

Preface

Teaching *Tech-Savvy Kids: Bringing Digital Media Into the Classroom, Grades 5–12* focuses on the intricate and maturing relationship between youth and their digital media practices. Given that this phenomenon has primarily developed outside of school walls, educators can utilize characteristics of digital media such as collaboration, creativity and peer sharing and feedback, in an effort to offer more engaged, student-centered learning opportunities within our schools. Surprisingly, it is through an understanding of how young people learn and participate in our shifting media landscape that philosophical questions regarding learning and literacy in the 21st century can be addressed and new ideas regarding pedagogy and curriculum development can emerge.

Drawing on studies of youth and their experiences outside of school, I initially asked myself, “What are students doing with new media?” The answer, I realized, was centered on engaging and complex literacy and learning opportunities in which students were avid writers and readers outside of school and also producers of many different kinds of media texts such as original stories, Wikipedia entries and documentary videos. I was amazed and impressed by the sheer amount of time and devotion students put into their collaborative, detailed and intense non-school projects. I then asked myself, “What can classroom teachers in Grades 5–12 learn, both personally and professionally, from the study of new media environments?”

This book is an attempt at answering the former question, and has resulted in a compilation of resources and insights based on current research from a number of sources including projects funded by the MacArthur Foundation and leaders in the fields of new media and education. As such, each chapter includes vignettes and quotes from personal interviews and written materials from various sources. Additionally, educators such as classroom teachers, counselors and technology specialists helped to connect current academic research to the realities of today’s

schools with their own stories and reflections, as they highlighted what they saw as a rich and rewarding relationship between their students and digital media. I hope this will be the start of a long and prosperous discussion concerning new media in our society and its impact on learning and adolescence. I view this as a conversation among learners, rather than a book that grants correct answers or cut-n-paste activities.

GOALS FOR THE BOOK

This book is designed for teachers who are interested in understanding the ins and outs of digital media, such as Wikipedia, YouTube and MySpace, and are also curious as to how their students are using these social media in their daily lives. This is not your typical teacher's guide with an expert detailing unit and lesson plans on one particular subject. I understand most teachers' guides are grade and content specific, but I have designed this book as a practice-based guide not a content-based guide. There are activities for teachers to try in order to navigate their way through the abundance of new media in their students' lives and contribute to an online community of teachers. As such, the book's focus is to encourage teachers to explore new media in their personal lives and in their classrooms, and to help them rethink their practices and relations not their content: from teacher-centered to student-centered activities, from individualistic pursuits to collaborative efforts, and from teacher-as-the-audience to teachers and peers-as-audience members armed with feedback and critique.

One of the goals for this book is to inspire fifth through twelfth grade teachers to understand both the relationship between their students and digital media and how to make use of this relationship when designing learning opportunities for their students. By focusing on literacy and learning through a different lens, as described by the numerous out-of-school media practices of youth captured throughout these chapters, teachers can work to offer educational environments in which a 21st century student is entitled. This book does not advocate "replacing" face-to-face learning or teachers themselves with new educational platforms or online environments. On the contrary, the goal is to learn about the culture of new media as it pertains to specific friendship- and interest-based practices, and through awareness and dialogue educators can apply characteristics of new media in their classroom. The classroom activities put forth in this book are not "the answers" nor are they meant to be a laundry list of activities for teachers to implement the following school day. This book is about understanding how the study of new media environments can help to broaden our understanding of literacy, promote a

much-needed dialogue concerning new media technologies, and highlight the changing nature of learning.

AUDIENCE OF THIS BOOK

This book speaks to teachers of fifth through twelfth graders, regardless of one's technological competence or interest. Novices will find these chapters offer explanations of specific sites such as Facebook and Wikipedia, definitions of key terms and even activities to try out personally and in the classroom. Tech-savvy teachers will have access to the latest research and current on- and offline resources to further their knowledge of the field. Beginning teachers can take away implications for their pedagogical practice and mull over a changing communicative landscape. And veteran teachers can broaden their understanding of interesting phenomena such as virtual worlds and remix culture. Additionally, teachers and educators will have access to our online community forum!

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

Teaching Tech-Savvy Kids: Bringing Digital Media Into the Classroom, Grades 5–12 is organized thematically and encompasses popular youth activities found online and/or with other computer applications. Focusing on key characteristics of new media environments such as a community of learners, creative production, peer sharing and feedback, themes of this book include:

- Social network sites: MySpace and Facebook (Chapter 2) and YouTube (Chapter 3)

These sites are ***networked publics*** (***bolded italicized*** words are defined in the glossary) which offer young people active participation—whether friendship driven or interest driven—to produce, share and publish media and youth culture. These two chapters offer educators a chance to learn about prized aspects of youth culture while also pondering how characteristics such as peer sharing and feedback can enhance student learning.

- Communities in cyberspace: Wikipedia (Chapter 4) and online role-playing (Chapter 5)

Collaborative wikis and online role playing are sites that cater to particular interests such as adding or editing entries in Wikipedia or exploring informal story telling through online role playing games. These two

chapters provide insight into user-generated content and offer teachers a glimpse into online participation and membership.

- Creative media productions: Virtual worlds (Chapter 6) and remix culture (Chapter 7)

Remix culture and virtual worlds, such as *Second Life*, *Final Fantasy XI*, and *Quest Atlantis*, allow students to become active producers rather than passive recipients of media. These two chapters offer examples of **participatory culture** and outlines how educators can capitalize on specific characteristics of this culture.

Chapter Sections include

- An *Introduction* that provides key terms and a description of how a medium is used or phenomenon is appealing.
- *Myth and Reality Sidebar* that outlines common misconceptions surrounding youth and digital media and shares a more sophisticated understanding of these experiences.
- *A Story From the Field* that details current research of youth experiences with new media.
- *Pedagogical Implications* that highlight classroom practices such as activities and creative ideas for teachers to test, reflect, and share.
- *References and Helpful Resources* that contain key readings, Web sites and other resources for teachers.

Special Features of the book include

- *Bits and Bytes of Research*. These are short vignettes based on current research and address potential implications for teachers. Topics include safe spaces to connect for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and queer (GLBTQ) youth; class issues regarding the purchase of a family computer; and familial interactions with media in the home.
- *Online Community Forum*. Why not use technology to further our professional development and create an online community of educators? My hope is that from this online community comes a rich and diverse space in which to upload, download and discuss content-based activities, best practices and struggles with digital media. I invite educators to continue this journey online at www.teachingtechsavvykids.com.
- *Glossary*. Located in the back of the book, this glossary is based on the **bolded italicized** words and phrases seen throughout these pages.