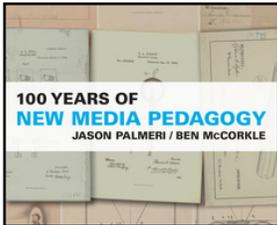


## Book Review Editor

Russell Kirkscey, *Penn State Harrisburg*



### ***100 Years of New Media Pedagogy***

Ben McCorkel and Jason Palmeri, Authors

Ann Arbor, Michigan

The University of Michigan Press  
2021. [Digital text.](#)

Reviewed by J.R. Collins

*The Ohio State University*

**N**ew media has a deep, rich history, much of which has either faded or lies outside the periphery of many writing instructors. In the last three decades, the computer has come to dominate new media pedagogy narratives, eliding a great deal of new media instruction that predates the computer's recent influence. Ben McCorkel and Jason Palmeri's *100 Years of New Media Pedagogy* collects and delivers that rich history through a fittingly accessible multimodal resource. The authors note that they read a corpus of 766 scholarly articles from *English Journal* or "100 years of *English Journal*, so you don't have to" (2021, Chapter 1, Trailer, 1:25). The open-source digital text is organized into nine chapters which can be navigated linearly using the "Next Page" button at the bottom of each page, or, readers can jump around the chapters and their subsections through the ever-present menu at the top right. For example, Chapters 3-8 encourage nonlinear movement with their many audio, video, and interactive elements. Throughout the book, McCorkel and Palmeri employ a wide range of methods, "thin description, data visualization, media archaeology, and multimodal performance methodologies," to capture *English Journal's* 100 years of new media publications (2021, Chapter 1, Introduction, para. 2). Utilizing this wide range of methods allows the authors to recover some lost pedagogies as well as warn against some past new media pedagogical missteps.

One such misstep, McCorkel and Palmeri argue, is the predominant move toward new media reception instruction over production instruction. As new media are introduced, their newness often invites production-based instruction (e.g., designing podcasts, creating instructional films), but as media become more popular, production often shifts to experts and instruction tends toward reception (e.g., analyzing video, using computers to facilitate instruction). The authors call for new media instructors to “embrace amateur models of new media production” in lieu of taking an exclusively receptive approach (Chapter 3, *Zooming Out*, para. 4). Adopting playful, amateur approaches to production in new media pedagogy invites the construction of fresh genres and avoids siloing new media in service of alphabetic literacy. McCorkel and Palmeri adopt a whimsical approach in their methods of coding, data visualization, and multimodal production. In Chapter 2, “Methodological Play,” the authors introduce Royster and Kirsch’s (2012) “tacking in and tacking out,” which in turn inform the authors’ thin and thick description (p. 75). The authors also draw on Branstetter’s (2016) concept of “a ‘promiscuous’ approach to historical methodology that is ‘performative, playful, and mischievous’” (p.18). McCorkel and Palmeri’s videos, podcasts, and other multimodal productions, placed strategically throughout the book, display this “promiscuous” attitude to historiography while shifting between thin and thick description.

Writing for university instructors, historiographers, and K-12 educators, McCorkel and Palmeri blend text with video, podcasts, images, graphs, infographics, memes, emails, and web pages both to analyze new media pedagogies and to demonstrate new media production. The authors have created several humorous videos that extend the text and visually represent the wide variety of new media used in classroom instruction over the past 100 years. The focus of their corpus analysis, and many of their videos, centers on the instruction and use of four primary media: “radio, film/video, television, and computer” (2021, Chapter 3, Introduction, para 1). In Chapter 3, McCorkel and Palmeri note trends across the history of these four media; most notably that the instruction of new media often follows predictable patterns, that new media operate and evolve in broad ecologies, and that new media often settle into the service of alphabetic writing instruction.

