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Professional Books of Interest

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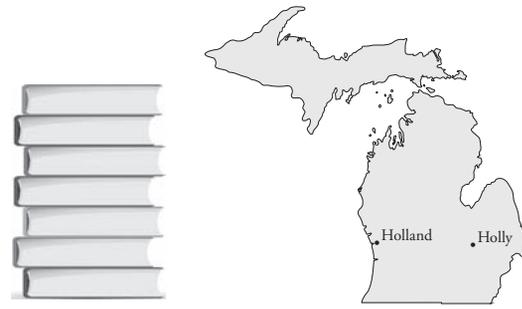
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Professional Books of Interest

by Kathy Highfield
and Laura Pardo



Dear Readers,

We are happy to share professional books that will interest you, challenge you, and cause you to examine your own beliefs about literacy teaching and learning. In this issue, we recommend excellent professional books on the topics of digital literacy learning, writing instruction, and student engagement.

In this issue's column, we review two books that deal with digital literacy. The first, *Assessing Students' Digital Writing: Protocols for Looking Closely*, by former Michigan educator and current teacher educator Troy Hicks, focuses on digital writing. The second, *Reading, Writing, and Literacy 2.0: Teaching with Online Texts, Tools, and Resources, K-8*, by Denise Johnson, focuses on the purposeful integration of technology for deep thinking in the literacy classroom.



Kathy Highfield



Laura Pardo

The third book, *Eight Myths of Student Disengagement: Creating Classrooms of Deep Learning*, by Jennifer Fredricks, dives deeply into the concept of student engagement and challenges many commonly-held beliefs about this complex topic.

Finally, we review *Uncommonly Good Ideas: Teaching Writing in the Common Core Era*, by Sandra Murphy and Mary Ann Smith, which showcases effective teaching of writing within the expectations of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

Note: We review these texts individually, which is why we use the pronouns I/me in the reviews below. As always, we welcome suggestions for future reviews via email. (Note: We only consider titles published within the past 2 years.) We plan to review at least four professional books or digital resources for each future issue of *MRJ*.

Happy reading,
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Fredricks, J. (2014).

Eight Myths of Student Disengagement: Creating Classrooms of Deep Learning. Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks: CA. ISBN 9781452271880 \$29.95

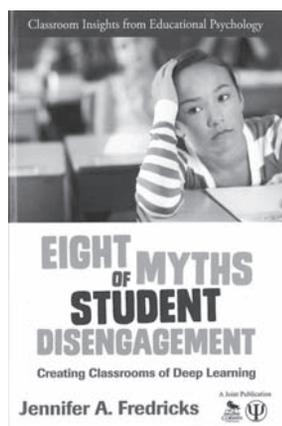
In her book, *Eight Myths of Student Disengagement: Creating Classrooms of Deep Learning*, Jennifer Fredricks

challenges teachers to see that student engagement can be improved in every classroom for every student. This statement is challenging because it causes us to think deeply about some of our long-held assumptions about student engagement. Since I love a good challenge, I enjoyed this book tremendously. There is deep value in questioning our assumptions, especially in educational contexts. I challenge you to look deeply at your own classrooms and your own assumptions about student engagement by reading this book.

Fredricks introduces us to six hypothetical cases of students at varying levels of engagement. These cases span the entire book, as the reader learns the layers of complexity that accompany issues of student engagement.

Each chapter of the book addresses one myth about student engagement, peeling back the layers of complexity. The chapters offer practical application of research-based principles, numerous tables and charts to support the content, resources, tools, vignettes, and opportunities for the reader to stop and reflect. Each chapter closes with a clear summary; text-to-practice exercises that challenge teachers to apply the concepts in the context of the classroom; a glossary of key terms and concepts; and a research-based resource list of books, journal articles, and websites.

So, you are probably wondering what are those eight myths?



Myth 1: It's easy to tell who is engaged: What is engagement and how can I assess it in my classroom?

Myth 2: Some students just don't care: How disengagement is more than just a lack of student motivation.

Myth 3: What happens outside of school competes with academics: How out-of-school time and families affect engagement in school.

Myth 4: Hands-on is minds-on: How to create more engaging classroom tasks that result in deep learning.

Myth 5: Focus on content: Don't make it personal: How relationships matter for student engagement.

Myth 6: Socializing with peers distracts from student engagement: How to create a peer context that supports engagement.

Myth 7: There's only so much a teacher can do: How to help those students still struggling to succeed.

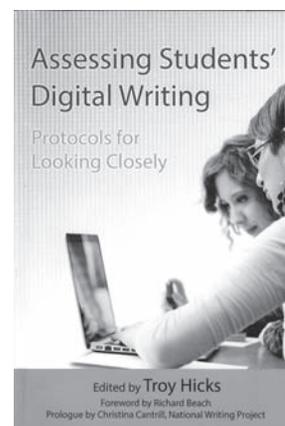
Myth 8: Student engagement is a student choice: Choosing to make the effort and not waiting for engagement to happen.

