s company. This opening chapter sets up those that follow and provides the connective tissue that enables the collection to cohere.

While many authors focus on print-based meaning-making, their pedagogical inclinations and practices are infused by the same post-modern sensibilities as many of the new digital genres and text forms. In fact, the approaches advocated by the authors offer ways to think about, understand, and harness the resources of the digital world, in particular the meta-fiction framework.

The book is a welcome hybrid that combines the best of articulate, accessible scholarly thought with proven classroom practices most of which are grounded in public schools but includes some in university settings. Each of the following chapters begins with what amounts to an artist statement in which the author maps out his or her philosophical place within the broad landscape painted by Gambell and Courtland, a place developed through excellent examples of and suggestions for pedagogical practice:

Sociocultural Constructivist Pedagogy for Literacy Teaching and Learning (Mary Clare Courtland and Trevor Gambell): provides an overview of major trends and shifts in theories, philosophies, and pedagogies of literary and literacy education during the past decade. It also includes a list of meta-fiction devices that resonate with new literacy texts and practices and help to bridge traditional print-based and digital worlds.

Talk in the Middle Years Literature Classroom (Angela Ward): acknowledges and embraces the new literacies spawned by digital technologies but reminds us of the importance of talk – exploratory, reflective, deliberative (Bloem) — for personal, social, and academic development. This reminder is particularly important in an age of oblique conversations that are conducted, increasingly, via the Internet and social media networks rather than face-to-face.

Canadian Multicultural Picture Books for Young Adolescents (Joyce Bainbridge): reminds us that picture books are neither simple nor neutral and persuades us that their words and images need to be taken up critically – to be unpacked ideologically, socially, and personally.

Contemporary Picturebooks with Radical Change Characteristics (Sylvia Pantaleo): demonstrates, through extended examples of Radical Change Theory and metafiction in adolescent picturebooks, that the multimodal nature of these texts parallels or is consonant with many digital text forms and reading practices.

Multicultural Novels for the Canadian Classroom (Ingrid Johnson): speaks of the challenges of finding and choosing multicultural novels that not only have literary merit but also represent peoples and their cultures accurately and authentically.

Richard Van Camp: Aboriginal Author, Storyteller, and Teacher (Richard Van Camp with Mary Clare Courtland and Trevor Gambell): outlines Van Camp's experiences of not seeing himself in literature and textbooks when growing up; and of the difficulties of finding a publisher for early work. Van Camp speaks with pride and hope of emerging Aboriginal writers.

Graphic Novels in the Modern English Language Arts Classroom: Acknowledging the Complexity of Literacy (Jeff Park): invokes Louise Rosenblatt to make the case that the graphic novel is a legitimate literary form that can be experienced both aesthetically and efferently, and that it can serve as a bridge to and from traditional literary forms and formats of the novel.

Everybody but Me: Social Justice and Literacy Learning (Barbara McNeil): speaks of the inadequate, often non-existent representation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans-gendered, and queer (LGBTQ) youth in literature (and other cultural media) in classroom, school, and public libraries. McNeil goes on to discuss and illustrate the possibilities and challenges of including LGBTQ literature in curricula and classrooms.

Taking Shape: How Reading (In)Forms Writing (Rebecca Luce-Kapler and Dennis Sumara): demonstrates how multiple pedagogies and collaborative learning with multimodal texts can effectively foster awareness and control of the ways in which language works not only in print but in digital texts.

Imagining and Becoming: Empowering Students' Literary Experience Through Classroom Drama (Anne Burke): extols and illustrates the power of process drama for engaging students in collaborative, reciprocal explorations of narratives and multimodal forms of language representation beyond those afforded by traditional reading and writing practices.

Response and Production: The Media Lives of Contemporary Young People (Margaret Mackey): discusses ways to build on students' explicit and tacit understanding of the narrative forms and devices in cartoons, films, and video games to foster critical engagement with and production of literary genres and formats without destroying the pleasure of the recreational texts from which their narrative knowledge derived.

Media Representation and the Case for Critical Media Education (Deirdre M. Kelly): provides an excellent primer for critical media literacy and the deconstruction and construction of media(ted) texts; also offers guidelines for critical media education.

New Literacies and Digital Technologies: Exploring Possibilities within the Context of English Language Arts Curriculum (Roberta Hammett and Deborah Toope): distinguishes oft-confused and contested notions of literacy and their attendant skills and practices: conventional literacy, critical literacy, digital literacy, technological literacy, and New Literacies.

Integrating Multimodal Literacies through Thematic Units (Mary Clare Courtland): provides a series of curricular units, grounded in notions of sociocultural constructivism and social semiotics, to demonstrate practices for fostering multimodal literacy learning as transmediated meaning-making.

Differentiation: Respectful Responses to Diverse Literacy Learners (Ruthanne Tobin): distinguishes between Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Differentiated Instruction (DI) and uses examples to illustrate the appropriate and necessary conditions for each approach to serve as an effective pedagogical strategy for literacy learning.

Assessment for Constructive Learning (Trevor Gambell): provides a conceptual framework and series of practices for constructivist, multimodal literacy learning and assessment.

Reference

- Gee, J. (2008) Discourses and literacies. *Social Linguistics and Literacies*. London and New York: Routledge, 150 – 181.