

Babel Tower, a richly textured novel by British writer A.S. Byatt is organized around the Babel myth. It opens with several epigraphs including one from Nietzsche—"I fear that we are not getting rid of God because we still believe in grammar. "

Those of us working in literacy as researchers or teachers are reluctant to address the extent to which religiously derived beliefs and values continue to infuse our theories and practices in language and Literacy. The story of Babel, at a deep level, still colours many explanations of language diversity and of the difficulties of communication between cultures and classes. In some cases, it continues to affect academic research and school language policies. Byatt weaves her novel around some of these threads.

Regardless of their origin, those of us in literacy hold strongly to the belief systems that underlie our work and argue passionately for our positions.

Diverse positions

LAC Volume 13, No.1 offers a number of examples of ongoing academic arguments about literacy and of diverse practical applications in school and community. Harvey Graff and Brian Street take issue with Stan Jones's response to their separate articles on IALS (Volume 12, Nos. 2, 3, and 4), The Centre for Literacy Montreal, Quebec and Stan Jones responds. John Comings has some further thoughts on all three commentaries, extending the discussion into the newly researched area of health and literacy.

In the classroom

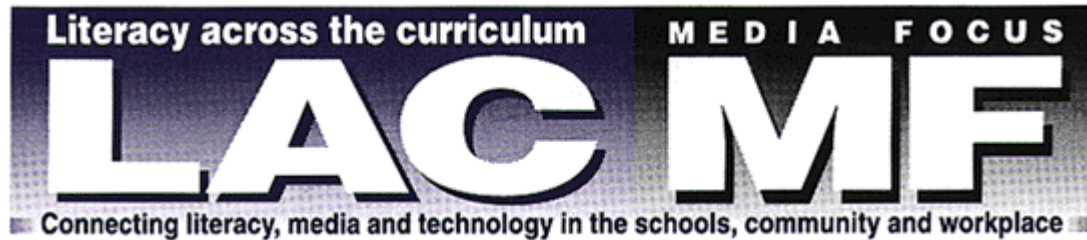
describes a local student publication of poetry and drawing that was launched in print and on the Internet and covered by a television crew. Reviews and Resources looks at some traditional materials for family Literacy and at sample school materials for media education. An overview of the Janus Project on Women and New Learning Technologies raises concerns that have implications for Literacy teaching in the future. Finally, our program of workshops and seminars for 1997-98

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opens with an International Literacy Day public discussion lead by Dennis Baron and called "The Subject is Grammar," which could bring us full circle back to Babel.

The debates go on.



A new look of integration

As *LAC* begins its thirteenth year of publication, we are making some changes that reflect our own positions about literacy.

The most overt change is the title which will now be *Literacy Across the Curriculum/Media Focus*. It integrates what have previously been two strands of our work—the exploration of traditional literacies of home, school and workplace, and the focus on an expanded notion of literacy informed by the influence of media and new technologies.

When we began to comment on media literacy in 1990, we saw our audience as being different from the audience for *Literacy Across the Curriculum* who were generally teachers, researchers and policy makers with a primary commitment to print. So we designed *Media Focus* as a supplement insert. Although we always saw a strong link between the two, we knew that many readers read only one or the other of *LAC* and *Media Focus*.

We think that has changed. Although many people still find the links among print, media and technological literacies contentious, there is an increasing audience who shares our larger notion of literacy as outlined in our

working definition—that is, as a complex set of abilities to understand and use the dominant symbol systems of a culture for personal and community development. In a technological society, the concept of literacy is expanding to include the media and electronic text, in addition to alphabetic and number systems.

Our new title reflects our intention to address these issues holistically. For those who may still want to read only media articles, we have put the tag MF at the top of the page on every article that is primarily about media.

The Centre is a unique setting. It is the only place we know where teachers from all levels, tutors, parents, community workers, health care providers, researchers, policy makers and members of the media constantly find themselves sitting at the same tables talking, exploring, and arguing.

Our resource centre and program of workshops, seminars and special events are the physical meeting grounds. Our website has enabled us to move into cyberspace. We hope that, in another medium, this newsletter offers some of the same opportunities to challenge fixed ideas and create new patterns of understanding literacy in all its complexity.

We welcome your comments. [LS]

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