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Composition at Washington State University: Building a Multimodal Bricolage

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Abstract: Multimodal pedagogy is increasingly accepted among composition scholars. However, putting such pedagogy into practice presents significant challenges. In this profile of Washington State University's first-year composition program, we suggest a multi-vocal and multi-theoretical approach to addressing the challenges of multimodal pedagogy. Patricia Ericsson, the director of composition, illustrates how theories of agency are central to the integration of multimodality. Elizabeth Sue Edwards, a graduate teaching assistant, explores negotiating departmental standards and implementing multimodal assignments. Tialitha Michelle Macklin, also a graduate teaching assistant, discusses her journey from rejecting multimodal assignments to embracing them as an integral element of her pedagogy. And Leeann Downing Hunter, a non-tenure-track faculty member, approaches the challenge through the lens of adaptability.

We believe that this multi-vocal approach to building a multimodal composition program offers: (1) a foundation for other writing programs to adapt and build upon; (2) an alternative to traditional approaches that rely on single theories and single leaders; and (3) a reconstitution of how the university works, integrating stakeholder voices from administrators to students themselves.

Introduction

Admonitions about changing or refocusing a composition program often include cautionary terms like "carefully," "incrementally," and "locally determined." Drastic, top-down changes are typically described as unsuccessful, disruptive, and even tyrannical. Unstated but underpinning both the admonitions and negative descriptions are concerns from and about stakeholders in the larger community in which composition programs are located. That community includes instructors, program directors, department chairs, deans, provosts, presidents, and the wider public in which the program exists. This article profiles Washington State University's (WSU) first-year composition program, detailing the institutional situation and the concerns of its director of composition and three of its instructors as the program moves toward the inclusion of multimodality in its courses. We believe that this profile's approach is unique for the variety of stakeholder and theoretical perspectives that have informed our move toward multimodality. The four authors bring multiple theories, varied careers, and different teaching experiences that are part of WSU's robust composition program. We understand our work as *bricolage*, drawing from Seymour Papert and Idit Harel who suggest that much academic work is that of *bricoleurs* who "can come to agreement about theories of learning (at least for the present and perhaps in principle) only by groping in our disorderly bags of tricks and tools for the wherewithal to build understandings" (2). Although calling on Papert and Harel's sense of "disorderly bag of tricks" may seem ill-advised, we believe that multiple experiences and a rich mix of theories illustrate the strengths of our program.

We are confident that our experiences and the theories in which we ground our practices are translatable to colleges and universities of various types, not simply idiosyncratic accidents. The four stakeholders whose praxis is detailed in this profile include the director of composition, two graduate teaching assistants, and one clinical professor. We contend that the variety of viewpoints and theoretical support these stakeholders bring to this profile make for a rich overview of the challenges and opportunities inherent in the implementation of a multimodal composition program.

The Context

(Patricia Ericsson, Director of Composition)

Washington State University's main campus serves an undergraduate student population of 19,000, including about 4,000 first-year students. The composition program enrolls about 4,000 students each year in first-year composition (FYC) classes taught by instructors, teaching assistants, as well as clinical and tenure-track faculty. In a typical semester, 50% of FYC classes are taught by instructors or clinical faculty, all of whom are hired on benefitted contracts. The other 50% are taught by teaching assistants from both the rhetoric and composition and literary studies MA and PhD programs. Teaching assistants do not teach during their first semester at WSU, but instead take a pedagogy seminar, take a tutoring seminar, and perform small-group tutoring in the writing center.

I came to WSU in 2003 as the director of the digital technology and culture (DTC) program and held that position for seven years before becoming director of composition (DOC). Although the DTC program was housed in the English Department (as is the composition program), DTC was not an entirely comfortable fit for a traditional English department. My work was necessarily in the digital realm and I taught courses emphasizing digital rhetoric and multimodal composing. After earning tenure in 2010, I expressed interest in the recently vacated DOC job. My move to DOC was not controversial, but there was a small constituency of the department worried about me turning the composition program into DTC. Since the program had not moved toward multimodal composition, there was a strong temptation to start that shift immediately. As I started working with the composition program, I found there was plenty of work to do to get it on firm footing, so for the first two years of my DOC tenure I did not push multimodal composition.

One of the major steps in putting the program on firm footing was establishing a syllabus with common, required parts. When I began as DOC, the composition program had two requirements for first-year composition syllabi: the attendance and portfolio policies. Assignments and readings varied wildly, as did inclusion of elements from the university-required syllabus. I realized that the program needed a more uniform public face—one that would be recognizable across all sections of first-year composition. At the same time, I wanted to avoid the constraints of a lockstep common syllabus that would make the program's courses conform to a cookie-cutter model. Working with the assistant director of composition, we created a syllabus with common parts (including common goals and objectives), but one that also allows teachers the freedom to plan assignments, choose readings, and design their courses to play to their individual strengths while still addressing the program's emphasis on research-based writing (which typically culminates in a research-based paper). (For the common-part syllabus, see http://libarts.wsu.edu/english/composition/SyllabusTempF13.pdf).

