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From the Review Desk

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Dirk has been teaching business writing and technical writing courses at Kent State University for over twenty years, and he is interested in connections between workplace literacy practices and home and community literacy practices.

Book and New Media Reviews

From the Review Desk

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Buses. This is my current cause. I moved into a city in order to reduce my family's carbon footprint. I willingly entered a social contract that took from me privacy and a certain amount of autonomy concerning my property in order to benefit from the city infrastructure. It turns out, however, that my city (and many others besides) see buses as expensive and (ah-hem) not high priority. So off to the car dealership to buy a new commuting car.

This seems like a strange and perhaps irrelevant preamble, but I assure readers that it is not. The question that I join students in trying to answer is a rhetorical one: How can I work with my neighbors to move my local government to civic action in a time of austerity? How, in other words, can I teach and participate in community action and (because I am a teacher first) how can I involve my students? It appears that my colleagues at other institutions are struggling with the same questions and proposing analytical tools and readings that enable us to draw upon the strengths of academic disciplines to affect positive local change. Take, for example, Christina LaVecchia's review of Ryder's *Rhetorics for Community Action* in which LaVecchia emphasizes Ryder's rhetorical sense of public writing and communication—one that responds to particular situations by taking into account all actors and their different expertise. An overriding theme in this book is Ryder's emphasis on a problem-posing pedagogy and balances multiple approaches. To compliment this review is the one on Nancy Welch's *Living Room* by Diana Eidson. Eidson identifies Welch's frame as one of balance between action and constraint, or the desire to affect public change in the face of private corporations and precedential government. This same theme between public and private can be seen in Jerry Lee's review of Prendergast's *Buying into English*, a noteworthy book for those of us interested in the control and possibilities of literacy and language in local and global contexts. Finally, this issue's Keywords essay "Prison" by Laura Rogers explores the complexities associated with prison literate practices and pedagogies as important to "for inmates to continue to obtain education, literacy skills, the chance for reflection and collaboration, and the opportunity to use writing to explore their worlds and lives" (internal page reference please). In all, I hope that the books and topics reviewed in this issue are as much as an inspiration to our readers as they were to me. Now to get my students as excited about buses as a topic of civic importance.

Thanks to the careful scholarship being conducted by contributors to this journal and others worldwide, this research is being made available at an astounding rate. As such, we encourage you to contact us about a book, documentary, or alternative medium that you have read/watched/participated in that would interest readers of this journal. Further, since we are currently unable to keep up with the rate of publication, we have instituted a keywords essay—a short five-to-seven-page synthesis that brings together multiple contemporary sources on a single topic. If you are interested in contributing to the Book and New Media Review section with either a review or a keywords essay, please contact either me at jdewinter@wpi.edu or our new book review editor Jim Bowman at jbowman@sjfc.edu.

Also visit <http://www.communityliteracy.org/index.php/clj/pages/view/reviews>.

Keywords: Prison

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Border crossing, razor wire, transformation: words and images that pervade writing about prison literacy and pedagogy. Although literacy programs in prison have existed for decades, it is only during the last twenty years or so that scholarship in this area has begun to increase. What has also increased is the number of incarcerated American citizens; this number is currently over two million (*One in One Hundred*). Perhaps not surprisingly, the majority of those incarcerated have lower literacy rates than the general population; the connections between incarceration, poverty and low levels of literacy have been well documented (Jacobi, “Foreword”). The need for literacy programs for the most marginalized and stigmatized members of our community as well as access to information, research and scholarship about the practice and theoretical understanding of teaching in carceral environments seems clear. The purpose of this brief synthesis essay is to provide an overview of the more recent scholarship on prison literacies and pedagogies. For the purposes of this essay, I have sorted the work into four groups: 1) materials that reflect on the experience of teaching in a correctional facility setting; 2) overviews of specific programs; 3) material investigating inmate literacy/literacies; and 4) edited collections of inmate writing. Negotiating the experience of teaching in the often tense prison environment and the competing demands of the prison, the school, or the workshop setting can be a bewildering experience for novice and veteran prison teachers alike. These resources all provide useful and important background material for prison teachers and researchers.

It is important to have a clear picture of the prison population and their literacy needs as well as an understanding of the history of the prison system and the place of writing within that system. Detailed information and statistics about prison literacy can be found at the website of the *National Assessment of Adult Literacy and Literacy Among Prison Inmates*, a comprehensive 2003 study that assessed literacy in state and federal prisons. “Literacy Behind Prison Walls,” a 1994 study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics as part of the National Adult Literacy Survey, although dated, also provides relevant information. Additionally, *Prison Literacy: Implications for Programs and Assessment*, a report from the National Center for Adult Literacy, provides important historical material and an overview of what the writers of the report believe to be a workable, sustainable model of a prison literacy program. The Bureau of Justice Statistics website offers a wealth of information about the US prison