

Reviewed by Jason D. DeHart
Appalachian State University
United States

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 knowledgably 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 in 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,

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.

References


About the Reviewer

Jason D. DeHart is an assistant professor of reading education at Appalachian State University. His research interests include multimodal texts and New Literacies in classroom practice.
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