Another important move in the firm-footing project was instituting a robust professional development program for all composition teachers—instructors and teaching assistants. Having been an instructor for 16 years before earning a PhD, I knew Takayoshi and Huot's claim about faculty development was valid: "Administrators should bring professional development opportunities and resources to faculty rather than waiting for faculty to come to them" (109). In the case of WSU's program, bringing professional development to faculty meant creating a weekly professional development series with well-established goals. I also knew that this series could lay the groundwork for eventually introducing changes in the program. During my first year, Professional Development in Composition (PDC) was launched with goals of:

- Supporting pedagogy
- Creating community
- Fostering awareness of program history, goals, and objectives
- Assuring knowledge of WSU policies and programs

PDC sessions take place every Wednesday noon during the academic year and are regularly attended by 85% of first-year writing teachers with all participants eligible to earn PDC certificates (certificates are earned for attendance at a minimum number of PDC sessions and awarded at the annual department awards event). The first year of PDC included an overall focus on WSU's scholarly history in composition studies, plus sessions on assignments, peer review, and other classroom strategies. PDC has made personal or virtual appearances by composition scholars a regular event, so during its first year scholars such as Richard Haswell and Sue McLeod skyped into the sessions; face-to-face scholar appearances included Victor Villanueva, Bill Condon, Diane Kelly-Riley, and Kristin Arola. The second year of PDC was titled "Pedagogy Plus," with guests including John Bean, Rebecca Moore Howard, Michael Day, Janice Walker, and Cheryl Ball. In my third year, PDC focused on multimodality, details of which are found later in this profile. Regular evaluations of PDC show that it has exceeded

its stated goals every year.

One important evaluative tool already in place when I became DOC was the required portfolio. The program requires that a final portfolio must comprise at least 50% of each student's grade. Major assignments throughout the semester are not graded, and all teacher comments are focused on revision. Originally, this portfolio required a minimum of 22 pages of revised work as well as a reflective cover letter. To assure consistency in the assessment of portfolios, uniform portfolio outcomes (see http://libarts.wsu.edu/english/composition/PortfolioEval.pdf) had been established when the portfolio system was implemented. Since the year marking our shift toward multimodality, the portfolio requirements have changed. This change (described later in the profile) was motivated by the difficulties the 22-page requirement presented when working with multimodal projects.

Part 1: Agency and Ecosocial Theory: Foundations for a Multimodal Composition Program

(Patricia, Director of Composition)

As an administrator implementing a multimodal composition program, I have found Jay Lemke's ecosocial theory invaluable. Ecosocial systems theory goes beyond a linguistic or a language-based approach and demands that community (and communication) be viewed in its complexity. Lemke defines a community as a "system of doings, rather than a system of doers" (10) and argues that because the human social community is limited, the material ecosystem in which the human social community is embedded must also be considered. Lemke claims "We cannot be understood apart from our connections to our social and material environments … nor outside a view of the multiple levels of self-organization of systems larger and smaller than us" (94). He argues for a complicated articulation of community and communication.

In addition to ecosocial theory, my approach owes much to composition scholar Richard E. Miller's definition of agency. According to Miller, agency can be defined as "learning to work within extant constraints, as an activity that simultaneously preserves and creates the sense of self-worth that comes from participating in the social world" (211). Through an ecosocial analysis that understands community as a system of "doings" that is constituted by its material ecosystem as well as its human constituents, the "extant constraints" of a community can be unpacked and considered. The work done (and still being done) to encourage multimodality in our composition program is informed by Lemke's rearticulation of the social as ecosocial and Miller's framing of agency resulting in a locally appropriate implementation of multimodal composition.

Like so many others in composition studies, I have argued for years that composing in multiple modes allows for more persuasive communication and for meeting the needs of composing in the 21st Century. I also believed that moving Washington State University's word-based composition program toward multimodality would be more successful if it was locally appropriate and strategically planned. That meant taking careful account of the complex ecosocial landscape in the already existing composition program.

I was also concerned about how a multimodal composition program might be accepted in the university community beyond the English department. Although I resist the idea of first-year composition as being a "service course," I know that many view it as just that—a course that will fix anything that's wrong with student writing (writing as grammar and mechanics) so that teachers in the disciplines don't have to. Because WSU had no well-established university-wide multimodal program like that at Iowa State University (detailed in a 2012 article by Blakely and Pagnac), the move from word-based composing to multimodal composing was one that could create waves. I knew the program could handle waves, but wasn't interested in creating a tsunami.

Ecosocial Analysis: The Stakeholders

One element of this ecosocial system that can't be ignored (or shouldn't be) is the subject positions of those involved. Although I am not a particularly cautious person, by the time I became DOC I had been in the academic world for almost three decades: 17 years as an adjunct instructor, five years as a teaching assistant, five years on the tenure track, and one year as a tenured faculty. That experience had taught me to be cautious and respectful of stakeholders at every level. My work in agency theory had also led me to be restrained and attentive to local conditions. The move to the multimodal pedagogy would also impact the assistant director of composition (who had an eight-year history with the program), instructors (some of whom had been teaching in the composition program over a decade), the department chair (in his first year as chair), and more.

Curricular change hinges on what instructors are willing and able to do, and even if I was convinced that moving to multimodal composition was a sound change, instructors needed to be on board too. I knew, like Takayoshi and Huot, that while composition studies does "offer many reasons why we should teach with technologies or teach multimodal composition practices, we don't have as rich an understanding of what teachers encounter when they make such a commitment to change" (109-10). Some of the trials and triumphs instructors experienced in the move to multimodality are included in this profile.

This consideration of stakeholders would be unpardonably incomplete without considering the largest group of stakeholders: students. As Richard Miller points out, students are sometimes invisible. Too often, we consider them "absolutely anonymous, deracinated, ahistorical, malleable, infinitely penetrable being[s]" (16). Through PDC, I had worked to avoid these assumptions. As the experiences of the three composition instructors illustrate, the composition program is consciously aware of keeping student needs foremost in our considerations, asking questions about their needs, abilities, expectations, and more.

