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Book Review

Teaching and Learning in Multiliteracies: Changing Times, Changing Literacies by Michèle Anstey and Geoff Bull

IRA and Australian Literacy Educators' Assoc.
Kensington Gardens, Australia. 2006
160 pp. ISBN 13: 978-0-87207-586-3

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The goal of Anstey and Bull is to introduce the reader to literacy as *multiliteracies* created by technological changes, social and cultural changes, and a global economy. Targeted for K-9 teachers, *Teaching and Learning in Multiliteracies: Changing Times, Changing Literacies*, is designed as a tool for teachers of literacy and other consumers or producers of text in a variety of forms. Merging new and established ideas about literacy, Anstey and Bull focus on current best practices in literacy and methods that have stood the test of time, and they keep their promise to provide both theory and practical applications for teachers. Their sections on *Reflection Strategies* guide the reader in thinking critically and reflectively about ways literacies have been viewed and lead the reader gently into how these literacies have changed, diminished, or vanished based on the social, cultural, and technological changes. Incorporating sections of *Theory into Practice: Classroom Applications* serves to mediate the often criticized space between theory and practice for classroom teachers.

The authors begin by placing these ideas of multiliteracies, created by the constant changes in technology, culture, society, and the global economy, generally located outside of classrooms, in context with what students need to know in today's knowledge society. Technological changes have made social and economical interaction different with access to others faster, easier, and broader due to innovations like the

Internet and multimodal texts. These far reaching resources introduce readers to new values and beliefs in new and different ways with a variety of messages and presentations.

Anstey and Bull want teachers to understand the new literacies in relationship to various technological innovations and to distinguish how teachers ask students to consume or create multimodal texts. They define for the reader what it means to be multiliterate. "The multiliterate person can interpret, use, and produce electronic, live, and paper texts that employ linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural, and spatial semiotic systems for social, cultural, political, civic

and economic purposes in socially and culturally diverse contexts" (41).

According to the authors, literacy is a moving target. In fact, they view the new constant as *change*. Changes in literacies are constantly being altered and teachers need to adjust their pedagogy to meet these changes and the challenges they bring. Anstey and Bull call for a dynamic pedagogy where the learning outcomes, a focus of learning, and the social and cultural influences on students and their community are central. These concepts along with what students understand about classroom discourse, materials, and tasks determine the ways and the kinds of learning that occurs.

Anstey and Bull discuss how changes in society, culture, technology, and the new global economy have created a change in literacy leading to the formation of multiliteracies. These multiliteracies are created by different ways to interpret different modes of text. No longer are students limited to printed text: all semiotic systems must be included in notions of multiliteracies. The authors help teachers recognize that changes required to their existing pedagogy should include the multimodal texts associated with multiliteracies. Children's literature, primarily picture books, is used as the model to help teachers understand the importance of text in different forms. By comparing illustrative text to print only text, teachers gain understanding of

visual images as text and as ways to make meaning from a variety of text formats, or modes.

Finally, Anstey and Bull offer templates for planning instruction in the context of multiliteracies. Teachers are shown how to lead students in the *Four Resource Model* to critically assess the texts they read. The authors provide teachers with guidance in creating lessons that include the model's concepts of the student as code breaker, meaning maker, text user, and text analysts. Embedded are notions of critical pedagogy designed to assist students in recognizing the inconsistencies of information in a given text format or how subtle issues of social justice may be ingrained in multiliteracies.

The authors have carefully crafted the inclusion of clearly constructed tables and sections to encourage reflective thinking: *Reflection Strategies*, and pragmatic offerings for classroom use; *Theory into Practice: Classroom Applications*, as tools for teachers. As teachers reflect on their own evolving literacy experiences (NOTE: or experiences with literacy?), they may begin to realize how ideas of literacy continue to change. Preparing for these changes becomes critical for instructing students in an ever-changing global and technological society. Teachers are also encouraged to include a critical pedagogy framework to the multiliteracies as students are exposed to multiple messages from an increasing number of multimedia resources, particularly outside of classrooms.

Anstey and Bull have filled their discussion with the increasing focus of visual texts in the form of photographs, videos, and font distinctions but make no reference on the differentiation of instruction needed for students outside of the 'norm.' What are students with impaired vision to do with all of these semiotic system representations that are dependent on what the reader actually sees? It would have been helpful to have some insight on differentiating their classroom applications to handle diverse learners.

Overall, teachers will appreciate the work of Anstey and Bull if for nothing more than its practical applications to the classroom. The authors clearly explain the theories associated with literacy issues, provide more clarity in their well designed tables, a different presentation of printed text, and give teachers realistic, practical suggestions or alternatives for them to use immediately in classrooms or with students.

About the Author

Sandra Plair (miztech@gmail.com), a former middle school technology instructor, is currently a PhD candidate at Michigan State University in the Teacher Education program, focusing on technology and professional development. As an instructor of preservice teachers, she mixes literacy and technology to prepare her students for classrooms in urban settings.

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