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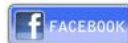
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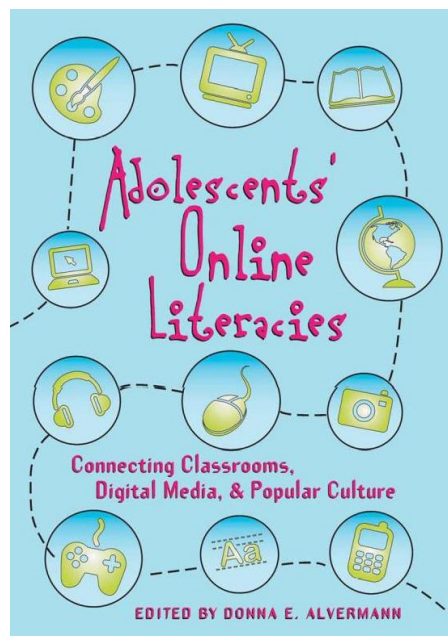
Alvermann, Donna E. (Ed.) (2010) *Adolescents' Online Literacies: Connecting Classrooms, Digital Media & Popular Culture*. NY: Peter Lang.

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Reviewed by Barbara Guzzetti
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As a researcher studying adolescents' consumption and production of digital media in schools and in out-of-school settings, I was excited to get this new book edited by Donna Alvermann. I've long been a follower and a fan of Alvermann's research on adolescents' new literacies (e.g., Alvermann, 2004; Alvermann, 2008) and young people's interactions with popular culture texts (e.g., Alvermann & Xu, 2003; Hagood, Alvermann & Heron-Hruby, 2010). Like many of my colleagues, I keep a copy of her current vita handy on my hard drive for ease in writing citations, and I follow her line of inquiry on academia.edu. So, I was curious to see how this volume would complement and



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extend that prior work, and in particular, how this text would update her earlier edited book also published by Peter Lang, *Adolescents and Literacies in a Digital World* (Alvermann, 2002). My interest was personal too, since I had declined her invitation to contribute to this book for the usual reason—too inundated with other projects—in almost gleeful practice of my new-found ability to say “no” to colleagues who want to create more work for me.

My self-satisfaction dissipated as I scanned the Table of Contents, quickly realizing I had excluded myself from being in the company of prestigious and relevant contributors writing on timely topics with an inclusive range of informants. The ten chapter titles address practices of the New Literacies that intrigue me, like zining, blogging, gaming, and participating in virtual worlds. In addition, the authors studied these online practices with under-researched populations—street youth, preteens or young adolescents, Black females, and African-American males.

This preliminary glimpse into what already appeared to be an important text guided my reading and reviewing by stimulating three queries: What new information about and insights into adolescents’ online literacies can be learned from these chapters? How do these studies offer implications for literacy instruction in classrooms? What are the silences in this text that could provide direction for future research and practice?

These questions were partially answered by Alvermann’s Introduction explaining her purpose - to offer diverse ways of connecting adolescents’ online literacies to teaching and learning in classrooms. She developed this compendium as a response to her graduate students’ desire to learn from those who found ways to use digital literacies to make learning relevant to adolescents’ lives. Alvermann expresses her desire to “keep it real” by providing readings that make concrete connections between the theoretical literature on adolescents’ online literacies and the realities of classrooms, media centers, and libraries.

To help her meet this goal of “keeping it real,” Alvermann selectively chose authors who represent a range of experts, including those whose voices are not often heard in the



Donna Alvermann

professional literature – current and former teachers, graduate students, school media specialists, and librarians - as well as researchers. These insider perspectives provide a needed stance as a learner of students in research on adolescents' unsanctioned literacies that lends potential to “keep it real.” While these authors did not all explicitly name this stance as a deliberate methodology, they each allowed themselves to be positioned as students of students (Staples, 2005).

This stance of researcher as learner is well illustrated in Jane Cowan's research; as a school-library media specialist she became an after-school club participant getting lessons from young teens exploring the virtual worlds of Webkinz, Chobots, and Club Penguin. Her co-participant status allowed her to discover the multiple literacies young people use to problem solve in these new and authentic situations. Her positioning also facilitated the insight that those who possess the skills necessary to navigate virtual worlds hold perhaps the greatest cultural capital of all – skills of adaptation and hybridity that will be increasingly needed for literate participation in the 21st century.