Ecosocial Analysis: The Non-Human Players

In keeping with ecosocial theory, the non-human, material conditions that would help or hinder the implementation of multimodal composition needed to be considered. Were there enough computer labs available to teachers and students? Did we need computer labs, projectors, or laptops? Was classroom technology adequate? Did we need to provide all teachers with computers? Was reconsideration of the program's textbook required? What kinds of professional development would this implementation demand? The material questions were almost enough to paralyze.

Ecosocial Analysis: The Sum

At the end of two years of my tenure as DOC, I was thoroughly immersed in the composition program, had established a rich professional development program, answered a few of the questions about staffing and technology access, and was laying the groundwork needed to move toward multimodality. I am not arguing that two years is a magical point in time. My claim is that it took me two years to adequately assess the local ecosocial system and put the program on firm footing. In different systems, the timeline might be shorter or longer. I am suggesting, however, that careful consideration of the ecosocial system is a necessary condition for successful change. Since some pieces of the groundwork are vital, the rest of this segment is devoted to explaining them.

Ecosocial Agency: Professional Development

Professional development was already in place at Washington State University in the form of the PDC detailed earlier. PDC proved to be the ideal venue for encouraging teachers to adopt multimodal assignments. In 2012-13 the theme of the year's PDC was "Minimally Multimodal—At Least" and included sessions on assigning and evaluating multimodal projects, taking care to make sure that such assignments and evaluation rubrics were designed to meet the already established program outcomes. Guest speakers in PDC sessions included Cynthia Selfe, James Ridolfo, Kristin Arola, and Doug Eyman. The year's activities culminated with an exceptionally successful "Multimodal Fair" during which teachers who had experimented with multimodal pedagogy brought multimodal assignments and examples of student work. The number of teachers participating was encouraging and the level of enthusiasm exhibited by the presenters and attendees was exciting. (The schedule for the PDC "Minimally Multimodal" series can be found at http://libarts.wsu.edu/english/composition/pastPDC.html)

Ecosocial Agency: University-Wide Survey

Ascertaining campus-wide attitudes toward multimodality was another step in laying the groundwork for programmatic change. A detailed survey was sent to WSU teachers at all levels and in all disciplines. Although the survey did not mention the composition program moving toward multimodality, that move could be easily assumed since the survey came from the director of composition. The survey defined multimodal projects this way: "Traditionally, projects assigned in courses have been word-based. Multimodal texts go beyond the alphabetic, although the written word is often one of the modes included. Multimodal texts may include still or moving images, animations, color, music, sound, and more. The venue for multimodal texts might be web pages, films, podcasts, and brochures."

Responses to the survey came from 131 teachers (ranging from TAs to full professors) in 50 different disciplines

with a range of teaching experience at WSU from 1 to 30 years. Of those responding, 73% taught undergraduate classes at least once a year.

Only 8% of our respondents were openly negative to the idea of assigning multimodal projects in their classes, 13% were neutral, and the rest were at least willing to consider such assignments. When asked whether they had ever assigned a multimodal project, 53% answered no. Despite over half of the respondents never having assigned such a project, 54% said they would agree if a student asked to replace a word-based project with a multimodal one.

We received negative comments in the survey, including the following:

> I predict that if they replace traditional types of presentation, like essays and pencil-and-paper math, then this whole country will go to hell in a handbasket. The populace is already halfway to total illiteracy.

But on the whole, comments such as the following are more representative of the feedback we received:

- "This could be the type of change undergraduate curriculum needs to move far into the 21st century to keep up with the young minds in our classes/programs."
- "We are screwing the students if we don't go in this direction. The students often are equipped with skills that professor are not. We are the limiting factor."
- "If we want a greater diversity of students to be successful in the classroom, we need to be more multimodal in our delivery. The generation we have to teach now is much different than the one we were in during our college years. They are used to interactive software and having the answers at their fingertips. They want their learning to be more meaningful than rote memorization. If instructors care about reaching their students, they will become more multimodal."

Ecosocial Agency: Technology

Answers to technology questions were not easy, and in some cases, presented a "chicken-or-egg" situation. Would the implementation of multimodality require that all technologies be in place before the move began? The English department already supports three 25-station labs that instructors can schedule. But three labs are not enough to fully support a program that regularly teaches 60 composition sections per semester. An informal survey conducted by a graduate student provided information on the number of first-year students who had laptops they could bring to class. Although we assumed the number would be high, this survey found that well over 90% of first-year students had laptops. Lab and laptop situations were not perfect, but we believed they were adequate to move forward.

Classroom technology presented another challenge. Although most classrooms at WSU have satisfactory technology, some composition classes are scheduled in rooms that have minimal technology. Purchase of lightweight, inexpensive projectors and speakers that teachers can check out partially solved this problem, but the composition program continues to advocate for the updating of permanent classroom technology in the rooms we regularly use.

Ecosocial Agency: The Program Materials

The composition committee reviewed the program's textbook (*The Academic Writer*) and outcomes (http://libarts.wsu.edu/english/composition/PortfolioEval.pdf) and found that both could support the initial move toward multimodal instruction. Reconsideration of these two elements after two semesters has confirmed the initial decision.

Requirements for the portfolio were another story, however. The program is fully committed to a portfolio system, so there was a firm resolve to sustain that. We knew that the portfolio requirement that students produce 22 pages of revised text would be nearly impossible to translate to multimodal projects. We were, however, unsure of what kind of requirements would work, so we decided to implement multimodal instruction before revising the requirements. Waiting to revise the requirements could have backfired, but we were willing to take the risk so that revision of the requirements could be a collaborative project.

