Handbook of Adolescent Literacy Research

Reviewed by: Archea T. Reiter

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Title: Handbook of Adolescent Literacy Research

Authors: Linda Christensen, Randy Barey, and Peter Smagorinsky

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Literacy, according the editors of Handbook of adolescent Literacy Research, is a complicated puzzle much like a search for keys. The shuffled letters lie under a light instead of where the keys were dropped, because the drudgery is too intense. This light simulates the fact that governmental policy might be the ultimate form of light that illuminates a certain kind of literacy, but not all. Literacy might be described by research in this acting. The purpose of this handbook is to bring together the various experts and subject areas, and discuss and translate the complicated layers of interaction between the components of the research, the teacher and the student, and focus upon aspects of literacy as problematic and central to nature. Literacy Studies has been in need of a handbook on current topics in the field, and this one reviews a thoughtful and stimulating survey of pertinent issues.

The book is broken into four parts that reflect the current major concerns of literacy studies. These editors map researchers' thought processes as they attempt to grapple with the complexity of the terms in the handbook. As the editors state in the introduction, "The 'adolescent, literacy, research' is a simple, un-differentiated, un-anthropomorphistic term. (p. 3). The tension surrounding these terms is exemplified more fully by adolescence in Chapter 3. In our view, the history of the field, based upon understanding that none of these terms actually deny any student, reveals an agenda for the future of literacy. It is our hope that, by describing the fragments that make up our work in the field today, the autonomous model and the adolescent model. The autonomous model presents reading and writing as 'inevitable processes that are largely explained by individual variations in cognitive and physiological functioning' (p. 10). The ideological model, proposed by Sleeter (1993), integrates the autonomous model with Vygotsky’s theory as an attempt to bring about cultural change of knowledge that can account for learning and development, and power structure in the classroom. The book is divided into five parts. The first part is on literacy research and the phenomena they describe. The other three sections of the book continue these trends of thought. Each section is framed by a pertinent set of policy, which combines the dimensions of a discussion of the book and a larger political milieu. Part I, Literacy in School, describes literacy as a term under construction in the classroom as electronic media gains in popularity and social and economic pressures on 'literacy' are left behind. The researchers in this section question the decline of literacy proficiency in today's society and point to the factors that have contributed to this decline. Part II, Reading, describes the nature of meaning-making that students can participate in when the definition of literacy shifts from a word-bound model to a more semiotic perspective. Part III, Writing, describes how the use of digital literacies is an essential tool for the development of students. This book is an essential tool for anyone who wants to understand the complexities of literacy and the impact it has on our society.

In Part II, Reading, the authors explore the impact of digital literacies on reading and the ways in which these literacies shape the reading and writing experiences of students. The book is divided into five parts. The first part is on literacy research and the phenomena they describe. The other three sections of the book continue these trends of thought. Each section is framed by a pertinent set of policy, which combines the dimensions of a discussion of the book and a larger political milieu. Part I, Literacy in School, describes literacy as a term under construction in the classroom as electronic media gains in popularity and social and economic pressures on 'literacy' are left behind. The researchers in this section question the decline of literacy proficiency in today's society and point to the factors that have contributed to this decline. Part II, Reading, describes the nature of meaning-making that students can participate in when the definition of literacy shifts from a word-bound model to a more semiotic perspective. Part III, Writing, describes how the use of digital literacies is an essential tool for the development of students. This book is an essential tool for anyone who wants to understand the complexities of literacy and the impact it has on our society.

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