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# Reading and writing pathways through children's and young adult literature: exploring literacy, identity and story with authors and readers

by Alicia Curtin, London, Routledge, 2022, 300 pp., £19.99 (Ebook), ISBN: 9780367821012

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Reading and writing pathways through children's and young adult literature: exploring literacy, identity and story with authors and readers**, by Alicia Curtin, London, Routledge, 2022, 300 pp., £19.99 (Ebook), ISBN: 9780367821012

Literacy is an essential aspect for the development of reading and writing skills among children and young adults, as it has the potential to influence their understanding and thought patterns towards various aspects of life (Churchill 2020; Street 2014; Guy et al. 2012). Improving their literacy can greatly aid in enhancing their literacy skills. Therefore, an effective literacy learning strategy is required to advance their literacy skills. Hence, a serious effort is needed to improve literacy proficiency to confront future challenges.

Reading and Writing Pathways through Children's and Young Adult Literature: Exploring Literacy, Identity, and Story with Authors and Readers, written by Alicia Curtin and published by Routledge in 2022, expounds on strategies for simultaneously developing literary knowledge and literacy skills of readers and writers through the exploration of texts. The book focuses on meaning-making strategies for readers and writers and offers various paths for reading and writing. The term 'text' is used broadly in this book, referring to all forms of meaning communication through reading or writing, including written texts, visual and animated images, oral and audio communication, digital representations, multimodal, and other aesthetic experiences. These strategies for creating meaning are collaboratively discovered by students and teachers in strategic reading and writing practices. This encourages the development of a personal repertoire in reading and writing, inspiring a desire to make reading and writing an inseparable part of lives.

The first chapter of this book discusses the exploration of various authentic and diverse forms of literacy in strategic reading and writing practices, with a focus on multimodal literacy in the works of Shaun Tan and Margaret Wild in children's literature and young adult literature. In this context, reading, writing, and modes are redefined as personal and strategic tools for developing literacy, including new and emotional literacy. This chapter also interrogates the complex relationship between the reader, writer, and text, and considers the importance of maintaining communication and meaning as the primary focus. Through understanding strategic reading and writing practices as support for learners in creating their own multimodal literacy maps, the chapter demonstrates that literacy pathways take centre stage in simultaneous literacy exploration, and that these maps are essential in navigating experiences and the world beyond the classroom.

Chapter two of this book provides a more detailed discussion of literacy pathways in the context of authentic and meaningful engagement with literary practices outlined in chapter one. Reading and writing are viewed as strategic processes explored from various cultural perspectives, in order to expand the understanding of literacy as a social and collaborative practice. Inquiry-based learning through the arts, encompassing various modes such as dance, music, drama, poetry, mixed media, and others, is emphasised as a priority in home, community, and school environments, with the understanding that each cultural activity provides unique literacy pathways for reading and writing. Interviews with Patricia Forde and Máire Zepf also reflect on the role of aesthetics and art-based literacy in the development of inquiry-based approaches, from various perspectives, to strategic reading and writing in the classroom.

Chapter three of the book adopts a human literacy practices approach that enables students to understand how to narrate their personal and social stories. In this chapter, the conception of reading, writing, and genre is redeveloped as practices that are closely related to social and personal

experiences. Todd Hasak-Lowy and Paul Fleischman are examples of literacy practices that are inseparable from social contexts and personal experiences. Meanwhile, chapter four expands the discussion to the realm of social reading and writing communities, including affinity-based and online spaces as platforms for personal reading and writing. In this regard, pleasure-based learning becomes an important focus, with a focus on the study of fan fiction, remixes, parodies, and reading aloud through the works of Joan Holub and KJ Shapiro.

Chapter five delves deeply into reading and writing practices to transform understanding through a focus on critical literacy, social justice, and historical perspectives in learning. The theme of identity is prioritised as the centre of attention, where real-life stories and historical events related to non-fiction and historical fiction narratives by leading writers, such as Deborah Heiligman, Michelle Markel, and Marita Conlon McKenna, are provided as examples. This chapter emphasises the influence of critical, social, and historical literacy on personal identity and literacy development.

Chapter six expands on the discussion of in-depth reading and writing practices to transform understanding by exploring opportunities to sustain cultural literacy practices in the classroom, with specific reference to popular literacy and contextual sources of knowledge and culture. Advocating for collaborative learning, rather than mere content delivery, the chapter investigates ways in which teachers can negotiate curriculum design through the Negotiated Integrated Curriculum (NIC), based on the diverse ways in which students have engaged with culture, language, and literacy in everyday contexts. Authors Roddy Doyle and Judi Curtin share their understanding and experiences of personal, community, and culturally meaningful learning while exploring key themes in their own works.

Chapter seven places a strong emphasis on relevant knowledge and methodological approaches in the context of deep reading and writing practices for transformative understanding. Opportunities to sharpen philosophical, psychological, and mental health awareness through children's and young adult literature are explained through the works of Kevin Brooks, Neal Shusterman, and Cethan Leahy. Throughout these works and the chapter as a whole, life experiences are utilised to effectively and meaningfully develop literacy, learning, and identity.


This inspirational book presents relevant theoretical frameworks and practical tools for teaching literacy through children's literature to graduate students, teachers, and researchers. It offers innovative ideas to enhance students' and teachers' experiences of using literature and popular culture texts in classroom learning, with practical examples and teaching aids. This book will be a valuable resource for teachers, researchers, and anyone interested in improving their reading and writing skills. The interviews with the authors will also be of great interest to older students as a means of enhancing their understanding of personal reading and writing practices. The pedagogical approach in this book can be adapted for all ages, from children to young adults.



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