During the "Minimally Multimodal" PDC sessions, conversations about how to fit multimodal projects into pages led to the creation of a Portfolio Requirement Committee (PRC) composed of the DOC, assistant DOC, and several representatives from the English graduate organization and the contingent faculty organization. As a first step, the

PRC decided to take the discussion of revised portfolio requirements to a fall 2013 PDC session to brainstorm possible revisions. Ideas from that PDC session were brought back to the committee, discussed at length, and revised several times. A draft of the new requirements was taken back to a PDC session for more discussion and feedback, and a final revision of the requirements was drafted and approved by the committee. The new portfolio requirements (see http://libarts.wsu.edu/english/composition/PortfolioReq.pdf) were implemented in spring 2014. In fall 2014, a PDC session was devoted to the reconsideration and assessment of these new requirements. Feedback at this session was surprisingly positive, with the overwhelming majority of instructors satisfied with the new requirements.

The common-part syllabus, portfolio requirements, and first-year composition outcomes all include an emphasis on research-based composing. Because of their flexibility, these program materials allow instructors to design and implement courses that play to their strengths, while at the same time providing program coherence. This flexibility also allows for the implementation of research-based multimodal projects without requiring what form those projects might take.

The next three segments of this profile describe the experiences and articulate the approaches of three teachers in the program as we moved through the first year of the "Minimally Multimodal—At Least" program at Washington State University.

Part 2: Dancing to a New Beat: Music, Rhetoric, and Multimodality

(Elizabeth Sue Edwards, Teaching Assistant)

A cold November weeknight at 11:30 p.m.: that's when inspiration hit for my inaugural first-year composition course. Prior to this epiphany, much anxiety about teaching for the first time plagued me: "How should I address the program's emphasis of the three Rs: research, reflection, and revision?" "How do I scaffold assignments to ease my students' transitions into academic writing?" "How do I pique my students' interest and create common ground?" "How do I design a curriculum that is functional and logical for *me*?" The answer to these questions was music to my ears.

Theoretical Support for a Multimodal Rhetorical Analysis

Choosing a music-themed first-year composition course (temporarily) quieted my anxious mind, met departmental requirements, and created a multitude of opportunities for my students to incorporate multimodality. In her article, "The Movement of Air, The Breath of Meaning: Aurality and Multimodal Composing," Cynthia L. Selfe argues that "teachers of composition need to pay attention to … the *multiple* ways in which students compose and communicate meaning, the exciting hybrid, multimodal texts that they can create—in both nondigital and digital environments—to meet their own needs in a changing world" (642). Adsanatham et al. also echo Selfe's beliefs that first-year composition should "raise [student] awareness that texts are ubiquitous by exposing them to … different forms of discourse—alphabetic, visual, and aural/oral" (297). Selfe's and Adsanatham et al.'s parallel encouragement to expose students to a wide array of texts supports my intent to use music as a conduit for engaging my students' multiple strengths, talents, and interests. As I prepared for the semester, I was aware that I would enter the classroom as a brand new teacher prepared by tutoring experience and by a composition pedagogy seminar with Patricia. While theory and mentoring helped me plan, I still struggled to balance my insecurities about implementing bold pedagogical strategies with my desire to make my course unique. In other words, echoing Patricia's sentiments, I attempted to exert my agency over my teaching environment by "learning to work within extant constraints," while also "preserv[ing] … the sense of self-worth that comes from participating in the social world," which included finding my place within this educational system (Miller 211).

Putting Theory into Practice

Keeping my immediate audience of first-year students in mind, I sought to develop a curriculum that would pique their interest and create common ground. I was also mindful of Selfe's caveat that "when we focus on print alone as the communicative venue for our assignments and for students' responses, … we ensure that instruction is less accessible to a wide range of learners" (644). Further, I acknowledged Adsanatham et al.'s concern that "we [as instructors] run the risk of alienating students by 'invading' their discourse and making it 'academic'" (292), with the act of "invading" minimizing rather than maximizing student enthusiasm. From these considerations emerged an assignment that includes a scaffolded rhetorical analysis of a song and music video, with potential to develop music-themed research later in the semester. While Selfe advocates students creating their own multimodal texts,

I opted to introduce my students to multimodality through the analysis of multimodal texts, as a way to test the waters. Just as Leeann discusses in part 4 of this essay, my course design was testing the hypothesis that multimodal learning, in any capacity, would facilitate flexible learning habits.

Policy Constraints and Curricular Negotiations

The timeline of one sixteen-week first-year composition course heightened my urgency for increasing my students' investment in the material. Selfe notes, "The challenges and difficulties of such work cannot be underestimated. The time that students spend in composition classrooms is altogether too short—especially during the first two years of college" (643). The music theme gave me a creative pitch to spark student interest but did not fully address the complex task of improving student writing skills in one semester. The second stage of designing my course, then, entailed guiding students through the writing assignments with maximum investment and minimal burnout.

Keeping in mind the limitations of a compacted time span led me to the idea of a scaffolded rhetorical analysis, which allows my students to write incrementally, with a fully developed rhetorical analysis completed by the end of the assignment sequence. The scaffolding for the rhetorical analysis is comprised of three parts:

1. analysis of a song through Aristotle's three appeals;
2. separate analysis of the corresponding music video through attention to visual details; and
3. a comparison/contrast of the song and video to make assertions about the overall message of the combined elements.

