

## BOOK REVIEW /CRITIQUE DE LIVRE

**Mob Rule Learning: Camps, Unconferences, and Trashing the Talking Head.** By Michelle Boule. Medford, NJ: Cyber Age Books, 2011. Softcover: 248 pages ISBN: 978-0-910965-92-7.

*Mob Rule Learning: Camps, Unconferences, and Trashing the Talking Head* is written by Michelle Boule, who is self-proclaimed on her website as a “Geek Librarian living in Houston, TX” (<http://wanderingeyre.com/about/>). *Mob Rule Learning* is a well-organized book that is divided into two sections. Part 1 goes over the history of unconferences, along with case studies that show how they work in real life. Part 2 gives other examples of how the ideals of unconferences can be applied to other educational settings and organizations. The chapters are neatly divided for reducing information overload. There is also a web site directly affiliated with this book that contains a multitude of resources and continues the discussion as a backchannel, which the author defines as being “like a back door, where people sneak in and then escape in order to have side conversations”. Boule’s “backchannel” Web site is a fantastic supplement to the book.

Boule takes the first chapter, “Traditional conferences: What they do and how they get it wrong”, to discuss what traditional conferences aim to achieve and to define a “talking head”. Once that is out of the way, the next chapter, “(Un)defining a camp or unconference”, goes on to discuss how an unconference differs from the traditional conference introduced in the previous chapter. In this chapter, terms such as open space technology and facilitation styles are introduced. “The Good, the Bad, and the Unscripted” marries the first two chapters and elaborates on the differences between a traditional conference and an unconference. Boule also goes into detail on how an unconference works along with its strengths and weaknesses. Of course, the American Library Association experience of unconferences is often referred to as Boule is a librarian. The planning chapter, “How to plan and execute a successful camp”, clarifies the questions readers may have throughout the first three chapters. After an unconference is explained, Boule showcases some real-life examples in the chapter “Unconference case studies”. What is really neat about this chapter is that you can actually look up the examples and check out the websites that have been developed for the camps and unconferences mentioned. And finally, “Applying the unconference structure beyond conferences and the future of the movement” finishes off this section by giving examples of other ways to use the camp format to brainstorm, such as an atwork retreat. This chapter flows well into the succeeding section, which talks about other ways to apply the unconference style of learning.

The second part is constructed much like the first, introducing ideas in the first few chapters that are then reinforced through case studies. In this section, the mob mentality of unconferences is applied to the classroom.

Chapter 7, “Traditional classrooms: What is missing”, elaborates on different types of learning styles and then goes on to talk about the actual physical limitations of teaching in a classroom. The following chapter, “Benefits and challenges to leaving the traditional classroom behind”, introduces many different tools available to overcome physical limitations and foster the different learning styles that were discussed in the previous chapter. Most importantly, Boule discusses the use of Learning Management Systems such as Blackboard and Moodle and how they nurture the self-teaching style of learning.

In the chapter, “Creating your own knowledge ecosystem: harnessing the power of mob labor”, Boule talks about ways that employers and organizers can make use of internal resources, such as people who are already involved with the organization, to “enable their own mob rule learning”. She suggests many different ways to discover existing employee skills and how to enable them. Finally, before going into case studies, the chapter “Planting, caring for, and feeding your mob” offers strategies on how to successfully transform from the traditional teacher-led learning style to being a self-taught mob with a facilitator. Boule gives examples of obstacles and how to overcome them along with some best practices that can be applied in many learning situations. As promised, there is the chapter of education case studies that demonstrate scenarios in higher education and libraries. The case studies bring together the theory discussed in the earlier chapters in this section. Before concluding the section, the chapter on “The future of the self-education mob” is important to read, as it goes over the implications of self-taught mob learning in organizations and in universities. In the afterword, “A conclusion and manifesto”, Boule concisely writes on how to move from talking-head style to the mob mentality and how the mobs can grow into their own self-teaching communities.

*Mob Rule Learning* is a well-written book by an enthusiastic writer who has put together her thoughts in a wonderfully succinct manner. Many tools are offered throughout the book and are listed in an appendix along with a glossary. The Creative Commons attribution is frequently referred to in the book with effective examples on how to apply it, especially with presentations and media. The index is well structured to ensure you can find key ideas after reading the book. This book would be beneficial to any event organizer in any association or workplace. Education facilitators would also benefit from reading this book to help foster new ideas with how to be more creative in their teaching techniques.

**Amanda Rose Horsman, BA (hons), MLIS, AHIP**

*Bibliothécaire de référence*

*Centre de formation médicale du N.-B.*

*Bibliothèque Champlain*

*Université de Moncton*

E-mail: [amanda.horsman@umoncton.ca](mailto:amanda.horsman@umoncton.ca)