

BOOK REVIEW

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Global Conversations in Literacy Research: Digital and Critical Literacies

Editor: Peggy Albers

Publisher: Routledge

Year of Publication: 2018

Pages: 207 pp.

ISBN: 9781138742383

As a Professor of Language and Literacy Education at Georgia State University and founder and director of the Global Conversations in Literacy Research (GCLR) series, Peggy Albers put together resources from GCLR webinars where literacy scholars from around the world gathered to share what is new and what has been updated in the field of language and literacy, with digital and critical literacies as the cornerstones of research. Edited into written form, this volume comprises 15 chapters, each with different focuses in literacy. While each chapter is independent of one another, they could broadly be categorized into main themes.

The first six chapters deal with literacy, practice and implementation, which are suitable for those who are new to the field and keen to explore more about the key theoretical background and practices. Entitled *Critical Literacy, School*

Improvement, and the Four Resources Model by Allan Luke, Chapter 1 provides practical evidence of literacy education for school-level curriculum with successful implementations of the four resources model in which text can be used differently as resources in literacy and English education. The model thus allows learners to interact with text via different practices including coding, comprehension, pragmatics, and critical analysis. In Chapter 2 *What Do We Mean By Literacy Now? Critical Curricular Implications*, Jerome C. Harste and Vivian M. Vanquez engage in a critical discussion on how critical literacy is defined, presented in a conversation manner of two people taking turn discussing the issue. The chapter discusses the three components of curriculum including meaning making, language/semiotic study, and inquiry. Hilary Janks, in Chapter 3 *Doing Critical Literacy*, discusses why critical literacy should not be treated as a temporary implementation and emphasizes its perpetual significance beyond the classroom context. Janks demonstrates the connection between being literate and what she refers to as “the politics of everyday life” (p. 30). The chapter also includes the four dimensions to critical literacy and the five steps in implementing critical literacy in classrooms, so readers who are new to critical literacy may find the chapter particularly resourceful to begin with.

Chapter 4 *Towards an Ecologically Valid, Scientifically Rigorous Theory of Learning to Read* by Brian Cambourne touches upon the theoretical aspects of learning for young learners. One of the main discussions in the chapter is the existing learning theories in the literature and how these emerging principles are competing, from debates on what is best for reading education to critiques of psychology-backed, educational theories. Another interesting topic featured in this chapter is Cambourne’s flow chart on *Conditions of Learning* in which the author elaborates the concept of each condition and their interrelations that could be useful for teaching reading and writing. Examining literacy and identity by means of a longitudinal study, Catherine Compton-Lilly explains the role of time in Chapter 5 *Exploring Literacy and*

Identity at Multiple Timescales. The chapter revolves around different timescales: historical, familial, and ongoing and their effects on how children and their families make sense of the world around them and their literacy development. My impression is that the chapter discusses children's literacy development in line with their families, highlighting how parents play a crucial role in different stages and contexts. The last chapter in this section, Chapter 6 *Ethically Based Literacy Assessment with a New Literacy Framework* by Sharon Murphy, explains how humans, as social beings, use language as assessment, weighing between our own judgment and values in the social context. The chapter encapsulates the idea that in order to establish a valid literacy assessment, literacy engagement and contexts must be taken into consideration. It also features where ethically based assessment is critically discussed in connection with the widely known PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) and is addressed with regard to New Literacy Studies, a framework in which literacy is considered as a social practice.

The next four chapters concern the roles of technology and online platform as a central focus in literacy research. In Chapter 7 *How Affordances of Digital Tool Use Foster Critical Literacy*, Richard Beach highlights how critical inquiry and practices are based on different frameworks and leads us to the role of digital literacy in literacy development. Beach recounts how affordances of digital tools can help improve critical inquiry. These affordances include multimodality, interactivity, collaboration, intertextuality or recontextualization, and identity construction. Chapter 8 *New Mobile Literacies* by Guy Merchant introduces us to specific literacies brought by the mobility of smartphones and how they have shaped today's learners and classrooms. Apart from the educational potentials mobile phones might entail, Merchant also discusses the challenges that classrooms may encounter. The next chapter, Chapter 9 *Constructing the Child at Play: From the Schooled Child to Technotoddlers and Back Again* by Karen Wohlwend investigates the contrasting contexts of children and their schooling in the distant past. Wohlwend introduces the term

“techtoddlers” and provides a critical lens to look at how children in the past and today make sense of the world around them. One of the highlights of the chapter is the mention of the “nexus of practice” which is a research methodology to approach mediated discourse including literacy given that multiple components should be taken into consideration: *interaction order, discourses in place, and historical body* (Scollon and Scollon, 2004). In Chapter 10 *Young Children’s Online Practices: Past, Present, and Future*, Jackie Marsh offers a broad overview of how online literacy practices have shifted over time. Focusing upon the UK, this chapter explores young learners’ online practices and their literacy development in three dimensions: the advent of the Internet (past), what our learners are doing with what they have (present), and projections of how technology shapes their literacy and learning (future).

