

Book Review/Recension d'ouvrage

New Media in the Classroom: Rethinking Primary Literacy

by Cathy Burnett & Guy Merchant

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With the growth of new media technologies, children are changing the way they engage and learn, requiring a shift in what is viewed as literacy. The book, *New Media in the Classroom: Rethinking Primary Literacy* by Cathy Burnett and Guy Merchant explores authentic approaches to meaning making to develop 21st century literacies in primary classrooms.

The authors developed nine principles within their *Charter for 21st Century Literacies* that considers the emergent and affective nature of meaning making with digital literacies in engaging, collaborative, creative and critical ways. The Charter highlights “principles for literacy provision that are particularly relevant given the fluid, mobile and participatory ways in which digital media are now used in everyday life” (p.115). Both professors at Sheffield Hallam University, Cathy Burnett and Guy Merchant are well researched and widely published in the area of technology, literacy and education. Their book highlights the following themes:

- The redefinition of literacy to include new media in daily learning practices.
- The expansion of children’s experience with texts and using literacy frameworks to further create rich experiences.
- Fostering creativity and engagement by encouraging children to take new and unexpected directions in their learning.
- Reworking texts to encourage creativity and critical thinking.

In Burnett and Merchant’s effort to redefine literacy to include new media in daily literacy practices, they are not unrealistic as they identify the challenges and tensions of using technology in schools. However, through this Charter, the authors offer principles that can provide guidance for primary teachers to create classroom environments that

reflect the communicative practices of society (p.2). The notion of literacy as a social practice (Street, 1984) necessitates negotiation in everyday settings to make meaning “reflects the situatedness and diversity of literacies” (p.9) and recognizes the socio-material relationships and emergent nature of meaning making. The Charter goes on to highlight both the opportunities and challenges of working with new media to promote collaborative, creative, and critical approaches to classroom literacy practices.

The impact that new technologies have had on literacy practices, and the necessity to redefine literacy to include new media, is Burnett and Merchant’s leading principle. Their second principle suggests “building on children’s experience of texts, and use of available literacy frameworks to create rich and meaningful experiences” (p. 34). As educators recognise and build on children’s linguistic and social and cultural repertoires (p.9), they are provoked to consider both children’s uses and knowledge of technology. Extensive research on multimodality has led to an understanding that a curriculum solely based on print literacy has the potential to be irrelevant. By acknowledge diverse modes and media (p.9), children can make meaning through use of multiple modes to develop and convey meanings in more meaningful and engaging ways.

Burnett and Merchant’s next three principles take into account the affective, embodied and emergent nature of literacy practices. Grounded in theories of socio-materialism, these principles assert that to foster creativity and engagement, children need to be encouraged to take new and unexpected directions in their learning.

Within the following two principles, the authors consider opportunities for children to work creatively and critically through the remixing and reworking of digital texts. The fact that many digital texts are provisional provides opportunity and context for children to reach new audiences in an authentic manor. Burnett and Merchant’s final Charter principle discusses the collaborative nature of new media and the complexities and possibilities of these interactions.

The authors’ *Charter for 21st Century Literacies* is well supported by literacy research. Through practical applications, dense theory such as affect and embodiment, are made intelligible. The book left me wanting to know more about this theory as it relates to new media, however I realize the limitations of explication of affect and embodiment within the structure of exploring the Charter. In saying that, the extensive reference list provides a springboard for any scholar to do more thorough research in this area.

As a literacy instructor to pre-service teachers, I was drawn to the practical and approachable nature of the book. I appreciated that Chapters 2 – 10 led with vignettes to frame each principle, followed by a comprehensive examination of the principle and concluded with reflective questions that beg for consideration of one’s own practice. Burnett and Merchant provide a manageable way to consider new media in primary classrooms. Although many examples are primary focussed, the Charter is transferable beyond the primary years. It is a necessary resource for educators as they look beyond incorporating technology in their classrooms and consider authentic and rich ways that new media can be used to better align with everyday literacy practices in the classroom.

Reference

Street, B.V. (1984). *Literacy in theory and practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press