This book would be perfect book for PLCs, a whole staff book study, and teachers who are hoping to increase student engagement... isn't that all of us? There is only one question left to ask. Will you take the challenge?

Hicks, T. (Ed) (2015).

Assessing Students' Digital Writing: Protocols for Looking Closely. Teachers College Press and the National Writing Project, New York: NY. ISBN 0807756695 \$30.95

Over the past decade more teachers have embraced digital writing in K-12 classrooms. If you are one of these teachers, or



you're considering teaching digital writing, this is the book for you. Hicks shares the insights gained from using an assessment protocol for digital writing which he engaged in with six National Writing Project teacher consultants. An additional aside – and one I find worth mentioning – is that Hicks is a former Michigan teacher and a current Michigan teacher educator.

Writing digitally is still a relatively new area for both research and classroom practice, and both the process and the products are significantly different from the traditional writing process. It therefore makes sense that the way digital writing is evaluated would be different as well. In particular, the process itself requires a teacher's guidance and feedback. Come inside the classrooms of six teachers to discover the way they implement and envision new tools for supporting digital writers.

The text is unique in that the editor and authors formed a teacher inquiry group to study how to assess digital writing, meeting over the course of eight weeks during the summer via Google hang-out. The teachers were committed to talking about and developing tools for assessing digital writing through collaboration and actual student writing. While multiple protocols for this type of work exist, Hicks selected the Collaborative Assessment Conference where one teacher presented student work at each virtual meeting without sharing any information about the student or about his or her digital writing development, and the other teachers engaged in three rounds of sharing their observations about the work. This allowed the group to work through six pieces of digital student work in not only a collaborative way, but also one steeped in analysis and critique, with the goal of identifying high-quality digital writing.

The book is comprised of six chapters and each contains the story of one of the teacher consultants and his/her classroom context and experience with students' digital writing. Each chapter begins with a sample of digital writing—a QR code and

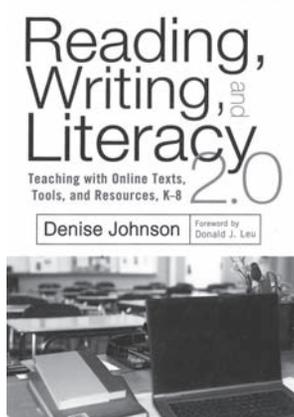
a URL are included so that readers may examine the actual student work. Collectively, the teachers teach from kindergarten through college and comprise a range of experience, geographic diversity, and teaching contexts, thus leading to recommendations that appeal to a varied set of teachers and school settings.

Following the case studies (each one presented in a single chapter), Hicks authors the final chapter where he draws some conclusions that emerged from the work and makes suggestions for assessing digital writing. His conclusions focus teachers on considering the broadening of our shared and individual visions of assessment to include the writer's process and purpose, where negotiation is considered a critical aspect of the evaluation. Further, Hicks offers the following recommendations:

1. Digital writing is not likely to improve students' traditional writing. We must acknowledge this, but also acknowledge the powerful learning that does come when students engage in digital writing.
2. When designing digital writing tasks for students, teachers must ask students to do something that they could not do without using digital tools.
3. When assessing digital writing we must consider both process and product.

Ultimately, Hicks provides teachers with a text that should spark collaborative conversation around the assessment of students' digital writing. Ideally, teachers would implement one of the protocols discussed early in the book and examine their own students' writing. Nonetheless, all teachers who read this text will gain valuable information about how to conduct careful and detailed analyses of students' digital writing.

Johnson, D (2014). *Reading, Writing, and Literacy 2.0: Teaching with Online Texts, Tools, and Resources, K-8.* Teacher's College Press, New York: NY. ISBN 080775529X \$29.95



“Literacy changes the way children see themselves—as readers—as members of a different group. Literacy opens the door to the world and has the power to change lives” (p 1). This quote rings true to us as literacy educators because we value literacy as foundationally critical to

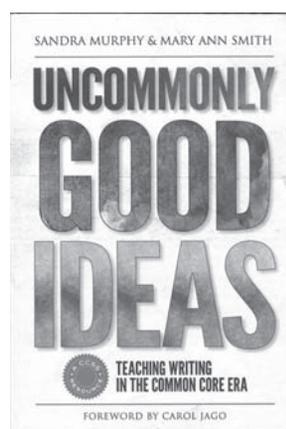
student success in every aspect of school and life. In her book, *Reading, Writing, and Literacy 2.0: Teaching with Online Texts, Tools, and Resources, K-8*, Denise Johnson presents a fresh look at important issues surrounding digital literacy and its impact on student learning.

