Literacy in the Digital Age: Reading, Writing, Viewing, and Computing, by Frank B. Withrow

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Recommended Citation

lessons would remind us that the history of dissent in schooling has also kept us free in the best sense of freedom.

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LITERACY IN THE DIGITAL AGE: READING, WRITING, VIEWING, AND COMPUTING

FRANK B. WITHROW
SCARECROW EDUCATION, 2004
$23.95, 107 PAGES

Reviewed by Sarah E. Crosske

Media has become a staple in contemporary life. The Internet, video games, and television are all common instruments to people young and old. But what happens when the young sacrifice some of their learning for these modern conveniences? In *Literacy in the Digital Age: Reading, Writing, Viewing, and Computing*, Withrow discusses the impact of technology on education, and more specifically on a child's developing literacy. Children are not only responsible for cultivating literacy through reading and writing, they also need to be conversant through computers, television, and other digital media.

Withrow begins to explore the digital phenomenon through the first chapter by posing the question: How do children learn? Withrow recounts a rhyming email exchange with his great-grandchildren. He was able to practice an important developmental literacy skill through the avenue of technology. The author reports the learning experiences that young children can gain through television shows and video games. Parents need to take a participatory role when children are coalescing their literacy skills with technology, more specifically with television. "One area that is critical in television viewing is to help the child understand advertisements that are directed toward them" (p. 15). It is a parent's and an educator's duty to create conscious consumers of media.

A literate student needs to be able to comprehend material that is laden with varying levels of difficult vocabulary. Withrow discusses the process of developing phonemic awareness and vocabulary. An advanced vocabulary

aids in reading and writing simultaneously. An expansive bank of words allows children to express themselves creatively. Similarly, the general public has been influenced by technology and its vocabulary. With the broadcasts of NASA lift offs and the popularity of weather reports, the general population has become conversant with new vocabulary. Due to the effects of this exposure, Withrow reminds the reader again that it is an adult's duty to monitor and explain what children see on television.

The difficulty with composing a text based on technology is that technology is developing and changing at warp speed. *Literacy in the Digital Age* was published in 2004 and became obsolete by the time it was stocked on shelves. One of the chapters is entitled "Learning in the Twenty-First Century" and it details what American schools will look like in the year 2010. Withrow details the experience of a digital library and online learning. Using this model the learning will be student-centered; "it [technology] concentrates the learning and teaching partnership on the learner rather than the teacher" (p. 53). The description of a digital library is not unlike that of distance learning. Overall, a 6-year projection is not going to keep this book relevant for long.

One is led to believe from the synopsis on the back cover that this book is directly related to education. While Withrow does delve into that realm toward the end of the text, the beginning is congested with anecdotes from personal family experiences with young children. This may prove to be a disappointment to educators and parents who select this book to assist their students in combining their literacy skills with technology. However, halfway through the book Withrow states that

> The bad news is that our schools are crumbling down around our teachers and students. Although we have examples of exemplary new schools, most of our school facilities are antiquated and in disrepair, especially in our central cities. We have moved forward in providing access to the Internet, but we are not completely wired. (p. 49).

This statement was intended for the public school sector, but it also rings true to those teaching in the Catholic schools. It takes the author approximately six chapters to express an opinion that is relevant to the reader of the book. With the limited number of pages this book does provide on the topic, the reviewer feels as though creating the background of literacy and technology in six chapters is unnecessary.

Withrow's priorities in this book are unclear. Chapter 5, entitled "Literacy and Technology," should provide a direct correlation with the focus of the book, yet only extends one page. However, the chapter "The Role of the Federal Government in Learning Technologies" is 14 pages. It is not to

say that the government's role in this discussion is not noteworthy, but the primary focus is not on the classroom. When the focus is in the classroom, it is difficult to see Withrow as a supporter of present-day education. The author claims that the classrooms of today are no different than that of 1900 or 1930.

"The teacher who fails to bring technology to the desk of the learner is failing to practice the high calling of teaching" (p. 53). It is important to note that not all of the different forms of media are isolated; they are interdependent and blend to create a world of knowledge. Withrow fails to mention there needs to be a marriage between traditional instructional techniques with the aid of technology; the world of education cannot live solely on distance learning alone. Overall, there is a disconnect between this book and the world of education. The title indicates that literacy needs to fit itself into the realm of technology, but it is technology that needs to find its niche in the world of literacy. Unfortunately, Withrow fails to make this distinction. While the book does an adequate job of explaining the importance of literacy in education, it disappointingly provides no practical advice for effectively incorporating it into the classroom.

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IMAGINATION AND LITERACY: A TEACHER'S SEARCH FOR THE HEART OF LEARNING

KAREN GALLAS
TEACHERS COLLEGE PRESS, 2003
$22.95, 181 PAGES

Reviewed by Kelly Ryan

The author of *Imagination and Literacy: A Teacher's Search for the Heart of Learning* has been in elementary education for over 30 years. Gallas spent the majority of that time teaching in rural and urban public schools. The