

# Consumers as Learners/Learners as Consumers

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Traditional pedagogy is premised on a belief that older generations teach younger generations how to learn. At this point in history, however, through their ubiquitous exposure to media, technology, and communication, younger generations understand contemporary forms of communication better and more tacitly than older generations. Yet schooling lags behind advances in communication and technologies, clinging to a concept that older generations still impart knowledge to prepare younger generations for the future. Jake Telluci (2007),<sup>1</sup> a participant in our research study on marketplace production, articulated this discrepancy well, when he said, “It’s about when technology is in the hands of people, they will often just do things with it.” In this chapter, I argue that unveiling new media and digital technologies production practices exposes a logic and language that better serve as a contemporary model of learning. The process of adopting new media is iterative and cyclical in that meaning-makers pick up new media production practices, remix them, and make them their own. Forging a twenty-first century identity entails reappropriating practices and texts consumed on a daily basis.

Cope and Kalantzis (2000) unraveled some of the mystery of design when they claimed that “all meaning and design is transformative in one sense: human agency constitutes meaning (designing) and remakes the world in the process (the redesigned)” (p. 205). Production is not a human-denying process because there are people making decisions that involve varying degrees of agency in multimodal composition. For some

time now, I have been intrigued by the role of agency and structure in design practices. It strikes me that marketplace producers have uncharted repositories of knowledge and experience about multimodal design that would enhance a reengineering of literacy education in a multimodal world. Rather than promoting a utopian vision of marketplace production, I argue here, and elsewhere with my coresearcher (Sheridan & Rowsell, 2010), that digital and new media will only increase their reach and ubiquity in the years ahead and contemporary meaning-making relies on the logic of multimodal producers, who, more often than not, are *outside* education.

Digital learning, as predicated on the marketplace, has been openly accepted in other areas of the public sector. Health workers text message patients around the world to remind them to take their medications. In banking and finance, individuals do mobile banking, with subscribers completing their banking on cell phones. In politics, text messages are sent out to support and advertise for political parties. In the media, social networking sites are used pervasively to share news events. Digital devices are a prime vehicle for dissemination. Looking across other sectors that are moving to a digital logic for communication and thinking, I would argue that educational practice could benefit from practices and epistemologies existing outside educational domains (i.e., pedagogy, practice, policy). Digital learning involves situated learning—learning that is shaped by the environment and by the group involved. Digital learning is collaborative and requires communication across groups. Part of this collaborative work demands building capacity for other members of the team (e.g., building capacity for teachers to teach digital literacies). Finally, digital learning avoids defaulting to old literacies and relies instead on dispositions inherent to new literacies.

#### DESIGN LITERACIES: A STUDY OF MARKETPLACE PRODUCTION

This chapter about consumer learning draws on a three-year study of marketplace production that I conducted with Mary Sheridan and it focuses on 30 producers of new media and digital technologies. To conduct the research, we interviewed people who work in television broadcasting, in designing war games, and in producing children's digital environments to explore a relationship between their language and knowledge base and contemporary ways of making meaning with texts. Our research questions targeted concepts, logics, and language about design and production because we see marketplace producers as authorities on multimodal composition. We asked producers such questions

as: What are the dispositions that producers share that make them successful in their innovation and creativity? How are these dispositions materialized in multimodal documents? How do producers see their work in relation to traditional notions of reading and writing? How can we adapt these dispositions in our classrooms? This line of questioning framed our interview interactions.

Our interviewees had varied roles and responsibilities, but a pattern emerged in the types of groups. We categorized these producers into three groups: educators (professors and students; the developer of the first national-level teacher education program in media literacy at The Harvard Institute on Media Education, the creator of a new gaming degree at a community college, a graduate student and team member of the U.S. Government Office on Women's Health sponsored media literacy site for girls); community producers (a media consultant for Save our Sisters, a domestic violence shelter), the founder of ArtistsforAutism.net, and the founder of and web designer for Oral Heritage Productions); and professional producers (the CEO and director of marketing of KumaWar, PBS's Reading Rainbow founder and former CEO, an award-winning documentarian, and a marketing director at Club Penguin). This last group of professionals is noticeably absent from the current literature in the field of literacy education. Our interviewees explained this omission in two ways. First, although producers of new media cut across disciplines, our interviewees repeatedly talked about academics being locked into disciplinary silos. Those who do interdisciplinary work in education and business often go unnoticed by, or are confusing to, academics, including those doing research. Second, our interviewees in academia felt that their colleagues treated academics who work with business and the marketplace as "sellouts."

