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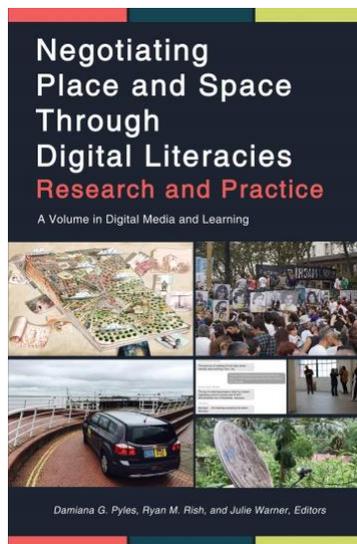
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Review of Negotiating Place and Space through Digital Literacies: Research and Practice

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Educational space is no longer limited to the physical realm of a classroom or playground; increasingly, students, families, and educators traverse boundaries of belonging and community through digital social practices and platforms. The studies provided in this volume encourage readers to reconsider the notion of spatial-society and work to stretch our understandings in how place is defined. These notions, as the book hopes, will disrupt and challenge deficit views held widely by English-centric, metro- and hetero- normative research agendas. What the academy misses in its hunger to meet the inner-city, standardized gaps and risks, are the clues embedded in these complex, liminal counterspaces. Our contemporary understanding of what is “right” or “real” about society is reconsidered in these 15 presented studies.

As the foreword suggests, this “spatial turn in literacy theory” is running side-by-side with a global shift in online spatiality, upturning our understanding of belonging, and revealing how these new ways of spatial-social participation impact individual and group identity, counter hegemonic structures, and redefine what is considered legit literacy. The authors work to bridge our understandings of *how place operates in tandem with digital literacy practices* to sketch a tapestry of instructional possibility. Researchers and educators alike are lucky to have these pieces collected for our perusal.

The editors divide the collection into three parts: (1) Reconsidering digital literacies from the edges, (2) Digital literacies from within, and (3) Tracing literacies across time and space. Each section speaks widely to the notion of digital literacy and, in its own way, reminds us of the danger of the single story (Adichie, 2009). Study design and analyses reveal critical social theory *cannot* ignore the inequities of access, nor the unique community voices and practices produced by today’s digital

networking. Additionally, readers may sense their own digital participation with fresh awareness, eager to investigate local, historical, and immediate notions of spatial justice. This book purports a huge undertaking, alternately reminding us of this larger purpose while introducing and challenging us with post-structuralist, posthuman notions of social-spatial possibility. It is a doozy.

Per this review, I will first define pertinent vocabulary and gather the editors’ intent, then review each of the three subsections individually. From there, I aim to synthesize the educative impact the volume holds for researchers and practitioners, and I finish with critiques and questions.

Definitions and Intentions

Regarding the notion of space, Doreen Massey (2005), who Kathy A. Mills references in her foreword, opens her book, *For Space*, with three propositions that help frame the editors’ vision for this collection. She proposes:

- (1) that we recognize space as the product of **interrelations**; as constituted through **interactions**, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny; (2) that we understand space as the **sphere of the possibility** of the **existence of multiplicity** in the sense of contemporaneous plurality; and (3) that we recognize space as **always under construction**. (p. 10)

Building upon this frame, the editors curate a volume of studies linking physical and virtual space-making with emotion, relationship, and symbolism.

Many of the chapters explicitly counter deficit-based beliefs and disembodied pedagogical practices, while others challenge our dismay and/or dismissal of online extremism, and with thoughtful narrative framing, expose a tender human belly of the cyber universe.

Readers may, additionally, need to suspend their own biases and academic savvy in order to fully grasp what these researchers are providing. *Negotiating Place and Space Through Digital Literacies* is a densely worded archive of creative possibility, and it does not hesitate to jump off the edge of normativity and familiarity, a bold and necessary ante in today's online playground of fake news, selective filtering, media influencing, loafing, and trolling. Clearly, humans are positioning, posturing, and performing their literacies rapidly, and if Paulo Freire were alive today, I imagine he wouldn't hesitate to include digital spatialities in his notions of reading the world.

Perusing the list of studies, one notices fresh, creative phrasing: *collisions of difference, tacit modalities, virtual carrels, transrhetorical analysis, and social loafing*, and if the reader is a logophile like me, they anticipate a journey into the (limitless and nuanced) crux of multiliteracies and lingualisms. A conscientious teacher imagines collecting a few new terms and tricks for naming and encouraging the use of, rather than the abuse of, digital dexterity and depth.