Breaking the larger project into smaller sections provides my students with the opportunity to focus on fewer details at one time and increases their confidence in writing lengthier, more complex essays. So while the assignment sequence helped my students move toward the assignment goals, the more important outcome was that it allowed space for my students to "work with new communicative modes" (Selfe 644) not typically associated with first-year composition. The majority of my students described this assignment sequence as beneficial to their learning experience because the incremental stages helped increase their confidence as writers and the topic allowed them to work within their personal interests. Despite my students' collective positivity and enthusiasm, there is still space for growth and exploration in terms of how I can better teach the content necessary to complete this assignment.

During the past two iterations of this music-themed course, Aristotle's three appeals (ethos, pathos, logos) have served as the primary terminology for the analysis. Students gravitate to these terms but struggle to incorporate other necessary literary devices such as metaphor and imagery, or to dissect visual placement strategies when writing the music video portion. As a result, students default to summary because they lack the tools to describe their observations clearly and accurately. The assignment promotes my students' creativity through analyzing music, but the limited vocabulary hinders them from articulating "the multiple ways in which [they] compose and communicate meaning" (Selfe 642). The material space of shorter drafts allows my students to ease into the analysis, but providing a toolkit of terminology will help them express themselves better within the allotted space.

Student Perceptions

Students first express their interests by choosing a song to analyze; the act of choosing affords them agency over the rhetorical analysis. Song choice, in both positive and negative ways, provides the material limitations of their rhetorical analysis. For instance, a student opting to analyze Taylor Swift's We are Never Getting Back Together (a song that is repetitive in nature) struggles much more than a student who recognizes the complexity and potential of a song by Mumford and Sons (who use sophisticated imagery and instrumental accompaniment to convey meaning). In other words, students able to decipher the material limitations of the song or video in the early drafting stages compose stronger rhetorical analyses than students who do not vet songs for analytical potential. The second key step is bolstering the song, whether strong or weak, with a complex and creative argument; even the best songs lose their luster when not fully utilized. Each student's interaction with his or her song and video leads to a wide variety of lessons, outcomes, and opportunities unique to individual experience. Regardless of outcome, students exert agency over their rhetorical analysis from the very beginning by choosing their song, which arguably allows them to take greater ownership over their final product.

In addition to the material consequences of song choice, using music as a bridge between academic writing and multimodal learning enhances the material opportunities for in-class activities and discussions. Students complete freewriting assignments about music lyrics and video images, they share music files during peer review, and we all learn about the power of rhetoric through diverse musical artists and genres.

Selfe posits that "Young people need to know that their role as rhetorical agents is open, not artificially foreclosed by the limits of their teachers' imaginations" (645). This music-themed course began in the foggy haze of my late night epiphany; the goal, however, was never to trap it there. In choosing a music theme, my intention was to expand my students' view of academic writing to include other multimodal spaces such as songs, images, and poetry rather than being limited entirely to 8.5" × 11" paper and Times New Roman font. In the beginning, I sought only to overcome my own constraints—as a first time teacher, unfamiliar with complex technologies, adhering to program outcomes—but in the end, I found that I had also expanded my students' confidence in their abilities to read and define their own worlds.

Part 3: Collaborative Assessment: Using Traditional Assessment Practices to Evaluate New Assignments

(Tialitha Michelle Macklin, Teaching Assistant)

As a seasoned teacher, I endeavor to engage with new pedagogical practices and theories. Yet, despite my attempts at pedagogical awareness and flexibility, I avoided the use of multimodal assignments in my first-year composition classroom for years. This reticence primarily stemmed from assessment concerns, but through a slow process of enculturation into multimodal composition work, I now fully embrace this work as an integral and essential element of my pedagogy. Throughout this process, I have discovered that when students are directly involved as stakeholders and contributors in rubric creation, assessment of multimodal assignments fosters the creation and preservation of the self-worth that Miller calls for by facilitating student agency. Collaboratively created rubrics also resist the issues of standardization that Leeann discusses in part 4, since students are encouraged to think deeply and creatively in their own rubric development. Ultimately, building collaborative assessment within the classroom is a worthwhile endeavor in working with multimodal assessment since

1. this evaluation is not entirely different from traditional writing assessment and is therefore somewhat familiar,
2. the creation of multimodal collaborative assessment practice is achieved with relative ease, and
3. teachers and students benefit from these collaborative efforts.

Aligning Multimodal Assessment with Traditional Writing Assessment

The collaborative work of rubric creation through student-teacher partnership is often considered a best practice in assessing traditional written work, and this collaboration is easily translated into assessing multimodal work— something that is often either forgotten or made overly complicated as teachers attempt to assess seemingly unfamiliar multimodal texts. In fact, when assignments aren't as familiar as traditional academic essays, this assessment partnership becomes even more essential when developing assignment criteria since students and teachers often experience difficulty in articulating the goals of such work. Multimodal assessment adheres to the basic tenets of local assessment practices, allowing teachers to build on their previous expertise in assessing even unfamiliar texts.

Collaborative assessment begins by ensuring that all voices in each classroom are heard, something that is essential when assigning unfamiliar multimodal assignments. Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln provide a framework for collaborative assessment in their now somewhat dated but still very useful 1989 volume, *Fourth Generation Evaluation*. They explain that all stakeholders can and should participate in all types of assessment, and while that approach has been frequently used in traditional writing assessment, their core framework is easily transferrable to multimodal work.