In a similar vein, in the chapter by Lallitha Vasudevan, Tiffany DeJaynes, and Stephanie Schmier, Tiffany DeJaynes, a high school English teacher, writes of her interactions with students by developing their trust through using social media and by incorporating blogs into a writing-based curriculum. She describes the tension she creates with administrators by allowing individuals more time on computers than other teachers do and by sharing her own digital tools with her students, including laptops that are not blocked by filtering software, allowing free access on the Internet. Those tensions are offset by the unique knowledge of individuals she gains from her students' emotional sharing of themselves and their progress in and out of academic settings in their online writings. She makes a case for incorporating social media into literacy instruction as motivation for writing, particularly for low-achieving adolescents who welcome alternative modes of writing. DeJayne's descriptions of a technology-rich classroom, however, made me wonder what advice she would have for teachers who lack access to the digital tools and technologies she readily provides in an arts-based school.

The topic of social media was also taken up by authors who offer compelling reasons for using participatory media in instruction. For example, Guy Merchant provides a rationale for teachers to become familiar with social networking sites and their educational uses to understand students' worlds and their digital knowledge, skills, and dispositions as social and cultural capital. As Merchant notes, researchers (National School Boards Association, 2007) find that although schools commonly block these sites, students independently use these online forums for discussing and writing on educational topics.

Other authors address issues of gender and social justice through digital literacy practices. David Kirkland extends a rationale for incorporating blogs in literacy instruction as he provides rich descriptions of Black females writing blogspot pages for gender and social justice. He describes how young women construct personal narratives of self-encouraging love, an authentic literacy practice of agency for those who may have been marginalized in traditional writing forums. Jarius Joaquin describes the Internet video world of hip-hop texts and their fans, noting how these musical texts can be used for critical deconstruction of social issues, including those of race and gender. Michael Dezuanni describes how boys interact within the video gaming community to explore their identities and challenge gender norms. Amanda Guiterrez and Catherine Beavis describe how boys gain social status and cultural capital and disrupt power relations by participating in the online AFL game community. In their chapter on e-zining, Theresa Rogers and Kari-Lynn Winters describe how this alternative literacy practice provides agency for young people living on the street whose voices are often marginalized and position these youth as producers and consumers of art forms, media, and culture. Although issues of access and transformation caused by moving zining to online spaces are addressed, I wondered how this underground literacy practice may have been impacted by being supported by and housed in a youth-services center under the supervision of an adult project director. Since zinesters caution against institutionalizing zines as writing assignments (Guzzetti, Campbell, Duke, & Irving, 2003) it is appropriate that Rogers and Winters emphasize encouraging the artful, playful, and critical style of writing

that characterizes zining rather than co-opting zining as a writing practice in schools.

The final two chapters challenge common perceptions of adolescents and their online abilities and provide impetus for educators to do the same. Kelly Chandler Olcott, and Elizabeth Lewis interviewed English teachers and media specialists for their perspectives, finding that most held the popular view of teachers as less adept at technology than their students. To trouble these notions, they recommend teachers ask students to self assess their online skills and use results to disrupt stereotypical views of adolescents' digital abilities and to differentiate digital assignments. Andrew Burn, David Buckingham. Becky Parr and Mandy Powell provide a rationale for doing so by providing a case of students more adept only at producing but not using new media than their teachers thereby re-conceptualizing essentials notions of adolescents as tech savvy and teachers as tech ignorant or resistant.

The book concludes with Kevin Leader's Afterword, reflecting on the authors' new directives for literacy pedagogy that complicate extant notions of teaching and learning with digital media. Leander speaks of the implications contained in these chapters for "unmooring classrooms" by balancing critical and playful engagement in new literacies. As Leander perceptively implies, the implications for current pedagogy extend beyond the mechanics of or processes in and obstacles to embracing digital media in classrooms to establishing new cultural models and rescaling education.

These are grand accomplishments for such a compact text. Alvermann and her contributors together have crafted a book that meets the goal of "keeping it real" while offering new insights into the digital practices of today's millennial youth. A strength of this text in doing so is that it represents one of the few attempts to gain insights from students in out-of-school programs that have implications for literacy instruction in classrooms. For those of us who notice that students do not stop learning when the school bell rings (Hull & Schultz, 2001), this text with its balance between studies conducted both in and out-of-school is a unique and welcome addition to the professional literature.

As a teacher educator, however, I anticipate teachers asking for studies that further address the realities of implementing the new literacies in schools. Teachers are commonly limited by lack of funds, inadequate technologies, and demands of state standards and high-stakes tests. Educators wish for studies that give them additional ammunition for rallying their administrators to provide digital tools and capabilities. They look for studies that describe how new literacies can help them address state standards and demonstrate how incorporating digital practices improves students' academic attitudes, motivation, and achievement. While these desires may be beyond the scope of this text, they do provide an agenda for future collaborative efforts to advance the exploration of new literacies in classroom settings. In the interim, however, this text can well serve to initiate and support those efforts.

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