Part I Reconsidering Digital Literacies From the Edges

Part I of *Negotiating Place and Space* begins with a bang as authors Sikkema, Smolin, Spielberg, Diaz, and Preston cut to the quick of how current neoliberal policies aim to homogenize, paralyze, and routinize the practices of teachers and communities across our public-school system. This unfortunate truth, the authors contest, undermines the benefit of

arts integration. To counter, they partner Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE) and public school teachers to afford opportunities to investigate space and identity with their students, finding artmaking a vehicle to notice, name, and disrupt dominant space-based hegemony in classrooms, hallways, and surrounding off-campus locales. The authors explore how traditional roles and time-frames were reversed and stretched as teachers and students explored and manipulated digital tools, artifacts, and physical boundaries.

The chapters that follow delve further into the nuances of digital-spatial consciousness. Jurich, in "Mediating Dialogue in Public Online Affinity Spaces," considers dialogic characteristics of online comments in affinity spaces and various ways participants listen, appreciate, synthesize, find connections, and mediate discussion threads. Next, Thomas-Reed in "Queering Text," reframes online trolling as an *opportunity to discover*, dissect, and challenge the nuances of hate speech, and with careful pedagogical consideration, hold them still as classroom dialogue fodder. Of course, as the author notes in reference to Bettez (2008, p. 95), this type of work demands a dexterous, "artful facilitation" on the part of the educator. Silence, of course, remaining the sneakiest oppressor.

Neal and Vicars examine how their teacher candidates engage with an array of new (and asynchronous) technologies to observe their "practices of engagement" with international partner-work, seeking clues to how space works online and across oceans to facilitate project unity. Teachers of multilingual students will also connect to Song and Cho's scholarship on the ways emergent bilingual students extract, compare, and synthesize meaning while toggling online between and among languages, genres, and interests. Using translanguaging in partnership with digital problem-posing, in this case, clearly supports the book's

theme of digital negotiation—not a simple deal at all, but rather, an ambling process of space-based trial-and-error, of languaging, toward cognitive harmony.

Part II Digital Literacies From Within

Studies in part II of *Negotiating Place and Space Through Digital Literacies* invite readers into particular places—locally, historically, relationally—to see how digital literacies are utilized for social growth, action, and resistance. The purposeful addition of studies celebrating rural and indigenous populations is a particular bright spot in the volume. For example, in “Complicating Problematic Narratives About Southern People and Places Through Counterstorytelling,” Connors and Daugherty send their preservice teachers out into the local rural community to collect, digitize, and share oral history interviews of residents to challenge and reframe dominant rural narratives. I wondered as I read, however, who *should* be sharing the stories? Who holds the power in this space? Perhaps it is due to the perspective of the study, but because the readers do not hear the stories themselves, concerns erupt regarding the notion of exploitation and interpretive authority. What responses were evoked? How could Massey’s (2005) notion of “throwntogetherness” have been honored closer to the source? Reading with a finger on the pulse of the story-maker is important in critical work.

The recurring theme of countering the single story shows up again in “Indigenous Activism in the Digital Sphere” in which author Woodward highlights how the Native American Kiowa people educate and build alliances on the Save Longhorn Mountain (SLM) Facebook page. By tracing the nuances of networked, localized activism over time, readers discover how place, in this case the geosacred terrain of Longhorn Mountain in

Oklahoma, the United States, can also be a vehicle for transrhetorical (networks of rhetorical location) community strength. For the sake of criticism, however, I am wishing the research was told from or with the voice of an indigenous scholar. Once again, I ask: *whose story is this to tell?* Gratefully, specific, narrative data is added to support the argument.

Additionally, part II delves into geospatial technologies, ecomuseums, and performance art as a renegotiation of place-based meaning. As a classroom teacher and teacher-educator, I am dazzled by the possibilities, but critical of the usefulness in praxis. For researchers, however, the considerations of location-based technology, multimodal layering, and historical significance seem promising. What we have students do, I believe, must come from a curiosity of tool use, but also from their own identities and lived experiences first and foremost.