Whatever the reasons, the lack of reach on issues relating to professional producers of new media is problematic, because clearly, the thick networks outside school settings are satellites to what we do. These satellites often take over as sites of meaning-making more than schools do. A disregard of these satellites limits our ability to understand the sites of innovation that are shaping, and are shaped by, our students, the potential knowledge-makers we want to reach. Millions of people find gaming of intrinsic value, and in the larger research study, we examine games as pervasive instances where the emerging conventions of literacy are reflected and being constructed. Many of these conventions (e.g., multimodality; the building of computer-mediated communities) extend to online environments.

## DEFINING CONSUMER LEARNING: THE STORY OF LEARNING INC.

To define and situate consumer-learning practices, I offer a case study, a small toy company called Learning Inc. (pseudonym). The case study hopefully illuminates dispositions inherent to consumer learning. On January 18, 2010, I interviewed a toy manufacturer in a town on the borders of New York and New Jersey. Jeff Katz started Learning Inc. as a company committed to designing interactive educational toys that foster environmentalism. Jeff began his career as a lawyer, then became an academic, and eventually, spurred on by becoming a father, found his way into educational merchandising. Jeff launched Learning Inc. 5 years ago and, 2 years later, sold the company to a large toy manufacturer. For the past few years, Learning Inc. has actively sought feedback from experts in literacy and held focus groups, as the company developed a product line of preschool toys that promote literacy skills. Jeff recounted how he followed the pattern of more established toy companies by designing toys premised on an interactive model much like LeapFrog, a product line that uses technology and interactivity to teach literacy skills to the preschool market.

Premised on a LeapFrog model of using technology to teach language skills, Learning Inc. designed 12 products that are cheaper than competing brands. Learning Inc.'s educational philosophy was to design toys that "get children to THINK [their emphasis] critically, passionately, and about others." Developing innovative toys based on the notion of converging technologies such as global positioning system (GPS) navigational systems that can also function as cell phones, Jeff surmised that his products were cutting-edge and built on "evolving new literacies," and that they fostered early literacy and children's development. Armed with the product line and months of fine-tuning, based on user and expert feedback, Jeff and his team met with Target, Toys R Us, and Walmart, only to receive lukewarm responses from all three corporations about Learning Inc.'s product line. Why? The reason is, in their words, "the products are not fun." The question then becomes, what constitutes fun? According to Toys R Us, Walmart, and Target executives, producing a fun product entails offering an innovative design, some form of interactivity and participatory structures or social networking, and diluting education (my words as interpreted from our conversation). In brief, as soon as a product hints of education, it is not as appealing. Based on an older, Fordist model of production, Jeff had approached the design of his product line from adult, parenting logic as opposed to contemporary forms of engaging with multimodal texts and working across thick, at times complicated networks.

During our interview, Jeff reflected on the experience with a renewed understanding of what retailers regard as “home-run products”: “to succeed, products need to be fun, they need to have a dynamic design, and they need some form of licensing.” By licensing, Jeff is referring to a line or license of copyrighted material, such as LeapFrog, which publishes Sponge Bob books in its line. Sponge Bob is a licensed line of merchandise. To succeed and gain what Jeff calls “a two-foot planogram” (literally a 2-foot space in a commercial provider) in Target, Walmart, or Toys R Us alongside LeapFrog and VTech products, you need to have “the kind of toy that a child who visits a friend would say, you have to try this thing.” As a criteria for all product development, Jeff and his team have implemented this credo, and anything that does not meet the “you have to try this thing” is “off the table.” Jeff has a new development plan in place for a digital environment with a social networking capacity to remix and a dynamic design.

Jeff’s experience illustrates the nature of consumer learning. Out in the marketplace, not only are communicational and production practices different, but the logic is also clearly different. The Learning Inc. example illustrates a contrast between an older, Fordist model of production, where manufacturers produced extensive product lines that people bought and supplemented, compared with a newer model of production, which requires a web presence, social networking, and capacities to remix materials into some other converged technology.

