

Book Reviews

Connected Reading: Teaching Adolescent Readers in a Digital World

Kristen Hawley Turner and Troy Hicks. NCTE, 2015.

- “What kinds of texts do you read (news stories, novels, emails, websites, magazines)?”
- How have you organized your reading across the various roles you play in your personal and professional life?
- At what point, when a text is available in both formats, do you make a conscious choice between print and digital text?
- How do you choose the device you will use to read?
- What factors figure into how you make all these choices?” (35)

Critical, reflective questions such as the above appear throughout Turner and Hicks’s *Connected Reading*, and they form the heart and the heft of this groundbreaking text. “Connected reading,” Turner and Hicks’s digitally

supercharged definition of reading practice, includes not only how readers find and read texts but also the devices (including paper) on which they read them; the ways they respond, interact, and share with the text; and what they do with and to the text during and after their reading. Sure, readers have always made connections, but the digital age has brought with it entirely new forms and better access to connecting for readers, and literacy teachers must learn to deal with, encourage, and enhance the depth of this connection for student readers at all levels. Asking students to think about the myriad ways they read and can enhance their ways of reading is an important part of this process.

Inspired by the National Council of Teachers of English “Reading Instruction for All Students: An NCTE Policy Brief,” *Connected Reading* is a powerfully useful guide for teachers to understand the complex world of contemporary literacy, whether they are just dipping a toe into new waters or they are ready to intensify their connected reading instruction.

A Developed, Thorough Discussion

If you know little about digital reading or if you know lots about digital reading (as I thought I

did), this book is for you. Turner and Hicks begin with an account of reading based on giants such as Rosenblatt and Atwell, connecting their ideas with the more recent efforts of Smith and Wilhelm, Gallagher, Kittle, Miller, and Tovani. They define “connected reading” as “a model that situates individual readers within a broader reading community and acknowledges a variety of textual forms, both digital and print . . . [W]e see that readers are connected to one another in increasingly useful ways that they make meaning of what they read in various ways through their connections” (5–6). Their visual “Connected Reading Model” provides additional clarity (see Figure 1). In particular, the authors want readers to note that the figure includes multiple readers and that it is a nonlinear model of reading (20). Readers might also take note of new literacy terms in the figure that emerge from digital ways of reading, such as “Search, surf, or stumble,” “Curate,” and “Share.”

Once the concept is clearly defined, the authors use their own and others’ reading practices to exemplify connected reading, and they discuss in-depth case studies of several students whose real reading lives they’ve carefully studied. Listening to these adolescents describe their reading

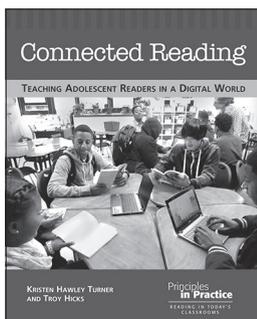
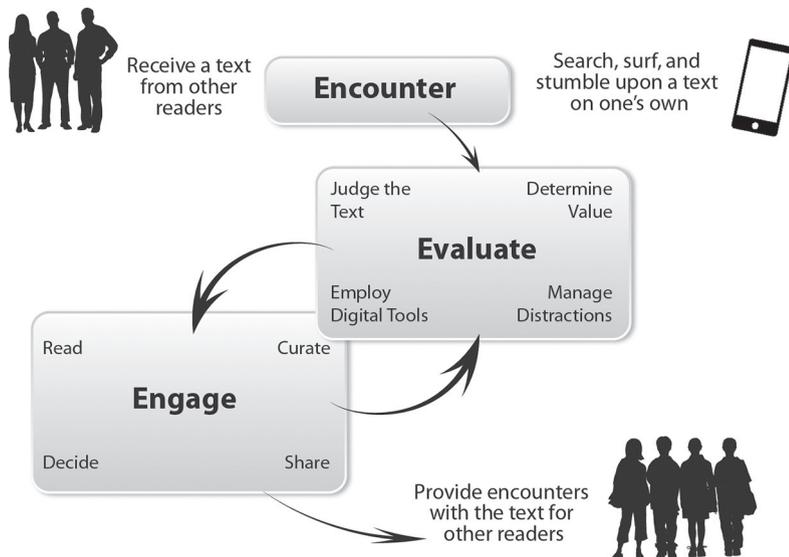


