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Book review: Literacy in the digital university

Journal Item

How to cite:

Leedham, Maria (2014). Book review: Literacy in the digital university. *System*, 45 pp. 261–262.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

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Version: Accepted Manuscript

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1016/j.system.2014.07.004>

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Goodfellow, Robin & Lea, Mary R. (Eds) 2013 Literacy in the Digital University. Routledge, Abingdon and New York. 213 pp.

This timely book comes amidst a plethora of online learning materials - such as the newly-launched FutureLearn platform - and concern over the increasingly ubiquitous world of digital scholarship. Goodfellow and Lea's introduction to this edited collection outlines the widespread use of new technologies within tertiary education, contrasting early adopters and dinosaur resisters, and pointing out that many of us are "quietly getting on with using technologies, day to day, and developing new ways of working" (p.1). The three concepts in the book's title are unpacked: 'literacy' is often used as a catch-all term meaning competence in an area (cf. 'mathematical literacy', 'computer literacy') and this approach is problematized by the authors – and indeed, throughout the volume – and contrasted with the multiplicity of practices around reading and writing signalled through the plural 'literacies'. 'Digital' is used in different ways by contributing authors to refer to technologies, specific devices, networks, practices and more. Finally, 'university' might seem an uncontentious denotation of academic establishments in the physical world but of course now also refers to the very different institutional spaces within open educational resources (OERs).

In Chapter one, McKenna and Hughes highlight the new affordances of digital technologies and environments in reproducing, distributing and searching texts and consider the impact on values surrounding OERs and plagiarism detection software (PDS). Digital texts can be "fragmented, reconstructed and curated" (p.15) yet beneath PDS lies a view of writing which "demonstrates little awareness of texts that are multimodal, hypertextual, or dialogic" (p.19). In short, the problem is that web-based, interactive texts are hard to upload for the purposes of "'originality' checking" (p.21). Here and throughout the volume, authors firmly point out that the "culture of print literacy privileges certain models and values" (p.23).

Fransman (Chapter two) narrows the focus to academic literacy practices around Twitter and considers the implications for the digital academic. Fransman's chapter raises the possibility in my mind of an alarming new era of academia in which scholars' 'online influence' is measured by such means as the commercial 'Klout score' (p.27) which measures a Twitter user through performance indicators such as the number of 'followers', 'mentions' and 'retweets'. As a person with an as-yet-unused Twitter account¹ with a single follower², my Klout score is presumably as close to zero as it's possible to get³. Chapter five (Goodfellow) also focuses on the digital scholar, in a comparison of writings about and by two such scholars: Martin Weller, whose work focuses on the individual digital scholar, and Christine Borgman, who takes a more institutional view. Much of the discussion surrounds the openness, or otherwise, of scholarship. The two

¹ I set up a Twitter account after feeling disenfranchised at a seminar when all questions had to be tweeted.

² An individual with the same family name so presumably one of those people who friends everyone who might possibly be related to them.

³ I have not yet been faced with the conference dilemma so have yet to tweet.

authors” differing orientations are summed up with Goodfellow’s claim that while “Borgman is trying to make digital scholarship more scholarly, Weller is trying to make it more digital.” (p.75).

In Chapter three, Satchwell, Barton and Hamilton focus on students’ digital and non-digital literacy practices, reporting results from a study in the mid 2000s of 100 students. They conclude that while the students’ preferred practices were mostly multimodal, employed multimedia, were purposeful and often shared, the literacy practices they were exposed to in educational contexts were frequently the exact opposite. Thus, “institutional assessment practices pull people back to the academy in traditional ways” (p.50). Contradictions abound: while mobile phones are often forbidden in class, tutors often ask students to access the internet on their phones in class. Emergent digital practices for learning is also the theme of chapter four in which Haythornthwaite informs us of gems such as a study of 560 US undergraduates in which the “overwhelming reason” given for studying in the library was to be “free of ... temptations to do something else” (p.61). In the majority of cases, the ‘something else’ was of course checking text and Facebook messages. Gourlay and Oliver (Chapter six) also focus on the devices and spaces used by students, offering quotes from students on the boundaries imposed to separate the worlds of home and study. This chapter is embedded in the here and now, with intriguing photographs of students’ study environments. My favourite image is of a bath with an iPad balanced on the edge, illustrating how one student places her iPad in a sealed plastic bag in order to read it while relaxing in the tub. While this is an excellent adaptation of a device to fit an immediate need, I imagine many readers may feel that bathtime reading is best kept to berliner-size newspapers and inexpensive paperback novels.

