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Handbook on Teaching Literacy Through the Communicative and Visual Arts Vol. 2

Edited by James Flood, Shirley Brice Heath, & Diane Lapp
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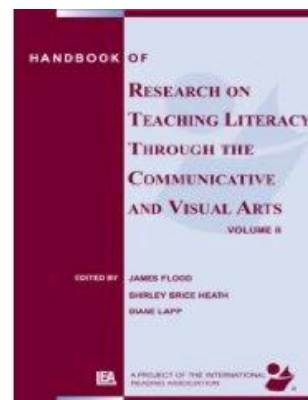
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The Handbook of Research on Teaching Literacy Through the Communicative and Visual Arts Volume II, edited by James Flood, Shirley Brice Heath, and Diane Lapp offers up to date viewpoints and research on a broad range of topics related to using popular trends in the communicative arts to support literacy skills. At a time when interest in reading is on a decline and technological advances have changed the leisure time habits of the younger generation, this volume offers a valuable resource for understanding how to adapt to new cultural trends by expanding the traditional curriculum paradigm. This book is a valuable resource for researchers who are interested in keeping abreast with the latest articles on these subjects, principals who are considering a modernization of their curriculum design, and teachers who would like to motivate students by offering lessons through a medium that is related to their interests.

The volume is divided into four parts. Part 1, “Historical and Theoretical Foundations,” consists of nine articles from a variety of scholars that offer perspective on how different cultures throughout history have integrated learning through visual media. From the earliest days of printed material and the multitude of images that accompanied many manuscripts, the importance of understanding content within the context of visual signals has been an important vehicle that has lent support to the written text. Parallels are drawn to the visual possibilities that modern technology offers and the potential to use these resources to scaffold literary assignments.

Many of the authors in Part 1 point out that while adults may be stymied by the fast pace of technological demands, our students adapt with greater ease and use it to develop their own sense of literacy growth. Of particular interest is an article by Renate Valtin that describes how international assessments have contributed to literacy policies. The article gives analysis of results from two international programs, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). An interesting finding was that although England showed students with strong literacy skills, their motivation was lacking, prompting questions about what steps might be taken to improve attitudes. Another statistic showed the United States with excellent resources in the forms of books and computers, but lacking in terms of attitudes and engagement. When observing student teachers in the classroom setting, I notice an advantage in the

use of technology over more traditional material in terms of stimulating student motivation, and there are numerous suggestions throughout the volume that give support and direction for doing so.

Part II, “Methods of Inquiry in the Communicative, Visual, and Performative Arts,” contains twelve articles that give a framework to understand the rationale for incorporating multimedia resources to support literacy instruction. Of particular interest was a study by Jonathan Eakle on how students interact with a museum environment in terms of making connections to the exhibits. When given more freedom to explore without the confines of educator supervision and academic protocol, the author found students’ experiences on the field trip to be more valuable, challenging the institutionalized notions of educational value. There is a consistent undercurrent to many of the articles that challenges the established norms for defining learning, broadening the scope of possibilities for classroom activities and how they are assessed.

The third part, “Family and Community Contexts in the Communicative, Visual, and Performative Arts,” is made up of thirteen articles that discuss how multimedia sources have changed our culture. This information offers educators and administrators a valuable resource to help understand what environment students encounter growing up, challenging the traditional stereotypes that many teachers feel towards the habits of the younger generation. “Anime and Manga Fandom: Young People’s Multiliteracies Made Visible,” by Kelly Chandler-Olcott, is a great example, as it helps bring adults up to date on the latest media advances that the younger generations now take for granted.

“Into the Language Arts Classroom Through the Visual and Communicative Arts” is the fourth section, consisting of twenty-one articles that give practical advice for incorporating multimedia resources into the classroom. Topics include use of film, video, picture books, graphic designs, role-play, and toys, among others. James Trier’s article, “Media Over the Decades: From Radio [Fast-Forward] to Podcasting and the iPod,” is a good representative example. It provides an analysis of how newer forms of media supplant older forms, while offering innovative possibilities for classroom applications. Trier compares the use of radio to support a wide range of literacy skills in the 1930s and 1940s, to the recent innovation of podcasting. This new technological resource gives students easy access to producing their own audio files and sharing them over the Internet, which also has great potential to enhance literacy interest and development.

This book does a good job of explaining the importance of expanding the traditional perceptions of educational resources and literary material. The rationale for doing so relates to the need for schools to educate individuals who will be able to negotiate the nuances and complexities of an evolving technological environment and the importance of making school work relate to the interests and cultural norms of a rapidly changing student culture. As a professor in teacher education, I am constantly encouraging students to use all possible resources to motivate students and this volume provides a comprehensive resource of ideas and practical applications for using popular forms of multimedia to enhance learning and attention.

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