During our interview, Jeff discussed how dramatically production logic and practices have changed in the short amount of time that he has been in the toy business. Jeff now intends to develop what he calls “micro brands.” To illustrate a shift to micro brands, Jeff offered the example of the company Spin Master. Spin Master, as a company name, is relatively unknown, but its products, such as Bakugan, are very well-known. Bakugan, the 2009 Toy of the Year, is a popular line of toys that has a wide reach due to its digital environment and television show. Based on Japanese animé and a Japanese television series, bakugan balls are spring-loaded miniature figures with accompanying metal cards. There is an extensive line of bakugan products: games, brawlers (the bakugan balls referred to above), bakugan belts, and bakugan pocket-size cameras. There are licensed characters and stories associated with the bakugan empire. Spin Master produces what Jeff calls “home-run products” based on contemporary forms of multimodal meaning-making. Their designs have a distinct aesthetic; they have a web and social networking presence; they have a digital and televisual presence; and they are affordable, portable, and built on the notion of remix.

The story of Learning Inc. illustrates a contrast in older and newer

models of learning that we engage in to consume products. Users of toys, new media, and digital texts want a storyline, ideally one that they recognize and appreciate; they need ways to communicate with people; and, they need to have multiple technologies converge into one object (e.g., a phone that is also an mp3 player and a camera). Consumer learning begins from what people do with things. The ingredients of consumer learning rely on creatively improvising with technology and remixing technologies and texts however people see fit. From this case study and our larger study, a logic and language of description emerge that are not based on Fordist ideologies. The process follows from an idea (often remixed), which gets a spin for a particular market, is designed with this spin in mind, and is then taken up by users and remixed how they see fit. Framed by these five stages of consumer learning, the next section describes principal dispositions of consumer learning.

### A ROADMAP TO CONSUMER LEARNING

Individuals buy technologies and remake them to suit their circumstances. Upon purchasing an application for a handheld device, users can almost immediately launch an application, or as Telluci, the media scholar and producer quoted at the beginning claims, “people will just do things with technologies” as soon as they pick them up. Doing things with technologies involves composing, clicking, tapping, reading, scrolling, and other repertoires of practice to make them function. However, the process has a longer history that starts with production. Producing for consumption has three main features: establish a spin or story; create a design to tell the story; and construct a participatory structure, social networking component, all based on a design framework.

### SPINNING A STORY

Production begins with an idea. In the *Design Literacies* (Sheridan & Rowsell, 2010) research study, producers described the movement from an idea to materializing a spin in a design. A marketing director at Nickelodeon talked about the evolution of *Dora the Explorer* and *Sponge Bob* as licensed products, whose genesis came from a simple idea. With *Dora the Explorer*, for instance, José Garcia (pseudonym), a marketing and creative director at Nickelodeon, discussed ideas emerging from a word such as “computadora,” meaning computer in Spanish, and this simple word captures the core values of the show: bilingualism, problem-solving, using information to solve puzzles, etc. The design team developed a show with a Hispanic young girl as the protagonist, and the word

computer catalyzed a central premise of problem-solving through situations and adventures with the help of information and some community support. According to José, the show and its evolution exemplifies the process of spin, or giving a story to a product.

Having traditionally been associated with manipulating audiences, spin often is used in a pejorative sense, but today spin is a creative, idea-generating process that marketplace producers talk about as fundamental to a successful design. What producers describe in some detail is moving an idea from a concept to a multimodal text by spinning together corporate ideals, learning agendas, modal preferences, and global values into a product. Spin is foundational to text production and consumption because it is the stage when diverse personalities and agendas (e.g., design, marketing, sales, and executives) gather to materialize designs and content. Despite the negative connotation, spin is a central production practice. To give an idea life, producers spin a story around the text. As a metaphor for describing a story that accompanies production, “spinning a story” helps us capture how each case study brings texts to life.

