BOOK REVIEWS

Hammett, R.C. & Barrell, B.R.C. (Eds.). (2002). *Digital Expressions: Media Literacy and English Language Arts.* Calgary: Detselig Enterprizes Ltd. Softcover. 229 Pages.

Most non-fiction academic texts seek to locate and (re)present themselves within an authoritative tradition. That is, the text's author, or authors, seek to assure readers that the topic at hand is appropriately, and critically, explored and investigated. Drs. Hammett and Barrell have gathered together several writers – Kathy Sanford, Jill McClay, Peter Weeks, Rebecca Luce-Kapler, Gurjit Sandhu, Chris Worsnop, Helen Nixon, Douglas Zook, Valerie Mulholland, Carl Leggo, Karen Smith, and Margaret Mackey – in order to explore / investigate the theoretical and pragmatic integration of digital technologies in Canadian English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms. In some ways, the text is an attempt to catch up to many cutting edge digital technologies in ELA classrooms already surviving and thriving across Canada. As such, Barry Barrell writes:

> From robotics to computer-assisted designs, from the use of synthesizers in music production to animated film-making, from nanotechnology to biotechnology, from census databases to collaborative writing projects, information and communication technologies are essential for the completion of both routine and complex calculations, predictions, procedures, productions, and diagnoses. These advances will change the structures of what will be expected of ELA teachers. (p. 222)

With such emergent digital practices evolving in some ELA classrooms, the text seeks to convince less technology integrative ELA educators to raise their awareness and consciousness of digital expressions. The text seeks to make the case for the transference of teacher / learner practices toward digitally integrative classrooms. And, why is such a new guiding vision of inclusive and integrated digital technologies and media required of most ELA teachers as the 21st century opens? Why is there the necessity to have ELA teachers engage with and embrace digital

technologies and media as a new basics education for learners? One reason is the pragmatics of the current ever-expanding universe of global economics. Barry Barrell, citing Waks (2000), indicates, "schools, as we have known them, are *not efficient* suppliers of workers capable of meeting the skill sets needed by knowledge workers in globally networked environments" (p. 223, Italics added). Simply, the death of routine workers is enviable. Therefore, schools must prepare learners to acquire and demonstrate digital technologies and media knowledge / skill / attribute-enhanced workers for trans-national, multi-mega conglomerate corporations. Again, he writes that, "the contributors to this text have offered a glimpse into how ELA can meet and contribute to the textual and creative demand of a changing world" p. 224). A second reason is advanced by the editors-authors for the necessity to integrate digital technologies and their uses into the ELA classroom. Barry suggests that,

> The point of having digital technologies in schools is not to make things easier for students or to electronically enhance traditional lectures and teaching practices or to make provincial testing programs more efficient. New technologies allow us to do things differently. They allow us to search a little further, dig a little deeper, and publish our investigations to broader audiences. We can do schooling much better. (p. 226)

The result of modifying and revolutionizing the ELA classroom into a digital / media expressions space is simply that teachers must front-line and front-load expanded notions of text and textuality, or little will change in the ways learners imagine and represent their knowledge and abilities. ELA teachers must become knowledgeable and skilled in advancing a broadening of learner affect and effect on what constitutes digital and textual (multi)literacy. And, they must frame a re-positioning of authorial identity as well as seek a new pragmatic way to establish where and what authorial authority and inquiry expression is in the new world order of global digital technology expression and expansion.

Sandwiched by an introduction by Barrell and Hammett and an epilogue by Barrell, the text offers nine chapters. Some of the chapter titles include: "Popular Media and School Literacies," "Writers in a Multiliteracy Classroom," "Assessment in Media Education," "Popular Media Culture," "ICTs and the English Language Arts Curriculum," and

"Reading, 'Riting, Representing and Resisting Media Violence: Viewing Television With Critical Eyes."

For scholars, teacher educators, classroom teachers, prospective teachers, learners, and those generally interested in the English Language Arts classroom and the integration of digital media as well as expanding applications of literacy, *Digital Expressions* is an informative text. However, if a rationale for the text is to assist teachers (and others) to think differently about ELA, and to show how to do / practice ELA and ICT in integrated ways, then a stronger argument needs to made other than to advance the new-old claims for the wonders of globalization, or to use the old-new claims of the ELA classroom as naturally a cutting-edge language / textuality space. If the editor-authors were thinking that a fusion of multi-authored descriptions, in a series of show and tell chapters, would be evidence enough for the *good* of digital expressions in an ELA classroom, then that thinking is not quite realized. Simply, the selected authors present uneven treatments of the topic, and at times seem to be at odds with the nature and spirit of the editors' vision of digital expressions. Although, each chapter does offer insights into digital expressions, and although each chapter seeks, through self-referencing, to authorize the work at hand, no chapter really becomes a fecund case of digital expression.

Perhaps a more interesting / significant issue circulating in the text is the claim that the text's varied treatments of digital expressions are *more* significant as an educational practice in terms of being a *more* authentic and *more* educative offering for learners as we, teachers, strive to live better with our students.' And yet, neither the authors nor the editors ever really critically take up the dark side of the consumptive gift of "more"-ness.

The assumptive claim that digital media and expression are *more real,* and a *better way* to educate the young, needs to be taken up before the call-to-arms is demanded of all ELA teachers to reformat and reload their and their students teaching / learning practices.

Nevertheless, *Digital Expressions* is a quality text. It will serve to enhance conversations amongst many levels of educators concerning digital media and its integration into the ELA classroom. In this regard. the text is a good read and across time will prove to be an important

contribution to teacher and learner understandings of the (re)evolution of digital expressions.

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Sayers, S., Morley, J., & Barnes, B. (Eds.). (2002). *Issues in Design and Technology Teaching.* New York: Routledge Falmer. Softcover. 258 pages.

This is a book with a strong focus on the design and technology teaching in the United Kingdom. Design and technology is a new area being introduced into the National Curriculum in the United Kingdom. Despite its short history, it has attracted a lot of attention in the teaching and learning of the subject. It has been argued that the challenges of design and technology education are unique in the school curriculum. One significant challenge is that because design and technology encompasses a wealth of skills and specialties, covering all aspects of the subject in any detail in initial teacher training courses is often very difficult, if not impossible. An important implication is that teachers lack the opportunity to explore critical theoretical underpinnings.

To meet this challenge, the book *Issues in Design and Technology Teaching* seeks to identify and study critical topics in the teaching of this subject, intending to stimulate rich discussions and debates in this area. The book is a one of the series, *Issues in Subject Teaching*. It is targeted at student teachers or new teachers of the subject, teachers with a leadership role, mentors, and trainers of the groups mentioned above. The editors are teachers in design and technology at the university level. Most of the authors are experienced practitioners in the area. The book is a collective work of high quality with a good introduction to some theoretical issues concerning the subject. Most of the chapters are engaging and provide valuable practical strategies that are helpful for the targeted audience. The balance between the theoretical and practical aspects makes it a good text for teachers and administrators.