In Guba and Lincoln's four-step design, "stakeholders are identified and are solicited for those claims, concerns, and issues that they may wish to introduce," often in groups (42). In the classroom or in an online environment, students may be divided into groups to define assessment criteria for a specific assignment. In the second phase, the claims, issues, concerns, and assessment criteria from each group are introduced and discussed through classroom discussion (42). The goal of this discussion is to determine commonalities and differences in the criteria list amongst the groups in an attempt to work towards consensus. In the third phase, the teacher highlights the areas of concerns and disagreement amongst the groups as a means of focus for class discussion. Again, the goal is to ensure that all voices are heard in an attempt to move towards consensus. In the fourth phase, a complete rubric is created through the overall consensus of all parties involved.

Similarly, Sonya Borton and Brian Huot support such process approaches to assessment explaining that "it is now a relatively common practice … for composition teachers to work with students to compile a list of criteria for use in composing … Teachers then use these criteria to create a related grading rubric for a particular writing assignment—one that takes into account purpose, audience, the forms that rhetorically effective texts might take, as well as possible contexts for circulation" (100). Brian Huot's 2002 book (*Re)Articulating Writing Assessment for Teaching and Learning* also extends this notion as he describes instructive assessment that requires that teachers involve student in all phases of the assessment of their work as a means of encouraging revision.

A Case Study in Multimodal Assessment

Such collaboration has worked well in my own classroom for developing all of the major assignment assessment criteria, but I have found it to be essential in developing criteria for multimodal assignments. One of the major assignments in my FYC course has become a multimodal assignment in which students are given a choice in the type of media they employ in response to a specific rhetorical situation. Because students are not used to such opportunity for choice and because students are asked to compose in a non-traditional manner, many of them are confused or nervous when the assignment begins. By connecting traditional rhetorical concepts with multimodal assignments and through creating all assessment criteria as a team (even for traditional essay work), the original tension typically gives way to the productive composition of solid assignments. In fact, after acquainting students with our broad, programmatic assessment guidelines as a starting point for developing assessment criteria, the students went on to create nuanced and detailed rubrics for all assignments, but most especially the multimodal assignments.

The WSU Portfolio Outcomes (See http://libarts.wsu.edu/english/composition/PortfolioEval.pdf) are the basis for assessment in all composition classes. Early in the semester, I provide students with the portfolio assessment outcomes and ask them to "translate" the outcomes into student-friendly language that we all understand. We continue to refine the language of these outcomes through small group and class discussion until we are satisfied that we all understand the programmatic outcomes to which we are held accountable. Each class then creates specific rubrics for each of the major assignments using these outcomes.

One of my classes illustrates this process well through their analysis and interpretation of the program's portfolio assessment outcomes, which asks students to "find, evaluate, summarize, analyze, and synthesize appropriate primary and secondary sources." These students purposely avoided falling back on the traditional notion of sources as the only authority in their writing. Instead, they chose to state in their rubric that "the author of the essay's voice [the student] must be present and that their [the student's] own argument must be an active part of the conversation." They also determined that "source information must attempt to maintain the source author's tone and voice and perspective and allow sources to speak for themselves, without forcing the author of the essay's [student's] voice on them." These rich, careful assessment criteria are certainly impressive and useful from my perspective, but I wondered whether the students also saw value in such work.

To answer that question, I surveyed students in my FYC courses. Such reflective pedagogy is encouraged through coursework and professional development opportunities at WSU as a means of better understanding the needs of the various stakeholders in our composition courses. As a student and an instructor within the program, I am encouraged to actively pursue research avenues that focus on student abilities and expectations. The instructive assessment that I enact in my classroom embraces students as active participants in the ecosocial environment of the program.

I surveyed both sections of my fall 2012 FYC class using a four-point rating scale; the results were quite promising. When asked whether this multimodal-specific assessment work helped students to feel comfortable with the grading process, 93% of students responded that they felt either very comfortable or somewhat comfortable, with the other 7% of students responding that they were still uncomfortable with the grading process. When asked whether this work helped them to understand the expectations of the assignment, 95% of students responded that they found the work very helpful or somewhat helpful, with the other 5% of students responding that they did not find this work to be helpful. When students were asked if this process resulted in a fair means of assessment, 98% of students found this work to be very or somewhat fair while only 2% found the assessment unfair. Finally, 88% of students said they enjoyed being part of this process; 86% found value in this process; and 91% said that they would recommend doing this work in future composition classes.

As a whole, students feel more comfortable with complex multimodal assignments when they play an active role in the assessment process. Many of the students also expressed that, while they may not have enjoyed every bit of the assignment, they did appreciate that understanding the task and being a part of the assessment process encouraged them to play to their own strengths in composing the project. In fact, "because it [assessment] was

based on how the writer chose to go about the assignment" (as one student noted in his or her survey), students felt comfortable in producing a wide variety of effective multimodal projects. I was pleasantly surprised by the complexity of both the digital and non-digital work that even the self-described "non-artistic" students produced for this assignment. Their works included hand-drawn cartoons, complex blogs, digital and hand-produced books and pamphlets, elaborate drawings in various media, complex essay formats, Facebook pages, Prezi and PowerPoint presentations, and numerous others.

Benefits of Collaborative Assessment

In the end, all parties profit from collaborative assessment since it allows students to focus their understanding of a text in the process of creating it. It allows students time to think through the complicated issues of assessment, and, by using class time to develop such assessment criteria, students better understand the importance and value of such formative work. Collaborative multimodal assessment "enables [teachers] to intervene and correct any misunderstanding that a student might have about project requirements and expectations before she or he begins composing" (Adsanatham et al. 299-300). Such an approach allows for localized assessment that complements larger, programmatic assessment, thus ensuring that all stakeholders understand, and at some level agree with, the criteria to which they are held accountable. This approach also encourages teachers to assess work that they themselves are not necessarily experts in assessing, something that often prevents teachers from adopting a multimodal pedagogy in the writing classroom.