Part III Tracing Literacies Across Time and Space

Despite the title referencing a span of time and space, I felt this section contained the most intimately situated studies. In a way, the closeness may parallel the way researchers in each section work to paint vivid portraits of their human subjects through the use of sensory, activist, critical, and tacit modalities. Across the chapters, the stories of analysis evoke a palpable *there-ness* due to an attention to perception, interpretation, and the subtle poetics of languaging over various data points. As a classroom teacher, what I sense and notice about a child, his or her responses and how he or she performs knowing, would be enriched with language and tools presented in, for example, Abrams and Rowsell’s “Immateriality Redux”. Tacit modalities, the authors philosophically suggest, such as timescale, crystallization, and affect alert us to the seemingly infinite, morphous, interrelated ways humans synthesize the world around us.

“Adolescents in the Wild” by Saunders, complements this notion well in showcasing the rippling impact a high school journalism class evoked when pairing authentic critical literacy activism with tweets, hashtags, and sharp argument composition.

Additional chapters, namely Buchholtz, Zanden, Husbuy, Powell, and Rust’s “Virtual Carrels,” speak to the fluidity and beingness evoked within spaces of communal, intellectual, and creative placemaking. When the authors, newly hooded, find their scholarly camaraderie distorted over time and place, they seek a digital revival. What tools work best? How do they maintain their generative community of practice, a social-spatial brave-space, when the work becomes increasingly isolating and demanding? Across part III, a theme of *human-can-do* is evoked, and it is liberating. We sense that relationality, our human lifeline, is available to those who utilize the digital tool warehouse with curiosity and demand its usefulness and enrichment—demand that with such tools, we actually become *less alone* and *more connected* in a society that seems to fear we’re doomed to the opposite. It is with greater learning that we first sense (and can begin disrupting) the power structures that inform our political systems. Sketching narratives of success-against-the-odds, like the chapters in this section, are just a wee pebble drop in a great sea of educational, digital inequity, but they stand as evidence for curricular pluralism, critical multiliteracies, and humanizing pedagogies in all of our schools.

Critique and Questions

Clearly, the impetus of the book is about celebrating the individual within an (ever-undulating) perceived whole, and how they make *and are made by* the social-spatial webs they encounter every day. Educators will not all have access to geospatial

technologies, but we can consider how people in our community experience and come to know the nooks and crannies of our campus; we *can* collect stories that counter how the world sees us. Most certainly, the editors and authors of this volume urge readers to consider abstractions of what constitutes *civil* digital discourse and to interrogate new realms of social participation for the sake of bettering our literacy instruction.

Academics must *continuously* ask, however, amid the tangle of posts, files, and modes in which our modern lives are steeped. Whose stories are being told? And who is telling them? Who holds the power when collecting intellectual media for parsing and analysis? Delving into post-humanism and new materialism does not excuse scholarly positionality, but rather, makes it all the more imperative when validating the findings. I urge fellow readers to remain vigilant.

I, for one, closed the book reassured in my responsibility to be a critical and progressive consumer of media. I was also continuously considering how my elementary students (these days, college students) may take up the work of digital collecting, layering, analyzing, and producing for themselves and their communities. A celebration of multiliteracies are upon us; how might we participate wisely?

In critique, *most* graphics are illegible due to the tiny print and poor resolution—a bit of irony regarding the intentions of the book. I feel like I didn’t get the full analytical story the authors wanted me to see, as it appears the data provided is rich with narrative considerations. Some screenshots are rather ambiguous and serve little to no purpose in support of the text. There are additionally a few tiny typos throughout the book—dropped letters and such—a minor complaint, but worth noting due to recurrence.

As a whole, the book serves an interesting purpose and signals a shift in spatial-literacy research. My favorite parts were always tied closest to the students and the authentic voices of the community members as they traversed ways of knowing, stretched their digital prowess, and affected real social changes. And because teachers in the language and literacy realm see, and delight in, the nuance of modality, these 15

individual studies provide researchers and practitioners alike ways to consider their methods

and means of collection, an antidote (and a bit of pedagogical footing) when the world of information seems too fast, too angry, or too complicated. In contrast, it is an opportunity, and this book pioneers that paradigmatic shift. It is imperative that educators and researchers radically seek new ways to consider participation, interpretation, and counter misconception with and among their community populations, and as we can infer, the digital ethos is prime real-estate.

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