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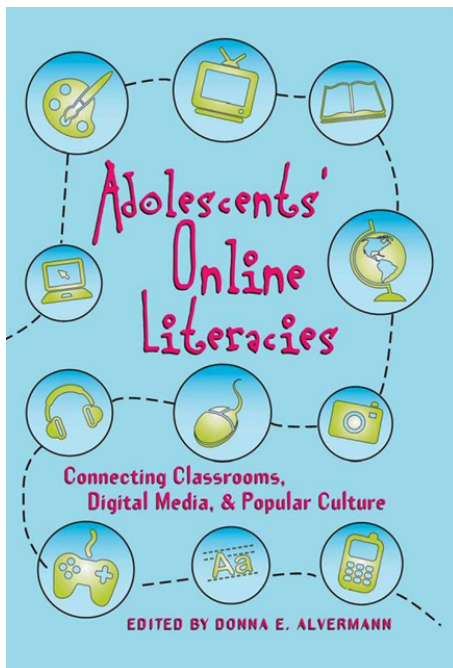
Professional Resource:

Adolescents' Online Literacies: Connecting Classrooms, Digital Media & Popular Culture (2010)

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*Adolescents' Online Literacies: Connecting Classrooms,
Digital Media, & Popular Culture*, 2010
Edited by Donna E. Alvermann
Peter Lang, New York, NY.



“Students’ literacies from their out of school worlds coexist with their in school literacies, yet often the classroom does not value or acknowledge the complex ways these literacies work and can be utilized to improve student learning.” – Amanda Gutierrez and Catherine Beavis- Chapter 8- ‘Experts on the Field:’ Redefining Literacy Boundaries

Sometimes what goes on in the classroom and what is *actually* written about what goes on in the classroom are two very different things. In *Adolescents’ Online Literacies*, Donna Alvermann, who edits this book, truly considered this aspect when asking authors to participate and contribute chapters regarding the online

lives of adolescent students in a world where schools continue to focus primarily on mainstream education. In her own words, the idea was to “keep it real,” as the book’s concept was based on her own experiences with practicing teachers, school librarians, and media specialists who were seeking to understand their students as they existed in their classroom.

Indeed, when we look at the word “literacy” in today’s classroom we must look at it from multiple perspectives. Reading and writing has never been more important, and it exists firmly within in the new dimensions of technology. Digital and media literacy extends and supplements traditional literacies as it opens the door to helping teachers and students have a conversation on different media texts whether they are within the areas of the core curriculum areas or outside of that frame. All of these literacies also open to the theme of popular culture which bridges the interests of today’s students with their mediated worlds. In fact, all the literacies in combination focus to improve student learning in all curriculum areas and in ways which can extend the learning of our students.

Teens of the 21st century live in a world unlike their predecessors. They are digitized, public, visual, and multimodal. Their knowledge of the world is based upon what they have learned from their peers and what is available to them online. They are a game generation, speakers of another language-text, and they exist on many platforms- Facebook, MySpace, Webkinz, etc. They come into the classroom and face teachers who are not usually in these spaces or understand their processing of these environments or why they enjoy them so much. They are different. Understanding that difference is what led in part to the creation of this book.

Each chapter, written by prominent people in the field of media and digital literacies, such as David

Buckingham of England and Michael Dezuanni of Australia, gives the reader a glimpse of students in these online environments from national to international perspectives. Moreover, the authors have years of experience in the area of digital media literacy either as researchers or as practitioners. Having this combination provides legitimacy to the topics and the focus of the work that was developed. Additionally, each chapter provides the reader with a new insight on student directed learning and teacher assisted learning has changed the dynamics of the learning relationship. There are ten chapters in the book and they range from topics such as the following:

- “Multimodal Pedagogies: Playing, Teaching, and Learning with Adolescents’ Digital Literacies,”
- “Textual Play, Satire, and Counter Discourses of Street Youth Zining Practices,”
- “Digital Media Literacy: Connecting Young People’s Identities, Creative Production and Learning about Video Games,” and
- “I Think Their Being Wired Differently:’ Secondary Teachers’ Cultural Models of Adolescents and their Online Literacies.

One of the main concepts that stands out is the importance of adolescents’ media choices and how those choices or participatory activities have changed the way that teachers and students interact just by the basis of the technology. As Henry Jenkins, the Provost’s Professor of Communication, Journalism, and Cinematic Arts at the University of Southern California, states,

A participatory culture is a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one’s creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices. A participatory culture is also one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least they care what other people think about what they have created). (Jenkins, 2009)

Adolescents are a part of the participatory culture as they are engaged by the media environments and are actively creating within them. That engagement has changed the way students think and behave when in the classroom. Teachers are then left with the challenge

of understanding how to work with these students and engage them with the curriculum while at the same time find a common denominator for possibilities of learning. While students play in their environments of choice, the teacher is provided with glimpses of learning and opportunities for interacting with students on a more personal level. By jumping in with students, teachers learn from the experts.

While all educators from multiple disciplines are considered in the direction of this book, what is most notable is that the school library media specialist is highlighted. In the second chapter, the school library media center is a focal point for where authentic learning experiences are seen and where the author/ researcher focused her work. In many schools, this is where the technology is housed and used by the school community as well as where many student clubs that focus on any digital gaming can be found. The fact that the editor gave important prominence to this area makes the book even more genuine as a teachable resource for learning.

As Alvermann states in the introduction, the book is “dippable,” meaning that the book could be read in its entirety or it could be read chapter to chapter and in any order. And that is an accurate description, as I have had the opportunity to use this resource with my graduate class and it has fit in very well with many of our themes and topics related to media and digital literacy and popular culture. This resource was used in multiple ways, but never in the order in which it was presented. I asked my students to comment on what they thought of the book as part of the class process. In general, most students felt that it was practical and more importantly unlike any other books they were asked to read while taking their education courses. The fact that it was applicable to this generation of youth made an impact and it enhanced their own learning as future educators.

Adolescent’s Online Literacies Connecting Classrooms, Digital Media, & Popular Culture is an excellent book contributing to the ongoing discussions for educators, administrators, and academics.

References

- Jenkins, H., P. Purushotma, M. Weigel, K. Clinton, and A. Robison. 2009. *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century* (The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Reports on Digital Media and Learning). Boston, MA: MIT Press.