Through collaborative assessment, composition teachers foster a mutually beneficial student-teacher, teacher-student relationship. All stakeholders participate in this admittedly somewhat arduous and time-consuming endeavor together, thus eliminating the need for teacher-created, solitary assessment work. In such an environment, the expertise of all stakeholders is highlighted and built upon using existing knowledge of assessment principles as the framework for evaluating multimodal projects.

Ultimately, assigning and assessing multimodal work hinges on what Cynthia Selfe calls teachers' "willingness to experiment with new media compositions, to take personal and intellectual risks as they learn to value the kinds of texts, to integrate attention to such texts into the curriculum" (Students Who Teach Us 57). If teachers choose to embrace the exciting, dynamic experience of multimodal composition, then we must also embrace the level of productive discomfort that comes from learning to assess such unfamiliar texts. Likewise, if we choose to develop student-teacher, teacher-student relationships in our classrooms, then we must see students as stakeholders with something to offer. We must resist, as Patricia recommends in her section, the notion that students are "absolutely anonymous, deracinated, ahistorical, malleable, infinitely penetrable being[s]" (Miller 16). We must, instead, trust and engage them in the critical work of assessment. As Paulo Freire says, "teachers' efforts must be imbued with a profound trust in people and their creative power. To achieve this, they must be partners of the students in their relations with them" (75).

Part 4: Learning to Adapt: Students, Teachers, and Professionals In the 21st Century

(Leeann Downing Hunter, Clinical Assistant Professor)

In March of 1999, underwent new employee orientation at a major newspaper publisher in the southeast United States. A human resources representative was introducing a round table of eager young faces to their new lives working for the publisher. Instead of focusing on the thick, three-ring binders that lay before us on the boardroom table, she offered practical advice: *be adaptive*. For over twenty years she had worked with the publisher, and during that time she cycled through many different positions, continuously adapting to new situations, new technologies, and new media. Over the years, she watched other employees get dismissed from the publisher when their skills became obsolete. This story resonated with me, because I was being hired to become a new "digital pre-press paginator," which actually meant that an entire department of veteran cut-and-pasters, who had served the publisher for decades, was being replaced by a software program and a handful of twentysomethings.

In his essay, 'English' at the Crossroads, Gunther Kress challenges long-held notions about teaching usage and conventions in the English classroom. These conventions, he argues, become less vital when communication must adapt to new technologies. Kress writes that a "curriculum based on theories of semiosis of convention and use cannot hope to *produce human dispositions deeply at ease with change, difference, and constantly transformative action*" (67, emphasis added). Rather than teaching students to adhere to a static and standard curriculum of language, he imagines the more dynamic processes that accompany multimodal communication,

where individuals must innovate and create their communication solutions. A curriculum founded in the spirit of multimodality can prepare students for the adaptive demands of their future careers.

Standardized Testing, Standardized Thinking

When students have been trained to follow rules and meet standards throughout their K-12 education, they are less likely to respond well to the uncertainty, problem-solving, and creativity that comes with multimodal projects in higher education and the competitive needs of the business world. This challenge has become more critical in recent years, because students in the United States now arrive at college with an education defined almost entirely by standardized testing, as directed by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The assumption behind standardized testing is that there is a clear measure of certainty—with right and wrong answers—and checkmarks on a generic rubric (as opposed to the collaborative, assignment-specific rubrics Tialitha describes in part 3 of this profile).

In response to my multimodal methods at Washington State University, many first-year composition students have exhibited "standardized thinking" in their evaluations of the course, and their comments suggest that they don't believe they should be making independent value judgments. The following comments come from one section of English 101 that I taught during Spring 2013. (The first two were written on the official end-of-semester evaluations. The third comment was made during the middle of the term on an anonymous survey that I supplied.) One student writes: "To improve this class I think the teacher should focus more on helping improve writing skills by showing us what we did wrong and how we could improve." Another student suggests: "Create a lesson plan that involved actual teaching of how to write essays in the way she wants instead of leaving us on our own." Both of these comments suggest that learning to write means learning to respond to a set of definite expectations, which is what they learned during their K-12 experience. While these two comments are limited to the educational environment, a third student's comment illustrates how a standardized education can lead to faulty expectations of the world and the workplace: "I really wish this class would connect to writing essays more. In my life I don't exactly plan on giving a speech to a couple hundred people about what I care about. I would more like to learn how to write an essay in case I need to write an essay to my boss in the future." Students like this one have come to think that the world is composed of standardized tests and essays. More importantly, all of the student comments above are implicit requests to be relieved of agency over their education. Learning to be adaptive is not isolated to adjusting oneself to others' expectations, but also, as Patricia points out in part 1 of this profile, it means learning how best to exert agency within larger social environments.

Social Learning Projects: Invention Mobs

While teaching at a technology institute, I designed a social learning project to address my observations of what appeared to me to be students' lack of creativity, spontaneity, and social engagement. I believed I could best support my students toward successful futures if I had them engage in the processes surrounding "invention"—as a brainstorming technique, as an impetus for making, as a boost for creativity. The invention projects took on a variety of guises, ranging from multimodal storytelling to collaborative TED Talks, but the one that became the most successful was a social learning project I call "invention mobs."