One way the authors work to draw out some of these patterns is through close reading and coding of the 766 articles. They follow up their initial coding inquiries with full corpus word frequency searches using Voyant, an online textual analysis toolkit. In Chapter

3, the authors use a video to demonstrate their Ngram viewer of word frequency in the corpus. An Ngram, jokes McCorkle, “*Might have something to do with charting the relative frequency of individual words contained within a corpus*” (Chapter 3, *Word Frequencies by Decade*, Ngram Video Tour, 0:15, emphasis added). In other words, Ngrams are data analysis tools used to examine the number of words across a corpus. Large corpus analyses don’t necessarily allow for definitive conclusions, the authors argue, but instead open the door to questions about relationships between the data. Some questions in McCorkel and Palmeri’s data visualizations emanate from apparent correlations between the rise and fall in popularity of terms like *television* and *radio*, *reading* and *writing*, and *computer* and *technology*. New media researchers will find McCorkel and Palmeri’s Ngram viewer generative, especially given that the timeline in the viewer contains links to *English Journal* articles that use the specific terms.

After the introduction of a playful approach to data visualization, and modeling visualization as an analytic method, Chapters 4-7 provide an analytic history of the book’s four main media categories. In Chapter 4 the authors explore the history of radio and its implications for digital audio instruction. The recent rise of the podcast has created a renewed interest in audio composition and the rhetorical importance of sound, but the long history of radio’s use in new media theory and instruction has been largely forgotten. Collecting this history and analyzing many of its insights and problematic tendencies presents new media instructors with a fresh take on critical audio production and reception. Chapters 5 and 6 explore the affordances of visual pedagogy through the histories of film and television, respectively. Through thick description, corpus coding, and video production, the authors offer a broad view of visual rhetorical practices and the instruction methods they engage with. As with the history of radio, the authors point out that the history of video is tainted with ableist, sexist, and racist perceptions of students and technology. New media scholars intersecting with disability studies and accessibility will find many problematic examples in past audio and video instruction, including views that certain voices are unfit for audio, certain bodies do not belong on screen, and certain identities are susceptible to the evils of various media. Chapter 7 explores the history of the computer from its early introduction in the 1960s, to its rise in prevalence during the 1990s, and its ubiquity in the 21st century. The sections of the chapter are creatively presented through the computer interfaces of each of these time periods. It is easy to see through McCorkel and Palmeri’s digitally rich multimodal performance how the computer

evolved to dominate new media narratives.

McCorkel and Palmeri's production, insightful in its rigorous methods and inspirational in its delivery, leaves new media scholars with an abundance of jumping off points. One such point is the correlation between the rise of various terms like *computer* and *technology*. Researchers might investigate the spike in the use of *computer* in the early 1980s versus the steady rise of the word *technology* beginning in the 1970s. Instructors might further glean interesting pedagogical insights from the authors' thorough analysis of computer use in classrooms during the 1980s. Another point new media scholars and instructors could employ is McCorkel and Palmeri's critique of instructors' problematic—but published—depictions of students as "stupid" and "lazy," of female students as unfit for radio, or of students with disabilities as incompatible with many technologies. As the authors note, we can see similar depictions in both past and recent scholarship that views students as unwilling or unable to learn because of a given technology. Technical communication program directors might consider these problematic historical depictions and their contemporary parallels in course and program descriptions, as well as instructor trainings and curricular development. Accessibility training for example, might use the authors' historical examples of ableist pedagogy to contrast ways newer technologies can accommodate a wide range of bodies. Finally, instructors might learn more equitable approaches to new media instruction by watching the authors' videos and be inspired to create their own videos for their students. Researchers might also be inspired to use production as an analytic method both providing the researcher with valuable insights and presenting their findings in fresh and engaging formats. In all, McCorkel and Palmeri offer a historical examination of the past 100 years of new media instruction and use that is interactive, meticulous, and entertaining.

## References

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## Author Information

J.R. Collins is a doctoral candidate in English at the Ohio State University. Their research interests include Indigenous knowledges, cultural rhetorics, and technical and professional communication. Their current dissertation project focuses on the negotiation of knowledge expectations in convergent Indigenous/science engagements.