The notion of spin has been examined by other scholars, such as Charles Bazerman in *The Language of Edison’s Light* (2002), in which he presents the evolution of the incandescent light bulb and ways in which Thomas Edison used rhetorical devices and discursive ploys to establish a place for a new technology. By purchasing pages in major newspapers, such as *Figaro*, Edison spun cultural stories around the new technology as an innovation that would transform households. Edison’s spin on the light bulb took the form of descriptive, biographical, and editorial columns he wrote on his visions of modern living. To extend the rhetorical spin, Edison placed electric lighting in bouquets of flowers and ornaments to speak to a domestic aesthetic and a large female audience:

Edison’s companies and other members of the early incandescent industry actively constructed an aesthetic of electric lighting in order to make electric light attractive to the domestic market. This aesthetic spoke to aspirations of the newly urbanized and increasingly prosperous American family. It spoke to a market highly inflected by gender and class. (Bazerman, 2002, p. 313)

Spinning a product means thinking about modes, materials, practices used, and the kinds of people who use them. In our study, producers talk about matching an idea to a target consumer: his or her age, interests, gender, and preferred aesthetic. Some producer participants focused on the aesthetic of their text (i.e., the colors, the sounds, the word choice, etc.), while other producer participants focused on the ethos of a text or

what values and ideas it exuded. Producers materialized these ideas through a spin. A spin could be an entrée into a population of viewers, users, or an audience, as in the case of Edison, or it could be introducing new practices, such as a phone that also serves as an mp3 player.

During our interview, José Garcia talked about the logic of spin:

I try to find what is the one overall message or spin that will translate the show across all categories and once I figure that out—and the way I do that is that we deeply study consumers, their behavior, their lifestyle, what are the different touch points which we can connect with them . . . is it through shoes, t-shirts, toys, books, and what is the role of the different touch points in their lives? (interview, February, 2009)

Garcia spent much of his time thinking about how to brand popular culture texts such as *Dora the Explorer* or *Sponge Bob* in different media and products (e.g., lunch boxes, bedspreads, pajamas, etc.), extending the story into a remixed, remediated text. José talked about spinning a story around a product and how an idea metamorphosizes into a popular culture text. It all starts with an idea as a catalyst, and from there, teams spin a story around the idea to speak to target audiences. To illustrate, José discussed the evolution of *Dora the Explorer*:

Dora was designed as a computer screen . . . Her name, Dora, came from *computadora*. Dora is the quintessential game show if you actually think about the format. So, you're given a problem you need to solve, a problem you need to conquer, so you go out and you're given certain clues to figure it out and you go through them and you grab those clues, get to the answer and then you celebrate and get the prize . . . Dora is all about finding the new and getting out of your bedroom and seeing a larger world—you're not afraid to go to the dentist, right? So, how do I make sure that that is translated in the story of Dora and in the books and DVDs and toys so that kids have tools to execute the Dora mission . . . Dora embodies all that—bilingualism—the fact that Spanish is always used when action is required. So if you look at Dora, whenever she says something in Spanish, it is because some action is going on. (interview, February, 2009)

There was so much new information in Garcia's description of the genesis of the *Dora the Explorer* show: it has Spanish roots, it is about problem-solving, it promotes adventure out in the world, it fosters bilingualism,

action happens when Spanish is used, etc. A word—*computadora*—spun an industry and the complex practices, values, and ideas are hidden within media ecologies that surround the show. Spin is our modern-day form of argumentation.

Design literacies involve spinning stories through modes, any modes that best suit the tale. The disposition of storytellers involves an understanding of framing, design savvy, creating an impact, remixing, and constructing communities online in the form of online forums, chatrooms, blogs, etc. Students can and should be encouraged to spin stories around genres of texts that the students create. Rather than asking students to frame an argument in a written narrative, teachers can ask students to spin a design based on the target audience, core values, beliefs, etc. The kinds of assignments that students complete can certainly work on a similar logic wherein they are given an idea and, within teams, devise the best possible way, media, and modes to tell the story.