FIGURE 1. Connected Reading Model



Connected Reading: Teaching Adolescent Readers in a Digital World by Kristen Hawley Turner and Troy Hicks (c) 2015 by the National Council of Teachers of English. This figure may be printed, copied, and disseminated (with attribution) without permission from NCTE.

habits (digital and print) and their sophisticated but somewhat limited understandings of their literacy is fascinating. From there, Turner and Hicks offer ways to enhance students' connected reading by incorporating digital tools into communal reading of print texts, showing how "digital tools allow readers to connect inside a [print] text while they are reading" (75). They also demonstrate

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ways to engage students in robust activities centered in digital texts. And, they end with tools, strategies, and calls for advocating for richer, more contemporary and open-minded approaches to literacy that more appropriately reflect

the kinds of connected reading that occur regularly in students' out-of-school lives. With practical depth, crystal clear examples, a vast companion wiki, and wide-ranging scholarly left, *Connected Reading* itself provides an exceptionally connected reading experience, one I'm pleased to share here with *EJ* readers.

A Friendly Approach to a Vastly Complex Topic

The most important feature of *Connected Reading* is that it provides a reader-friendly introduction into a world of information that can easily overwhelm. Former secondary and middle school educators, Turner and Hicks have developed their own reading practices step-by-step as new technology has created new affordances. Their book includes many screenshots that demonstrate how

digital tools can enhance reading, and they show examples of their own and K–12 students' use of these tools to connect with each other about books, develop shared meanings of texts while reading, and create authentic collaborative projects that engage students and teachers in in-depth reading and sharing of texts. While providing a friendly introduction, *Connected Reading* will also enhance literacy experts' understanding and use of digital tools. The book includes useful reference and demonstration of far too many tools to mention in this review, but suffice it to say that I am eager to use in new ways the tools I already know and to try new tools I'd never heard of before the technological avant-garde of Turner and Hicks brought them to my attention.

Connected Reading: Teaching Adolescent Readers in a Digital World is a pedagogical treatise, rather than a political one, but the authors make useful references to social issues that might prevent teachers from feeling comfortable increasing attention to digital reading. They take up, if briefly, issues of access, problems of copyright, the need to pop Internet filter "bubbles," and the futility of using multiple-choice exams to assess truly connected reading.

Given how expansive reading has become in the digital age, it's vital that Turner and Hicks reaffirm the importance of a traditional value in literacy: Digital "tools may bring us new items to read, yet critical thinking is even more important now as our sources continue to multiply" (46). Turner and Hicks help teachers ensure the critical thinking skills their students develop

will be an appropriate fit for the digital world in which those students will live, work, and make meaning as readers.

Teaching Literature in the Context of Literacy Instruction

Jocelyn A. Chadwick and John E. Grassie. Heinemann, 2016.

Fans of Carol Jago's *With Rigor for All* will be delighted with this new offering from Chadwick and Grassie, who consistently echo Jago's championing of truly rigorous approaches to reading and understanding literature at all grade levels. Chadwick, the primary voice throughout the book, offers the view of an experienced teacher devoted to engaging all students in the joys, challenges, wonders, and labors of great literature.

If you are an educator who tends to tune out writers who espouse traditional values of canonical literature, please don't miss this book. Yes, Chadwick is attentive to the ideas of E. D. Hirsch, Sandra Stotsky, and Allan Bloom; but she is more influenced by John Dewey, Paulo Freire, and Cesar Chavez. The result is a thoughtful, well-founded, and culturally responsible approach to teaching students to embrace difficult and highly respected literature. Chadwick and Grassie position

their ideas within an impressive reach of scholarly context, infusing them with relevant thoughts of dozens of living students and teachers, and undergirding them with moving stories from real classrooms and useful materials to help readers create their own pedagogical success stories. *Teaching Literature in the Context of Literacy Instruction* (TLCLI) is a rich resource, especially for a quick read (100 pages, plus 50 pages of materials).

Teacher and Student Empowerment

One of my favorite aspects of TLCLI is the constant refrain that literature should be an empowering force for both teachers and students. Known mostly for her work as a scholar and champion of Mark Twain, appreciated especially for her fights against censorship, Chadwick demonstrates her understanding of where many teachers are now: "[T]hey feel stripped of power and support" (6), and the Common Core and related state and national policies haven't helped. While censorship may no longer be the most pressing problem for ELA teachers, Chadwick argues, "We must [still] be self-assured and confident in the literature we teach; we must be able to articulate for others who are not ELA educators the importance and relevance of our literature" (10). Readers will be gratified that the others Chadwick spends the most time on are students.

