



The National Association for Media Literacy Education's
Journal of Media Literacy Education 4:2 (2012) 187-189

Professional Resource:

DIY Media: Creating, Sharing and Learning with New Technologies (2010)

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DIY Media: Creating, Sharing and Learning with New Technologies, edited by Michele Knobel and Colin Lankshear (2010). Peter Lang Publishing: New York, NY.

Knobel and Lankshear have compiled a text billed as a “how-to” guide for various media. The goal of the book, according to the editors, is to “introduce do-it-yourself – DIY – media” to those who teach young people whom themselves are “doing a lot of ‘digital media’ work on a day-by-day basis” (1). The text is designed to encourage readers into “mucking around” (4) with the different digital media described and help them gain a greater understanding of new media practices.

With contributions from a dozen different authors, the text is targeted towards educators who are supporting students’ creative media works; from those who are new to technology to those well versed in modern media tools. In an effort to reach this audience, individual chapters feature a historical background of each media form, tutorials for creating basic media projects in the specific program discussed, and advice on where to find additional support or troubleshooting information. Though the order of the chapters builds from the simpler forms of digital media (e.g. still images, Photoshop) to more complex media (e.g. Flash animation, video editing) the editors are quick to point out that there is no need to read the book in any particular order.

The book begins with a thorough introduction of how the media are used today and how the editors believe they might be used more efficiently. Knobel and Lankshear encourage a hands-on approach to gaining an understanding of each medium and, more specifically, how the principles learned might “inform sound teaching practices” (2). A brief history of the terms “DIY” and “DIY Media” is offered, dating

back to the early usage in the 1950s and highlighting the reference to undertaking a task without specialized training or expertise. It is with this idea in mind that the authors approach the use of each media form. Knobel and Lankshear introduce today’s media scene, addressing the idea of increased access to media producing software tools that are “free or almost free” (10). The authors discuss Henry Jenkins’ (2006) concept of participatory media as a means for increased involvement in media creation. Knobel and Lankshear share their thoughts on how media creation is a gateway to increased literacy in a traditional sense. They allude to increased writing skill, improved communication, and greater creativity through participating in the use of digital media. The editors complete their introduction by addressing learning in general, encouraging the use of new technologies to support social learning approaches. They emphasize that through this approach “the focus is more on how we learn, than on what we learn” (19).

Once the editors introduce the structure of the book, Knobel and Lankshear pass the baton to a host of other authors to discuss specific media forms. Individual chapters discuss a host of media including Photoshop, Flash, anime, and other specific media programs and techniques; “The book takes a practice approach to its subject matter. Each chapter addresses its particular form of media engagement in ways that illuminate it as a sociocultural practice” (1). Divided into three sections (music media, still media, and moving media), each with three chapters addressing individual mediums, the book concludes with the Afterword written by Henry Jenkins, a well-published media literacy author.

In the opening section of the text, readers learn about music remixing as an art form, then podcasting for both audio and video media for educational benefit.

The second section of the book addresses still images through the use of photosharing, Photoshopping,

and curatorship of online photo collections. Though both authors in this section focus their discussions on the website flickr.com and the photo editing software Photoshop, theories discussed here are easily generalizable to most any media form.

The third and most expansive section investigates moving media including Machinima, stop-motion photography, Flash, and anime music videos (AMV). A key principle of all media production is mentioned in chapter 6 when Luckman and Potanin remind the reader, “ultimately what matters isn’t the whizzbang technology, but the quality of the story being told” (146).

Knobel and Lankshear have made several valuable contributions to digital media literature and attempt a daunting task in this text. Providing a comprehensive text not only offering analysis and history of various media but also providing introductory instruction on each of these media is a gigantic mountain to climb. Certainly, an all-inclusive text of this type would be valuable to students, educators, and other professionals. While the goal of providing introductory tutorials for those inexperienced in media production is a worthy one, the task, however, may not be possible in a single volume. Tutorials found in Knobel and Lankshear’s text lack the detail required by a beginner while also speaking at a level far too elementary for the more experienced media producer, thus missing the mark for these audiences. For example, chapter 1 addresses music remixing and instructs the reader to export a completed remix to one of several file formats. However, no discussion is provided explaining the benefits or shortcomings of the various file formats, questions a novice most certainly will solicit.

The text also includes a number of inaccuracies and reliance on weak source information. Knobel and Lankshear cite Wikipedia frequently rather than relying on more esteemed primary sources. Some errors in the text may seem minor, such as the mention of the movie “Memories of a Geisha” (16), an assumed reference to the 2005 movie actually titled *Memoirs of a Geisha*, but multiple slips such as this cost the authors credibility. In chapter 5 addressing Photoshop, contributing author John Potter references research important to the gap between consumers and producers of media. Yet Potter fails to support this claim by offering any citation to such research (104-105). In chapter 9, Knobel, Lankshear, and Lewis mention, “Songs downloaded from iTunes will not work with... iMovie” (214) noting that, “copyright restrictions are built into the song”

(214). This information is given in such a way that the reader assumes the technical inability of iMovie to utilize music originating from an iTunes purchase. This statement contradicts one of the primary design features of iMovie, which is to allow for the interaction of all programs within the iLife package including iTunes (see <http://www.apple.com/ilife/imovie/what-is.html>).

An additional weakness in the text appears in chapter 9 where Knobel, Lankshear, and Lewis also touch lightly on copyright issues, which are always a concern when working with media originally created by others. Here, these authors unfortunately add to the large pool of misinformation or misinterpretation about copyright law. Copyright law is a highly complex specialty of the legal profession and one that is often misunderstood. It is clear that Knobel, Lankshear, and Lewis hold a nonchalant attitude regarding upholding such laws when they refer to “copyright and IP infringement *bullying*” (222, emphasis added) and appear to have an attitude of ‘It’s OK so long as I don’t get caught’ toward copyright infringement. Though enforcement of copyright is often lax at the primary or secondary school level, educators need to be respectful of others’ creative works and teach their students to do so as well.

The conglomeration of ideas presented by Knobel and Lankshear and their collaborators do offer many creative ideas for using media in the classroom. The authors strongly promote the integration of media into the language arts classroom as a means of helping students learn narrative structures and storytelling technique. As Jacobson observes in chapter 2, “Remixing provides opportunities for the kinds of project-based, collaborative learning for which teachers strive” (43). He comments, “Pedagogical interventions based on full participation have a better chance of helping students discover and develop their own hermeneutics than lectures on the meaning of *Troilus and Cressida*” (47). Similar attitudes are found throughout the text as each contributor encourages increased creativity in learning environments.

While Knobel and Lankshear miss the mark in their attempt to provide a beginners guidebook for all things media, this work should not be completely dismissed. The reader may reap value from the individual authors’ perspectives, supporting unique and creative learning opportunities for students. As Jenkins notes in the Afterword, “These practices are important gateways into larger learning cultures that help support young people as they construct their identities and

navigate their social surroundings” (231). Offering our youths the opportunity to learn creativity through today’s media tools is as important as traditional reading, writing, and arithmetic. After all, these media are not likely to go away any time soon and young people must know how to navigate them well.

References

Jenkins, Henry. 2006. *Participatory Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: NYU Press.