## BLACKBOXED CONCEPTS

A novel dimension of our study was the disclosure of information that struck us as invisible to outsiders to the marketplace. Pulling back the curtain on media producers resembles what Bruno Latour (1987) described as “blackboxing” or ways that scientific and technical work is made invisible by its own success. Blackboxing became visible when we examined unstable, variable influences before they got explained away. There were many moments in interviews when we witnessed such blackboxed concepts. In Table 1, I document some blackboxed concepts and practices that we noted during data collection and analysis. An example of a blackboxed practice is disguising educational material in shows, texts, and digital media so that the material does not appear boring or dogmatic. Even though the controlling idea of a show may be to teach Spanish speakers English and English speakers Spanish, as in *Dora the Explorer*, the educational overlay is subtle and couched to avoid appearing like teaching or instruction. By obfuscating education, producers put a blackbox (with varying degrees of subtlety) around learning and teaching. A recurrent theme in producer interviews was that texts with an educational entertainment overlay disguise anything overtly educational. In some way or other, interviewees talked about hiding educational messages within dynamic, interactive interfaces to beguile users into seeing the message as purely part of the text content. As soon as a text in any medium smacked of education, producers reported that user interest flagged. Modal choice represents a key part of the design process.

**Table 1. Blackboxed Concepts and Practices**

Blackboxed concept	Practice
Spin product from marketplace feedback and interpretation	Researching market/determining audience
Market-driven design: colors, images, attitudes, beliefs	Modal choice/design aesthetic
Trial and error with designs (it is okay to be wrong about designs)	Experimenting and improvising with design templates
Brand guardians who use the Internet to virally advertise products	Viral marketing of texts
Focus groups for potential design ideas	Researching design templates
Color and photography that can have the strongest impact in design	Accounting for synesthesia (i.e., psychological dimension of meaning-making—as in the creative process of responding to modalities in a text)
Colors that change people's moods	Embedding an awareness of synesthetic reception of text
Design is often premised on the notion of remix	Remixing a text or part of a text into another text
Designers' evaluation of websites based on color, fonts, photography, layout, ease of use	Working on design principles
Producers of new media, who make most of their money off branding products such as T-shirts, lunchboxes, duvets, towels, etc.	Creating stories about products that become brands
Testing audio out on a variety of high- and low-tech media to account for all listening conditions	Broadening understanding of technologies of reception
Multidimensional and one-note characters; for example, Mr. Grumpy on the <i>Mr. Men</i> series must be grumpy; he cannot be rude, or he would not be Mr. Grumpy	Developing media know-how and folklore
Broadcasting networks that have an aesthetic and target audience; for example, Cartoon Network is geared for boys, and Disney prefers to have live, not cartoon, characters	Branding material within rhetorical and market networks
Producers of new media aging up their television programming because children want to watch children who are slightly older	Developing media know-how and folklore

Indeed, interviewing participants who spend most of their time producing and, as a part of the process, consuming texts offer a far more nuanced lens onto multimodal composition.

## MODES AND MODAL CHOICE

Units of design brought together to make a text look and sound the way it does are known as modes. Where written words in the 20th century have told the story of texts, visual and aural modes tell the story for communicational texts. The choice of modes is integral to success. Will an avatar serve as the face of a product? Or will the product offer

applications that other products do not have? Will other technologies converge with the product, such as a phone that can also make movies? These are modal choices, and they are important to the success or failure of a product. Modes range from a camera angle in a film or photograph to special effects such as illuminated branches in Pandora, the setting for the movie *Avatar*. Directors, graphic designers, and marketing executives make these choices to capture viewer attention and invite us into worlds and stories. Modes tell stories, and often, dominant modes control the message or spin of a product. Dominant modes could be a sound to signal an emotion, or an illustration style, as with the television series *Naruto*. With *Naruto*, color and facial features are key modes because they depict ninja warriors' expressions and spiritual properties. Consumer learning relies on a producer's acumen with design and design principles to choose the right mode to tell the story that needs to be told.

Given the dominance of multimodal texts in digital media, popular culture, and our communicational landscape as a whole, today's student has an attuned sense of what is known as synesthesia.<sup>2</sup> Synesthesia is a key concept in modern communication for a mode's capacity to draw out emotional responses. Halliday (1984) wrote about multimodal texts as specimens (i.e., what can this text tell me about the system of language in which it is spoken) and texts as artifacts (i.e., why is this text valued). Our research findings take both descriptions into account. By viewing texts as specimens and as artifacts in our study, we recognized texts as multimodal with each mode fulfilling a different function in transmitting meaning.

