



**Friesen, N. (2017). *The textbook and the lecture: Education in the age of new media*. Johns Hopkins University Press.**

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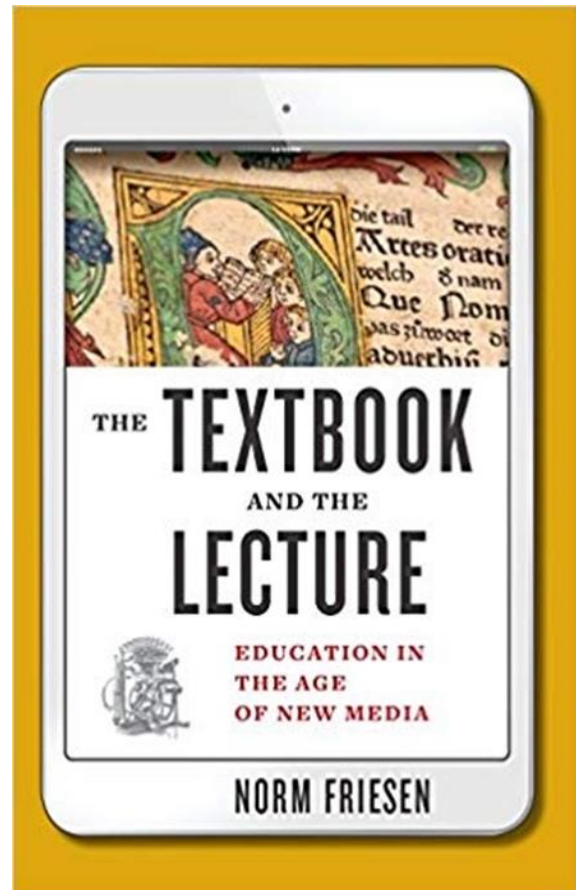
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In *The Textbook and the Lecture*, Norm Friesen considers the potential for transformations in pedagogy in an age when communication occurs at new speeds and in new ranges, and even within emerging platforms. This book fits well within a New Literacy, media literacy, and digital literacy framework, and aligns well with the work of Lankshear and Knobel (2011), particularly their study of new materials and new practices. In this review, I trace some of what *The Textbook and the Lecture* has to offer theorists and researchers who are interested in looking at new media, and I speak to the most appropriate applications for the book.

#### **Theory and Practice within the Text**

Of central interest is the way in which the author combines a theoretical approach, drawing on the kinds of sign-making that human beings have been engaged in for centuries, with practical applications for education policy. This theoretical approach is rooted in Dewey's notions of freeing children to close geographic and social distances with the use of communication, and also considers Derrida's use of inscription in terms of writing and media. Using these deeply philosophical



lenses, Friesen offers a work that looks at the development of writing and sign-making over time. The practicing teacher will find much here to think about in terms of communication practices. However, the reader will have to draw some conclusions on their own about how to apply them to instruction.

By approaching pedagogy from a theoretical and philosophical perspective, Friesen aims to reach an audience with a cognitive or research-based interest in new media and general communication methods. In terms of other readership, the content has the potential to be intriguing for secondary and university-level teachers who are implementing new media practices in classrooms on a daily basis – and may especially undergird the practices of those teachers who have found opposition to the use of these media. The book does not read like a series of lesson plans, but teachers who work with younger adolescents may find interest in the way Friesen lines up new materials with the communication practices that have been occurring from the beginning of written language.

Friesen speaks knowledgeably about the conflict that emerges with new media. Students are readily engaged with these new platforms and means of communication, including social media, and have a working knowledge of how these tools operate. And yet, new media are often met with resistance in education systems. Many school districts have technology in place that limits movement through online spaces, and some have policies that restrict access or use of cell phones. In some cases, for classroom management, these policies make sense, but the extent to which they limit access to knowledge and materials can be troubling. The place of new media, including the rapid dissemination of information, in classroom spaces is one ripe for debate and further discussion. This book offers a historical view of communication practices, reaching back to ancient texts and

extending the conversation into modern media, that can serve to further that debate.

Friesen gives the reader a strong foundation of knowledge from which to consider the ways media work now. In high schools and middle schools, barriers are often raised and students and teachers are left with questions of where new media practices fit in an age when traditional textbooks and interaction with printed matter are increasingly being replaced with more immediate digital formats and ways of communicating. This conversation even translates into college-level practices as we grapple with the best ways to proceed with ethical communication in an age when plagiarism can occur for student products, as well as for the tests and assignments that some instructors provide in digital spaces.

### **Notes for Literacy, from Old to New**

Of particular note is the way that Friesen situates both old and new literacy practices. Of current debate in the field is the notion of new literacy and the question of whether or not these literacy practices are simply updated forms of the same old practices, or old literacy. On the one hand, some suggest that we are engaged in evolving practices that are fresh and new, while others contend that we are not developing new reading and writing habits, but simply reframing them in new places. Friesen suggests that media require literacy. These literacy practices are not merely reading and writing tasks, but also involve the placement and formation of these tasks within a particular medium.

What the author shows us is that our practices have proliferated over the past few years, but that this is an ongoing process of human activity that has been going on much longer. With each new trend in rhetoric, there is a theme of questioning or opposition. This is the kind of push-back that sometimes teachers experience when using new media. He traces the restructuring and transformation of linguistic practices across time, and thereby

develops an argument for why contemporary communication practices should be considered pedagogically and culturally. For example, Friesen discusses the balance of words and images, and how these elements work together to convey meaning.

Friesen makes the move from mode to reader and further argues for the elevation of our experience with a text, highlighting our concern with content over method of delivery. He suggests that if we are reading digitally, the practice is still a psychological and transformative one, focused more on meaning-making than on the particular conveyance of that meaning. Rather than stick to a description of anthropological materials, the author begins to apply these concepts to the psychology of readers. This look includes what stimulates the reader, and how the reader's experience lines up with what the author has intended.

For the literacy community, this thought underscores the value of writing practices and levels the playing field to some degree, by theoretical extension, when it comes to considering the power of new media. Friesen hints that we should consider the power of our communication rather than be hindered by concerns about the pathway. Drawing on the work of Thomas Kuhn, particularly in relationship to continuous restructuring of theories and paradigmatic understanding, Friesen notes that shifts are a naturally occurring aspect of our cultural practices.

### A Valuing of Tradition, a Look at New Forms

*The Textbook and the Lecture* is a historical purview, in which traditional forms of communication, including the lecture, are valued and honored, while considered alongside new kinds of communication. Friesen accomplishes this by first taking the reader back to early examples, and then tracing that work thematically through the value of reading experiences as a life-shaping practice. One of the strengths of the text is the multitude of examples, which are critically considered, from the Catechism to Massive Open-Online Courses (MOOCs). With each movement along the ebb and flow of technology, from radio to television to the advent of online communication, the author notes that concerns continually rise. This is an ongoing narrative of innovation and resistance.

What Friesen offers is a tribute to both old and new ways of sharing information. The result is that the reader is left with an elevation of meaning-making, and the knowledge that these structures for sign-making continually change over time. Our interest in new ways of connecting in online spaces stems from thousands of years of discourse, and Friesen's text is a comprehensive and well-developed reminder of that evolution.

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### References


Lankshear, C., & Knobel, M. (2011). *New literacies: Everyday practices and social learning*. Open University Press.

### About the Reviewer

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