Review Article

Writing With, Through, and Beyond the Text

Rebecca Luce-Kapler. New Jersey, NY: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004, pp. 208. ISBN 978-0805846102.

Theorizing an Ecology of Language

Educator and writer Rebecca Luce-Kapler in her book *Writing With, Through, and Beyond the Text* (2004) brings together writing, its interpretative experience and identity, and the more than human world through a conceptualization of writing as a system - an ecology socially comprised. The author bases her theorization within hermeneutics that evokes the imagination and feminist theory as a particular way of knowing bringing her readers into an engagement with investigative writing.

The author follows in a line of curriculum theorists (e.g., Doll, 2000; Grumet, 1988; Salvio, 1999; Sumara, 2002) who are concerned with the ways in which “literary processes influence learning and teaching” (p. xi). Luce-Kapler questions the nature of writing practices by situating writing as “an ecology” (p. 9). In her conceptualization of writing as an ecology, she draws on Cooper (1986) and Abram’s (1996) work that consider how writers are influenced by and interact with a social collective and the unpredictability of a diversity of writing “form systems” that “link us to the non-human world” (p. xiii).

To help teachers and writers consider the phenomenon of writing and “encourage writing practices that help us interpret experience and realize new understandings” (p. xii), she turns to complexity theory (see Prigogine, Stengers & Toffler, 1984) as a science of self-determining and unpredictable complex learning systems in order to extend writing to non-human systems (p. 20). The example she offers is the complex system of language as an:

adapting and self-determining system ...that...continually changes in response to shifting conditions and contexts and its directions cannot be predicted as some words disappear, new ones emerge, and others develop meanings opposite to their original definition. (p. 21)

In addition, she questions the role of writing by investigating the nature of writing in terms of what it offers and how writing has been positioned in relation to reading. As a curriculum theorist she is concerned about beginning with an exploration of the role of writing as social interaction that brings about possibility for interpretation. Her work is also informed through Richardson’s (2000) understanding that writing is a method of inquiry into ways of knowing through various academic genres such as fictional poetic representations, ethnographic drama and mixed genres.

With an interest in the presence of writing in schools, she is concerned with encouraging writing practices and paying attention to the transformative possibilities of language as she views reading and writing as intricately connected. She places an emphasis on the importance of stories, memories, the

character of rhythm of writing and subjectivity as she weaves her own poetry throughout her six chapters while being “conscious that research may be a subtle form of writing the self in ways that engage others” (p. 65). Through close interpretive practices, she positions writing “as a method of inquiry, a way of knowing” (p. 4). Interpretive practices involve exploring identity as a writer and teacher, spending time in someone else’s thinking, and talking about writing pedagogy and processes through collective writing groups.

Her research involves intergenerational participatory research with women through focused groups inside and outside of undergraduate and graduate education programs. She links writing to aesthetic experience through a comparative analysis of Emily Carr’s aesthetic practice and Kate Chopin’s writing practices. She describes the important influence that numerous feminist scholars and poets such as Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich have and continue to have on her writing. She draws upon feminist theory and outlines four perspectives that help to “think about writing differently” (p. xii). These perspectives involve her reading of how feminist theorists have been using the following groupings (embodied and psychological, socially constructed, poststructural and complex) that are not meant to be hard and fast categories. Rather, these are placeholders and groupings as she encourages “the circulation and exchange among them” (p. 9). For within her writing groups, the principles of complexity involves a social collective and a diversity of writing forms that are unpredictable as she herself acknowledges how a number of theoretical perspectives inform her understanding.

Therefore, in her book, she reports on the experience of the writing group by paying attention to process, interpretive practices and forms influencing interpretations (p. 126). She espouses the importance of groups when writing and is concerned with being both writer and hermeneutic researcher in her study of relationships as an ecology (p. 142). To be sure, she is concerned with the ways in which “writing has opened up possibilities for women to disrupt some of the patriarchal structures that confined their writing” (p. 20). For Luce-Kapler, personal encounters involve disrupting discourses as embodied subjects are revealed in writing.

By deconstructing the concept of patriarchy as it relates to root metaphors, she demonstrates the repressive potential that language has. She looks with, through and beyond critical pedagogy, postmodernist and poststructural feminism toward complexity theory and the hermeneutic method in order to reveal the logic of anthropocentric knowledge and the sociocultural relations and structures that justify and express epistemologies that enable the differential valuation of humans and nature at the levels of hierarchical discourse.

This book should appeal to a wide range of readers interested in developing their ideas on the relationship between reading and writing. The book will certainly accelerate the rate of change in an already quickly changing area of research into the way in which reading and writing are intricately connected in educational research as it provides thought-provoking readings. However, although the book examines writing practices from an innovative and fresh perspective by introducing the concepts of embodiment and complexity from a feminist perspective, the book may leave some writers and teachers longing for

more on the ecological aspects of investigative writing as natural environments are clearly a major influence in the authors' life.

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