Online courses provide the topic for both Chapter seven (Bayne and Ross) where the intriguingly-named ‘posthuman literacy’ is discussed and Chapter eight (Martin and Mackenzie) in which the concept of ‘Big OERs’ and ‘Little OERs’ is explored. Chapter nine (Littlejohn, Beetham and McGill) brings together the practices of academics and students with a discussion of how the former influence the latter’s digital behaviour. In Chapter ten, Lea returns to discussion of the pluralized ‘literacies’, and contrasts students’ online practices with conventional assessment demands. The theme of young people’s production of digital texts continues in Chapter eleven (Lee), this time in the unassessed platforms of Facebook and Instant Messaging.

Chapter twelve (Jones) returns to definitions of the ‘digital university’ and revisits debates around Prensky’s (2001) “digital natives” and Kress’ (2003) move from “reading as interpretation” to “reading as design”. Surprisingly, perhaps, only brief mentions are made in the book to White’s (2011) useful concept of digital residents and visitors, though this seems a more useful concept than Prensky’s now outdated terms. The most contentious chapter is the final one in which Williams critiques commercial course management software, arguing that through their use of Blackboard or similar systems, academics are “complicit in reproducing institutional and cultural ideologies that are as hierarchical, rigid and prescriptive as the software” (p.174). The “walled-in enclave” (p.179) of BlackBoard grants exclusivity to students but withholds the wider online world. While the software

enables 'surveillance' of students through unsophisticated learner analytics, the system can be satisfied by such means as opening discussion forums so that the action is noted, but not actually reading the posts.

Excepting the glimpses of a dystopian world in which academics are judged through their Klout scores and students are imprisoned within course management software, the book offers us an online world in which creativity and open access are encouraged. A recurring theme in the book is the idea that the student body comprises a group of varied individuals who make the best use of the resources available to them. The point is made that even 'traditional age' students' ICT skills may be less developed than often thought, meaning they may lack the skill to evaluate online resources. Coming through strongly in the book, is the need to unpack and explain the ambiguity around the term 'digital literacies'.

Disappointingly, there is no available e-book. While there are advantages to the straightforward paperback format (you can read it in the bath for one), the topic would lend itself to interactive, multimodal content on a companion website. The main drawback of the book format is that the monochrome images are really not very good. For example, Fransman's chapter includes two visuals (p.32 and p.34) which each occupy the same page space yet one portrays a complex network diagram of Twitter use which is so compact that the resulting image is an amorphous blob and the other comprises an overly large pie chart giving simple yes/no results to the question 'do you use the micro-blogging resource Twitter?' and in which the pie portions are the wrong way round.

Notwithstanding the often dark or small images, this book is an extremely useful, readable account of a range of current research into literacy in the digital university and provides practical support for aspiring researchers of all things digital. For example, Fransman's table on p.40 gives "conceptual approaches for understanding digital scholarship", while Satchwell, Barton and Hamilton provide a helpful list of students' preferred literacy practices (p.45). Lee's list of considerations for university teachers engaged in developing a digital university would be useful for any educator with similar concerns; these are (in brief) to develop a responsive online pedagogy, be reflexive, become a member of students' online discourse community, and be aware of students' everyday text-making practices. And that reflexive note seems a good place to stop.

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