

Press Play on Composition: Transmodal Composing Across the Disciplines

Spring 2018 Canterbury Proposal

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This past year, I served as the Peer Educator for English 14 with Dr. Brown and English 16 with Dr. Lueck. Being a Peer Educator offers a unique perspective on both teaching and learning. I offered feedback on lesson planning and assignment structure for the course, but I was also enrolled and participated in class. While taking any class a second time invites a deeper understanding of the course material, working as a Peer Educator offers a special opportunity to engage with the material, and the students, on a level different from taking the course as a student or teaching as an instructor. Instead of turning papers in, I helped guide students through their own writing processes with assignments that I had done myself, which helped me to encourage their thinking as well as reflect on my own.

Since I worked so closely with the professor and the students in these classes, I could see what worked; which discussion question, reading, or writing assignment engaged students the most. Both courses, though on very different topics, incorporated a multimedia element in a final ePortfolio where the students could revise, reflect, and add creative insights to their work from the quarter. The ePortfolio assignment involves using a type of composition not always used in classrooms. Using an online platform, students can reproduce their coursework with videos, memes, digital paintings, photos, Instagram accounts and anything on the Internet. Working on the ePortfolio assignment allowed students to redesign their work from the quarter using an interactive method of composition that they used every day, only outside the classroom.

If I was ever lucky enough to see a “light bulb moment” when working with students as a Peer Educator, it was when they were working on their ePortfolios. One student showed the power of rhetoric with memes pulled from Reddit. Another created an essay fused with Anime comic strips and another created an interactive word bubble that required countless clicks to read the paper. While composing these projects, the students were completely engaged with the subject. Our meetings were full of brainstorming, technology test runs, and excitement about the project that drafting a literature review just didn’t bring.

This isn’t to say that writing literature reviews isn’t valuable, but we have so many new methods of composing that can be just as valuable. With the creation and widespread accessibility of the Internet as well as social media platforms, we are no longer restricted to the spoken or written word. Novels are no longer bound to printed pages and movies are no longer only in theaters. We can buy, read, and watch a story all from our couch just as we can communicate with friends about an assignment or watch a YouTube video for homework

help. Friends utilize emojis and screenshots just as much, if not more, than text in group messages to produce narratives that help them communicate with each other. A video on Facebook can tell the story of a premature baby hippo at the Cincinnati Zoo with nothing but video taken on an iPhone and a catchy song playing in the background. Within 45 seconds, we know the story of Fiona, the little hippo that went viral. Clothing companies now market, not in magazines, but on Instagram using models to post short videos on their Instagram stories with links to their online store. We identify with the story the models are telling and want to join in, so we swipe up to purchase. Using a device that fits in your pocket, you can simultaneously read, view, create, and share compositions to everyone connected to your network of social media applications. There are no covers binding the story in a neat package. The classroom doesn't have to have walls. Composing is becoming limitless.

Frank Rose, in his book *The Art of Immersion*, would describe this limitless composition as completely immersive. Because the Internet “is a chameleon” that can “act like all media – it can be text, or audio, or video, or all of the above,” an entirely new type of literacy is emerging where the book doesn’t have to close and you don’t have to leave the theater (Rose 27). Online platforms from Twitter to Tumblr can invite the viewer into perpetual engagement with a narrative that involves content submitted by other viewers to create continued participation and contribution. The composition of the story is dependent on the contribution of its readers.

Rose explains how this new, immersive media is changing the entertainment industry and uses the now-infamous marketing campaign for *The Dark Knight*, a film following the Batman narrative, as an example. The campaign created an interactive fiction that left clues for its participants on a website called Whysoserious.com (a direct reference to the Joker character in the film). Super fans followed discreet clues across the Internet from YouTube videos to forums to social media posts to track down the real-life hidden treasures in every corner of the country. The combination of narrative modes allowed the audience to be completely immersed in a never-ending narrative of Batman and the Joker which brought audience engagement to a whole new level.

This ad campaign was transmodal, meaning it took its participants across different modes of communication and narrative. The immersive quality of the campaign made it so novel, and so successful. People like feeling a part of a story that they love. The successful campaign shows that people are engaging with narratives using a new form of literacy: technological

literacy. Images, videos, emojis and text are working across platforms to engage the audience using technological literacy and, just as I saw in the students' excitement when working on their ePortfolios, it is exciting. Working across modes that all offer different aspects of composition engages people with the subject in a way that is entirely immersive.

