Assessing Students' Digital Writing: Protocols for Looking Closely

Hicks, ed., Troy
Teachers College Press, 2015

Book Review

Tags: assessing digital writing | assessing writing | student writing | teaching writing

Reviewed by: Carmichael Crutchfield, *Memphis Theological Seminary*
Date Reviewed: September 19, 2016

Assessing Students' Digital Writing: Protocols for Looking Closely collaboratively addresses teachers who want to know about how to give feedback on digital writing. The book provides six digital writing protocols used to give feedback to teachers about student learning. The authors of the protocols are teachers themselves; Erin Klein, Julie Johnson, Jeremy Hyler, Bonnie Kaplan, Jack Zangerie, Christina Puntel and Stephanie West-Puckett wrote this book as a part of the National Writing Project in Berkley, California.

Each teacher in this project uses a digital format to teach a specific lesson. At the end of each chapter the teacher discusses the implications of the digital process for instruction and assessment. At the end of the book the editor discusses broad themes and issues about curriculum, instruction, and assessment. This discussion is based on the study of student work in the writing as shared through conversations among the various authors and teachers of the project. As stated earlier, this book is a collaborative work and evidence of this is seen throughout each chapter.

A weakness of the book is that it may be difficult for those who are just entering into digital writing because of the use of many technical terms associated with web-based learning. Although in general I find this book very valuable for gaining a better understanding about digital learning, I would like to see more information about the students who were part of the writing.

The book is intriguing because of its focus on youth and their learning through digital writing methods. It is also timely in that it gives rise to more conversation about the remnants of the

No Child Left Behind era and the very present views on Common Core State Standards that are sweeping across K-12 public education in the United States.

Additionally, the rise of many digital formats for classroom teaching gives one reason to take the book seriously. As the author points out, this conversation is even more in vogue because of the accessibility of teachers and students to web-based services such as Google Docs, Wikispaces, and Voicethread. All of these services can be accessed on digital devices that are mobile. I can personally relate to what the authors are saying because I am presently teaching in an online platform that pushes me to look at digital writing very seriously.

Furthermore, the book is interesting because the voices of the teachers in conversation about student learning are present throughout the book. I find this to be important in a time when much effort is made to assess student achievement where it seems student learning is not at the core of the assessment concern, although on the surface it may seem to be. Overall, this book is a valuable asset especially for those interested in assessment and digital writing.

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