At their inception, invention mobs had no rules, no parameters, and no instructions because I wanted to break away from standardized thinking as much as possible. After various iterations, however, I have found the following parameters to provide enough direction to keep students motivated and enough flexibility to keep students creative. In invention mobs, students work in small groups to design a project that promotes campus community. The challenge is to collect at least twenty creative submissions from friends, acquaintances, and strangers on campus. The submissions can vary in modality (oral, visual, written), but should involve at least some effort on the part of the participant. Students create a WordPress website to host their multimodal materials, which include three short narratives on the purpose of the project, the rhetorical situation, and the collection process; an archive of the twenty submissions; and a final artifact, such as a video or poster, that tells a story of the community. The project is wrapped up with individual student essays that perform social, cultural, and rhetorical critiques of their projects.

In my transition from a technology institute to WSU, I considered that invention mobs might not work in a portfolio-based writing program where multimodality was still relatively uncommon. Initially, my students at WSU had difficulty grasping the value of multimodal tasks performed in the classroom. The small-scale assignments, such as creating visuals for an oral presentation, did not resonate with as many students as did this large-scale assignment that took them out of the classroom, out of their comfort zone, and face-to-face with their audience. When I turned students loose on campus to carry out their invention mobs, they suddenly saw the connections

between multimodal communication and the world that surrounds them.

Students either loved or hated invention mobs, but the reasons they gave for loving the project often came with more detailed explanations. (The following two comments were made during my fall 2012 courses in English 101. The comments were included in the cover letters of the students' final portfolio submissions.) One student observes the impact that invention mobs had on his writing for other classes:

> I was writing for my [political science] paper about current events in Iran when I suddenly found myself writing creatively, a thing I hadn't done very often prior to this moment. My paper was for once sounding like something I actually would want to read, not just facts about the class regurgitated. That was when I realized how much this class has done for me.

Another student observes not just the assignment's impact on himself, but how he was able to make an impact on the community:

> In doing this assignment I felt as if I had an impact in the Pullman community and positively impacted people's day. These assignments intrigued and inspired me because they felt important in the sense that you were not just doing it for a grade; you were doing it because it had significance.

Projects grounded in social action, which Kristie Fleckenstein describes as "symbolic acts motivated by the goal of compassionate living where the means and ends function reciprocally" (7), provide students with meaningful work spaces in which to practice their rhetorical skills and examine their impact. These projects also present digitally flexible contexts that can be adapted to any kind of student population because students can experiment with multimodal strategies ranging from interpersonal communication to video production. The value in multimodal pedagogies, however, does not lie in the production of digital artifacts but rather in its live social engagement. Multimodality, in my experience, means immersing students in the communication situations they will encounter as citizens of the world and as professionals in the 21st century. Multimodality encourages them to "be adaptive."

Conclusion

Our profile illustrates how multi-theoretical, multi-experiential approaches to multimodal composition can work under the umbrella of a composition program with common goals and outcomes. We have also demonstrated how such approaches can build on the strengths and theoretical interests of each teacher-stakeholder. Our approach is a *bricolage* constructed by all teachers who bring to the program their theoretical strengths and their social narratives. We are building a multimodal approach to composition by inviting the stakeholders to a socially rich, *bricolaged* understanding of what such an approach means. We have multiple views on how such a construction might be accomplished; we dig into our own theoretical "bags of tricks and tools" and, as *bricoleurs*, we add our own stories to the *bricolage*.

A minority of teachers wed to the conventions of exclusively alphabetic composing and reluctant to take the multimodal plunge still teach in the program. Because the WSU composition program does not require teachers to include multimodal composing in their first-year writing courses, this group of teachers may remain reluctant to expanding their notions of composing modes. At this point, the DOC is not willing to issue a "multimodal edict" and hopes that the example of other teachers in the program who are doing exciting and pedagogically sound work with multimodal composing will encourage those who resist.

This hope, however, highlights another challenge in implementing a multimodal approach to composition. Because of the firm hold that alphabetic composing has in the academy (especially in English departments populated by professors, graduate students, and instructors who have typically focused on alphabetic texts), such texts are considered the norm and hold strong sway. Reinforcing the importance of multimodality in composition requires consistent work. Although the authors of this profile and many others have continued to experiment and refine their multimodal assignments, PDC sessions have moved away from a focus on the multimodal, although multimodality has become integral to PDC conversations. Keeping multimodality more central in these sessions might have worked to more firmly establish a more robust approach to composing modes, but composition pedagogy is so capacious that keeping the focus exclusively on multimodality seemed unwise. PDC's yearlong focus on multimodality wasn't quite enough to make multimodal composition a given. But the foundation for composing with as many modes as are rhetorically appropriate has been laid.

The WSU's composition program is now considering a variety of ways to build on this foundation. Ideas being considered are listed below, but this list will grow as we consider the many venues possible for strengthening the presence of multimodal composing in our program.

1. Include at least three PDC sessions a semester on multimodal composing
2. Integrate more preparation for multimodal composing in the teaching assistant pedagogy seminar and require new teaching assistants to include at least one multimodal composing assignment
3. Establish an annual multimodal fair
4. Launch an online publication that highlights the best student work in first-year composition classes (including multimodal as well as exclusively alphabetic texts)
5. Establish a permanent space for the public display of multimodal projects.

Our profile argues for the strengths that complexity brings. One vision, one story, and one theoretical approach might seem appropriate and might provide the illusion of strength, but we believe that the singular vision of such an approach is only an illusion, not a strength. Instead we hold that, like multimodal communication itself, a composition program that is poly-vocal, multi-theoretical, and multi-pedagogical is strong because of its complexity.

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