A material quality to modes is hidden within multimodal compositions. Depending on the genre of text, how a text feels or looks or sounds affects what gets understood (and what is reappropriated by the user). Similar to mode, materiality has been the focus of much work in multimodality (Kress, 2003; Pahl & Rowsell, 2010) and cultural and material studies (Hurdley, 2006; Miller, 2008). Texts carry the traces of producers not only in the choices of materials but also in how these choices point to a producer's pathway into literacy (Kress, 1997; Rowsell & Pahl, 2007). Gunther Kress (2007) analyzed children's artwork as carrying a strong sense of the child's meaning-making within the physical features of the text. Consumer learning rests on thinking about materiality (in a tacit and naturalized way) and shaping composition based on awareness that readers and viewers engage with texts materially and reappropriate these design practices in the readers' own multimodal compositions.

Certainly, design relies on material qualities and chosen modes. With inexpensive digital cameras flooding the market, and a proliferation of websites such as YouTube hosting countless clips, it has never been

easier to produce and design digital texts. Though technologies make it possible for anyone to be a producer, choices that people make in terms of modes bring an idea to life. The goal of such design-based pedagogies is to develop dispositions toward problem-solving, a goal that academics and those in the marketplace share. Where academics disseminate new research, producers combine and remix existing resources to spin an argument or make a point.

To illustrate, I refer to an interview with a creative director at a branding company in New York who was involved in adapting *Olivia*, an award-winning book by Ian Falconer, to a popular television series on Nickelodeon. In the following excerpt from an interview, she discussed how integral multimodal choices are in designing characters:

Kids like color so we couldn't do everything white, black, and red with dashes of green and blue . . . you know so what we tried to do was strike the palette of a minimalist aesthetic in the house, and we kept the palette very muted, so it's not just pastel but it was muted, desaturated tones, which warms up characters, makes them less high-brow. So Olivia, in the show, is always wearing red, and everyone else on the cast is wearing muted color so that our little protagonist is always remarkable on the screen. (Interview, May, 2008)

Such modal choices as color, saturation, and palette cast TV Olivia in a different, more subdued, even empathetic light, compared with book Olivia. To be relatable, to be lovable, Olivia had to transform from an upper-class Manhattanite to an everyday kid. Megan talked about wanting to make Olivia “like *The Cosby Show* in animation.” With this in mind, Megan contended that, in multimodal composition, “the visual is the first job, then writing is the second.” Insiders in the media industry are aware of this logic and aware that modes tell stories.

## DESIGNING AND LEARNING FOR SCREEN LOGIC

Screen logic requires thinking in terms of patterns and practices that involve using multiple texts simultaneously and the use of hybrid texts in multiple genres. New media producers think about and design for screens of varying shapes and sizes. What is true for print is not necessarily true for screens. The key point for pedagogy is to make the print-screen contrast explicit and dialogic. First, navigation, or what Kress and Jewitt (2004) described as “reading path,” strongly informs what gets designed for the screen. Many of our producers talked about the

intricacies of designing for screens. In particular, several interviewees attended to navigation and online communities as essential components to screen logic. A participant who spoke at length about navigation was Gregory Stein, a communications executive at a faculty of education at a large state university. Having worked in fashion before entering the domain of technology and communications, Stein offered an institutional perspective on web design. Stein was involved in designing and maintaining a university website wherein navigation was a key practice for users. When a user enters a university website, he or she often needs to locate information quickly and easily. Hence, navigation would be the dominant mode for the production:

Navigation, you know, making things easy to get to, making them apparent . . . making your navigation self-apparent so you don't need a roadmap of the organization or some guide to like the cues and layouts. (G. Stein, interview, May 21, 2007)

Thinking about navigation means predicting what kind of information users are seeking out and where is the most obvious, transparent point on the screen to put the information. Though navigation plays a role in print media, print-based thinkers and designers do not speculate on how readers move into a text and where they might go after reading it. Gemma Moss (2004) examined the arrangement of words and images in textbooks, and she explained how even page design carries specific connotations, as “the Dorling Kindersley picture-led non-linear style of layout has become associated with the new as opposed to the old and with play as opposed to work” (p. 84). In this case, the textbook readers made inferences based on their understanding of the layout and their schema of how certain texts should appear, and only when the “new” texts replicated aspects of the “grid system” did they then “more strongly signal work” (p. 84). The students who approached the Dorling Kindersley textbook did so with a schema for school textbooks, and Moss’s research suggests that the content design and layout influenced how readers initially perceived and classified a text.