Chadwick is a strong proponent of holding students to high standards, and she gives many examples of the kinds of literary activities that engage students in

sophisticated critical thinking. She acknowledges the problems many students face—poverty, disrupted home lives, classist and racist attitudes—but she also charges teachers to hold high expectations for students anyway:

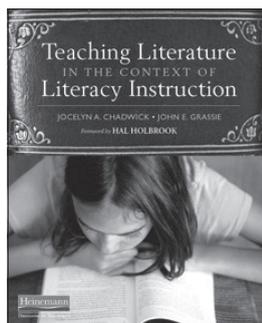
[I]f we wait until discrimination in all its iterations disappears, if we wait until we live in a class-blind society, if we wait until everyone enjoys an equitable and comfortable socioeconomic status, we might as well close our books, turn off the lights, and lock our classroom doors. We dare not hold our students who depend on us, K–12, hostage to real concerns over which we have no control. (23)

This is not the deceptive, bury-your-head-in-the-sand blather of some specious ed reformer. This is a wise colleague reminding us that all students need high-level sophisticated experience with literature that can be empowering, skill-building, and even transforming. And then Chadwick and Grassie offer stories and resources to apply those expectations to real classes and real students.

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Stories and Resources

In a chapter modestly titled "Making Literature Relevant," Chadwick tells the most remarkable story of working with a local teacher (Logan Manning) to engage a group of reluctant readers—students who claimed they disliked reading and who lived lives in violent, gang-laden



neighborhoods—in close, sophisticated reading. After getting to know the students, Chadwick and Logan selected Luis Rodriguez’s *Always Running: La Vida Loca: Gang Days in L.A.* and worked to interest the students in the violence, the introspection, and the wise perspective of Rodriguez’s book. Chadwick explains that she uses literature “to create micro- and macroconundrums for students” to think through together (25), and we get to see this method in action. By the end of the story, Chadwick brings the group of stu-

dents to her institution (Harvard University) for a two-hour conference call with the author they’ve spent weeks reading. It’s a moving story that reminded me of the power and importance of exposing students to the kinds of transformative thinking, the real-world sharing of human experience that comes from excellent literature.

TLCLI also includes a valuable assortment of useful reproducible, including a student literature survey, a close reading and analysis guide (with sections for rhetoric, fiction/nonfiction, and

poetry), a rereading template for teachers who teach the same texts multiple times, a form that helps teachers pair classic and contemporary texts, and more. The chapter on informational texts offers an excellent set of ideas for using primary historical texts to bring older literature to contemporary relevance for today’s students.

A quick, thoroughly enjoyable and instructive read, Jocelyn A Chadwick and John E. Grassie’s *Teaching Literature in the Context of Literacy Instruction* is highly recommended. 

Ken Lindblom is associate dean of the School of Professional Development and a faculty member in English teacher education at Stony Brook University. Ken has been a member of NCTE since 1989, and he is a member of the Executive Board of NCTE’s Conference on English Education. Follow him @Klind2013 and email him at kenneth.lindblom@stonybrook.edu.

Perpetual Motion Machine

flattened kestrels we forget in the wake
of our progress chugga chugga chugga
with the windows down and the A/C singing
power poles mixing like paint with canola yellow
until it’s unclear what latitude we’ve rocketed through
this could be Nowheresville Saskatchewan or Times Square
at the rate this is going

we’ve no doubt been here before
memory of damp grass and snow fence sharp
as if reciting the Apostle’s Creed & fumbling
on the Catholic version like the nuanced spray
of gravel or the bumpity bumpbump of balding tires
but to stop at any point is to accept your own failure

keep on humming with the pedal down run white lines into each other
without consideration for the price of gas the love of God
whoever’s clinging to your oil pan or fingernails tight
to that aluminum bumper get the hell out of the way
turn or burn evidentially the end is near
and I don’t even know where this thing’s headed

—Robert Jean LeBlanc
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Robert Jean LeBlanc is an assistant professor and single subject coordinator at Cal Poly Pomona, where he teaches courses on literacy and English language arts. Contact him at rleblanc@cpp.edu.