Considering a more specific tool that can be useful in the digital platform, Chapter 11 *Books and Games* by James Paul Gee illustrates the connection between books—the old media people have been depending upon when it comes to literacy—and video games. Gee’s chapter is based on Friere’s remarkable notion: *reading the world and reading the word* of which the first should always precede the latter. The chapter thus leaves an important message of how teachers could make use of these media, both old and new, to help learners understand what Gee refers to as *situated meanings* of the world they are engaging in. Chapter 12 *Living in a Digital World: Literacy, Learning, and Video Games*, in addition, focuses on the role of video games as new media in literacy. Catherine Beavis emphasizes how teachers effectively implemented classroom activities and used games as a resource for English and literacy which serves as a practical guideline for teachers interested in utilizing games as a learning tool. The chapter features an outstanding perspective of “working with games as text” as Beavis poses questions about English, literacy, and learning in relation to games. This idea leads to the combination of treating games as text and action which, in turn, resulted in a model for curriculum planning.

The final theme of the book underlines the role of literacy research in respect of other social practices both inside and outside the classrooms. Julia Davies explores how people's online identity is represented by specific discourses in Chapter 13 *Fashion, Style, Identity Performances in Time and Space*. The study examines Facebook as a space for people to express themselves in the virtual world. Despite the absence of pedagogical implications, the chapter offers a breath of language-in-context perspectives for teachers to think about. Interestingly, it occurs to me that this particular chapter could serve as evidence that, as one of the most popular social media like Facebook, there could be a blurred line between the actual and virtual world due to, as concluded by Davies, its uncertain, multi-dimensional, and dynamic nature. Apart from exploring the identity of learners, Chapter 14 *Identity, Investment, and Multilingual Literacy* by Bonny Norton explores the topic of identity and the relationship between language learners and the social world. The chapter centers around the context of Uganda in Africa and how technology shapes identities and affects language and literacy learning in communities. Moreover, Norton introduces the notion of *investment*, a sociological construct, as a new concept to consider in comparison with that of motivation. She argues that investment can deal with a more complicated, ever-changing identity through social contexts, which could be an interesting concept to think about particularly when dealing with the complex nature of identity in literacy research. In the final chapter of the book, Chapter 15 *A Critical Untangling of Adolescents' Literacy Practices and Popular Culture*, Donna E. Alverman touches upon learners' real worlds where learners' interests are represented by one of the most influential factors—popular culture—through various reading topics. Alverman first gives a concise explanation of the concept of critique under critical theory and how it can be applied in classroom. This chapter further underscores bridging literacy practices among adolescents and popular culture through research studies presented in chronological order. These studies shed light on how learners engaged, formally and informally, in

their literacy practices through different texts and media around them.

Global Conversations in Literacy Research: Digital and Critical Literacies is an informative and eye-opening resource for literacy and language educators, covering a wide variety of topics on literacy research, each of which is presented in a concise manner. This, in fact, offers readers an opportunity to learn about literacy research from multiple perspectives and contexts. Since the contents are written records retrieved from academic webinars, some readers might find it easier to go through certain chapters. As categorized into the themes above, the contents are organized in an easy-to-follow order, beginning with a more general concept and theories and moving toward more specific areas in language and literacy education. It is important to note that certain chapters contain online references such as Chapter 9 where links to Youtube videos are provided, so it is recommended that readers visit the websites for better understanding of the chapter. Because the central focus of the book is the literacy learning and development of young children and adolescents, the main target audience might be teachers and educators working at basic education or involving with planning literacy curriculum. It is therefore likely that readers who teach at other levels might find the contexts not directly related to their own. However, they might find the book relevant and informative in a way that it sheds light on how our learners nowadays learn in this shifting era and, in turn, could affect the teaching and learning of language, both at the policy level and in actual classroom practices.

It is an indisputable fact that digital and critical literacies are needed in this ever-changing educational landscape, especially in language teaching and learning. For language teachers and educators who would like to explore more about teaching critical literacy, learning about the practices in classrooms, and perhaps developing a research project, *Global Conversations in Literacy Research: Digital and Critical Literacies* can be a good start to apprehend literacy and language learning. They might as well find

the publications provided in the suggested readings handy and constructive.

The Reviewer

Sirawit Apairach is a lecturer at Chulalongkorn University Language Institute. He will be pursuing a PhD in Applied Linguistics for English Language Teaching at the University of Southampton, UK. His research interests include language education, second language acquisition, critical literacy, critical reading and writing, and extensive reading.

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Suggested Readings

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