Designers have always been concerned with reader gaze, yet gaze takes on a different meaning when one text directs users to another text that could be part of the original text or somewhere entirely different in nature and meaning. Working on screen demands different operations than working with printed texts. Screen logic is a way of describing systems of knowledge and practices enacted when working on-screen. Drawing on a study of marketplace production, a more radical argument can be made that 21st century literacy is actually screen logic and screen pedagogy.

## DESIGN

In our study of producers of new media and digital technologies, design recurred as a common, daily practice that producers engage in. Videogame producers talked about designs as constellations of different texts, such as the background from a scene in *Ice Age* as part of the interface for a first-person shooter game (Sheridan & Rowsell, 2010). When we shadowed some game designers, they designed a battle scene from digital maps of the war region along with small portions of a scene from *Ice Age*. The game then became a remixed text. Design has received lots of attention across many fields. Most notably, in literacy education, is the work of the New London Group, which devised a pedagogy of multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) based on design, redesign, and available design. What underpins such work is a belief that contemporary reading and writing demand that we read and write alphabetic print, but there is no longer a sole reliance on the written word. Such an acknowledgement signals to educators that we have expanded our scope of analysis to modes of representation beyond the written word, to visuals plus sounds plus movement, for instance. If we accept that this kind of text is more in line with what we use and enjoy on a daily basis, then *writing* does not quite cover the kinds of things that we do when we make and understand texts. Design is a more fitting concept. Design, as a logic and language of description for a study of contemporary meaning, parallels what actually happens. Certainly, the marketplace designs (rather than writes) things: apps, websites, discussion forums, photo libraries, etc.

Designs take time to evolve, and fearless creativity (Sheridan & Rowsell, 2010) exists to create designs and experiment and improvise with technologies to do so. Though designs spin ideas and values, they follow a process of trial and error and experimentation and often go through various iterations before becoming live. For example, a representative at Club Penguin, a children's popular digital environment, talked about how the company transformed from a local game designer to a global one (now owned by Disney Corporation). When Disney bought Club Penguin, its design changed to align with a Disney aesthetic. The website became more interactive, had more product tie-ins, and became a satellite to other popular Disney products.

Remaking things is a fundamental notion within contemporary design; in current parlance, remaking things is known as *remixing*, and many marketplace producers talk about remixing texts. Typically, remix plays a role in popular culture wherein recordings help DJs to sample or sequence parts of songs into new compositions. More recently, digital *mash-ups* are growing, as user-friendly technological opportunities to remix have

increased. Design, then, does not carry a set of conventions to follow, but instead, design calls on multiple channels brought together in unanticipated ways, often reshaping available materials to create something new. Remixing is a core 21st century disposition, and thus, producers make their products as remixable as possible. Designing for contemporary producers and consumers must allow a platform for remixing.

## PARTICIPATION STRUCTURES

A final but by no means less important component of learning as a consumer is participating with fellow consumers in social networking forums. Whether it is contributing regularly to a blog, Facebooking, or creating cheats with other gamers, each of these acts demand participating with other consumers to understand or enjoy new technologies. For a product to succeed, it must have some kind of structure for participation. Often, these participatory structures serve as forms of viral marketing for producers. More and more products have Facebook profiles or Twitter groups. In our larger study, a news editor talked about how converging technologies serve as a way of sending traffic back and forth; for instance, CNN will post footage on YouTube that sends users back and forth to the two websites.

For designs to succeed, they need hooks to entice an audience. Participation structures are integral, and using media as a way into publicity through such common practices as viral marketing is a popular means into online communities. Most successful projects have a web presence behind them. To be innovative and think in digital spaces, educators need to foster collaborative, open, and peer-powered knowledge-making participation.