Johnson presents some staggering statistics that serve to enlighten teachers’ understanding of the role of technology in students’ lives. These statistics help us to understand that the definition of what it means to be literate in today’s world is changing. For example, 93% percent of adults have cell phones and 65% of adults have high-speed Internet at home. Ninety-three percent of children ages 8-18 spend an average of 90 minutes a day using computers. Almost 75% of this time is spent on social networking, instant messaging, watching videos, and playing computer games.

This leaves only a small percentage of children who use the Internet to explore their interests or to find information beyond what is available at school or in their community (p. 4). These statistics point to the lack of student engagement with the Internet as a learning resource. Classroom teachers are in the perfect position to help students make sense of their digital world so that they can go beyond making and keeping friends. Clearly, the definition of literacy instruction in this context has changed in order to meet the dynamics of our digital and global society.

The book provides a clear and interesting section on the differences between print and online reading, writing, communication, and social contexts that even the most technology savvy teachers will appreciate. Johnson states, “Unfortunately, technology is rarely used in ways that promote deep thinking and reflection” (p 22). In light of this, Johnson provides a framework for thinking about literacy instruction that offers helpful guidelines for designing literacy instruction for today’s students.

In this book, Johnson lays the foundation for thoughtful and purposeful integration of technology. Johnson examines several important aspects of classroom life, such as the purposeful integration of technology in creating classroom community and connecting with families. This book contains plenty of resources to help support the purposeful integration of technology into the literacy curriculum, such as websites and the selection of eBooks, sample lessons and lesson ideas, support for vocabulary and fluency instruction, a comparison of traditional reading and writing to reading and writing with digital sources, assessment resources, and digital learning rubrics. *Reading, Writing, and Literacy 2.0* is a must-have resource for every literacy teacher.



Murphy, S., & Smith, M.A. (2015). *Uncommonly Good Ideas: Teaching Writing in the Common Core Era.* Teachers College Press, New York: NY. ISBN 0807756431 \$27.95

Emerging from the work of the Bay Area and California Writing Projects, Murphy and Smith present a resource for teachers who are seeking to teach writing more effectively within the expectations of the Common

Core State Standards. The text includes model lessons and assignments, mentor texts, teaching strategies, student writing, case studies, and practical advice for enacting these ideas in your own classroom.

Most teachers realize that teaching writing in a standards-based approach can result in a type of formulaic writing, as the concern that students perform well on standardized assessments overrides the desire for students to learn to write well. Murphy and Smith provide ideas that are inspirational, that can help teachers to enact powerful writing instruction, that can lead to the creation of passionate and eager student writers, and that draw heavily on the concept of resourcefulness. While the authors consulted expert teachers and examined a variety of contexts, the text is provided as a resource, and teachers can apply and adapt the ideas presented to craft their own writing curriculum.

The text is organized around five key ideas: integrating reading, writing, speaking, and listening; teaching writing as a process; extending the range of students' writing; spiraling and scaffolding a writing curriculum; and collaborating. Each of the topics is the focus of one chapter, and each chapter includes sample lessons, student writing samples, mentor texts, and case studies. Some of the lessons contain worksheets, lists, diagrams, or other graphics that show teachers how they might apply and adapt these ideas.

While each of these big ideas has been talked about in previous texts, teacher education, and professional development, I found the chapter on spiraling and scaffolding refreshing and novel. As a current teacher educator, I found many nuggets to use with my own students, as some of them struggle with adopting the professional language and style of writing that inservice teachers must acquire. In particular, the notion of writing scrimmages (borrowed from Rebekah Caplan, cited on p. 83 of the text) suggests that writers write in

short bursts, focusing on a specific strategy, and then receive immediate feedback. This is a type of scaffolding that I'm eager to try in the literacy methods courses that I teach.

In the concluding chapter the authors suggest that teachers emerge as leaders in their schools. If students are to become life-long writers and write effectively per the CCSS, teachers will need to collaborate, pooling great ideas and leading the development of effective writing curriculum. Like all standards documents, the CCSS are not a curriculum; they merely provide guidelines for reaching a final destination. They do not provide the vehicle in which this journey occurs. Teachers still decide how they are going to teach and, as Murphy and Smith suggest, may even implement the CCSS in *positively deviant* ways—positive because most teachers believe in the goals of the CCSS, want students to be college and career ready, and want students to enjoy writing, yet deviant because teachers and their voices and opinions matter. Finding your own way through the standards is not only your right, but is also a responsibility that we owe our students.

One thing became apparent as I read the text—Sandra Murphy and Mary Ann Smith know writing. They cite current and seminal research to support their ideas. They worked with actual classroom teachers and leading writing professionals in education. They utilize graphics, vignettes, samples of lessons, and student writing, and they write simply and effectively. The text engaged me from the minute I opened its cover, and it has the potential to change my own practice. I hope that it can do the same for you.