When it comes to digital media, face-to-face contact is not necessary given the presence of chat rooms, texting or instant messaging (IMing), and e-mail in virtual spaces. There are two interview excerpts below with Kim Cartesh (pseudonym), a marketing manager for *The Family Guy* website, that illustrate the power of viral marketing:

Yeah, I mean, it has long been a part of videogame marketing theory because we know statistically that more than 50% of the people who make game purchase decisions make them based on word-of-mouth from their friends, so the theory in videogame marketing is that you market to the core and let them tell the rest so it's a ripple effect. (interview, February, 2007)

That's typically what we do and building community and talking

to your mailing list of fans that stuff is coming and here are new screenshots for you to look at and what do you think about this, you know, all that kind of stuff is a part of trying to get the core excited. (interview, February, 2007)

According to Kim, *The Family Guy* website needed to carry the story of the television show but with its own spin on content. The challenge was to match up the spin with an existing audience who loves *Family Guy*, and the best way to do so was through constant user feedback. In our interview, Kim spoke at length about working with such sponsors as Burger King to shape content in particular ways to speak to particular audiences. The challenge of working with sponsors was mediating the vision and its subversive content with a corporation such as Burger King. Relying on viewer feedback helped as a mediator because viewers would push for fidelity to *Family Guy* content.

At various points in the interview, Kim talked about the lack of direct marketing and the grassroots approach digital media producers often take to spread the word about products. In so doing, Kim addressed a practice that is pervasive in the digital media world, which is shaping texts around user feedback and remixing the original story for a digital version, as evident in other examples in the corpus of data such as Kuma War or Club Penguin. “Building community, marketing to the core, and watching the ripple effect” have paved the way for such massively popular websites as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. Digital media relies on word of mouth and community membership to spread the word. This trend for viral communication and for word-of-mouth marketing underscores the dependence we have on communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and on collaboration.

## LEARNING FROM CONSUMERS

To conclude my commentary on 21st-century consumer learning identities, I share an epiphany that I had at the end of the writing process. Struggling with a meaningful way to conclude the chapter, I stared at my laptop screen and saw a podcast that our nine-year-old daughter, Maddie, created, impromptu a week before. The short clip depicted her love of Lego, and I was struck again, as I was struck when I listened to marketplace producers, by her fearless creativity in the face of media and communicational systems. The backdrop for her podcast is a Lego logo. Her execution of the podcast resembles a newscaster reporting a feature editorial.

In remixing a Lego logo she found on the web into a jpeg, Maddie

transformed one text into an entirely different one through Photobooth on my macbook. She began her clip with:

This video is about Lego. I like Lego best because it is fun, it requires skills, it is just very cool. You can build stuff like Atlantis, cars, boats, houses. Anyway, very cool, the Lego sign (she walks away from the screen to show the Lego sign and then resumes her place in front of the screen) as you can see behind me.

Figure 1. Maddie's tribute to Lego.



Maddie worked on this podcast, completely on her own, and left it on my desktop. What struck me after watching it was that, while it took our nine-year-old all of a half-hour to make a three-minute commentary about Lego, something that she is passionate about, it took me hours to create a similar, four-minute clip about a research project.

What does this podcast demonstrate about learning and how we should teach the next generation of learners? It tells me that, in Maddie's case, she can problem-solve and figure out how to capture a screen-saver of a logo as a backdrop for an audio clip; that she can extemporize on a ruling passion; that she can creatively display and describe her passion through modal choice; that her knowledge as a consumer has imbued in her a set of skills, and at risk of exaggeration, that she possesses a thinking system that makes meaning through objects, semiotic resources, and color. Incidentally, Maddie frequently tells us that she is bored in school, and, what is more, she struggles as a reader. I am definitely not alone in noting the irony of Maddie not doing well in school literacy. There is nothing as personal, humbling, and I might add touching, as your child

teaching you, an adult, about how to learn and think well today.

With this more personal case study in mind, thinking about consumer learning could well be a more compelling way forward for literacy pedagogy. Seeing popular culture texts and digital media as sites for thinking and negotiation, to be torn apart, disrupted, and analyzed, as much for their material qualities as for their applications, needs to be present in curricula. I believe that new media can productively rework traditional understandings of literacy within contemporary, multimodal contexts. Understanding how new and digital media shape the possibilities, pleasures, and problems of contemporary life is a pressing issue in so many domains, but none demands it more than education.

### Notes

1. I use pseudonyms to protect the identity of all research participants discussed in this chapter.
2. Synaesthesia happens when in which senses get mixed up, for instance, where people see music and hear colors.

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