Kathleen Yancey, in her article "Made Not Only in Words: Composition in a New Key," claims that English departments everywhere "have a moment": we can continue to teach just oral and written literacy, or we can incorporate the literacy of the screen. Yancey claims that, within this moment, a tipping point, we must develop a new curriculum for composition that fully integrates technological literacy into the classroom. Students are already technologically literate, but these skills aren't fully utilized in the classroom. Should they be, they can increase engagement via participation in a digital narrative. Like Yancey, others have discussed the importance of adapting technological literacy into the classrooms (Bezemer and Kress; Marback; New London Group; Shipka), but many of the suggestions are only technological extras to a standard curriculum. Adding multimodal assignments like videos or even ePortfolios are useful, but often only exist as a small portion of a class whose structure does not come from a transmodal perspective.

Yancey claims that we have a moment and I want to use this moment.

I think that, within this moment, composition and writing have an opportunity to embrace technological literacy, not as an addition to a course, but as an essential part of the learning process that can fully immerse students in their education. In The New London Group's article, "From a Pedagogy of Multiliteracies," the authors offer a framework of designs for making meaning with multiliteracies. Their framework consists of "available designs," described as the orders of a discourse that provide pre-established resources, "designing," the process of making meaning using available designs, and, lastly "redesigning" (194-196). Within the framework of the redesigned, the outcome transforms the available designs into something entirely new that can become a resource itself and changes the discourse. Redesigning doesn't only rely on existing tools, but intervenes with the current discourse and molds it into something entirely new. For this extended research project, I want to *redesign* the curriculum surrounding composition. I would like to contribute to the growing scholarly conversation regarding technological literacy and digital humanities (Bowen; Bezemer and Kress; Daley; Hovde; Marback; Shipka; Rose; Yancey) by conducting research into transmodal writing studies pedagogy and creating a model

of transmodal learning that can be used to integrate technological literacy and transmodal composition into the curriculum on our campus. Transmodal literacy can cross modes as well as disciplines and, with it, can realize the essential value of composing as learning. Transmodal composition and technological literacy can redesign curriculum across disciplines in a way that encourages student immersion in their learning. I imagine doing this in a variety of ways:

- Designing transmodal assignment models that can be used to design an assignment in a variety of different disciplines that encourages student engagement through composition across a variety of different modes. These models could become resources for professors across all departments of the College of Arts and Sciences.
- Creating a sample syllabus that is structured transmodally for a class at SCU. Perhaps this class would be a part of the English major, but it could also be a class that crosses disciplines. I can imagine a transmodal Pathway class that encourages third and fourth year students to reflect on their completed Pathway courses composing across modes. A CTW III could also be modeled that encourages students to practice their skills from CTW I and II within the immersive quality of technological literacy.
- Offering a talk on campus for both students and faculty that educates attendees about transmodal communication using transmodal communication.
- Creating an Arts and Sciences College network that connects the college sites with department sites with class sites and with online student projects. This interconnected and transmodal resource would serve to engage student learning long after the completion of the course.
- Presenting my research in a written piece that is published on a digital, transmodal platform that can be distributed throughout the College of Arts and Sciences as a resource for trans and multimodal assignments.

To create a resource like the ones above that offers ways to integrate transmodal composition into the classroom at SCU, I plan to:

- Conduct further research and increase my understanding on the pedagogy and teaching studies of composition courses as well as courses in other disciplines. Specifically, I plan to look into scholarship on multimodal writing, transmodality, and Writing Across the Disciplines to build my knowledge of recent history of the discipline, emerging trends, and the contributors to the discourse.

- Contact professors in the Arts and Sciences and ask them what multi or transmodal assignments they have used and learn what worked and what didn't.
- Attend the CCCC conference to learn more about teaching tools, multimodal and transmodal assignments, composition pedagogy, and integrating technology into the classroom.

My proposed project ideas may not be a typical Canterbury Fellowship proposal, but my project would contribute to the growing interest in writing studies and pedagogy within our department. My research project would not only draw from scholarly sources, but would expand the scope of what undergraduate research can look like on our campus by offering pedagogical tools that could greatly impact student engagement in the classroom across all disciplines. As a student myself, I have a very intimate perspective into student learning and, after my experiences in English 14 and English 16, feel that transmodality can greatly improve our learning processes on campus. While making an ePortfolio may not be quite like going on a giant treasure hunt looking for the Joker and Batman, it can be just as exciting. I hope to research, learn, and compose a project that immerses students in their learning through technological literacy just like a digital treasure hunt immersed so many Batman fans into a story that surpassed the pages of a comic book and created a networked universe across the Internet for a story without limits.

Budget:

Webhosting fees (1 year) to create an ad-free landing page for project that	\$240
Subscription to advanced editing programs for online landing page.	\$100
Travel to CCCC Conference in Pennsylvania in March 13-16, 2019	
Roundtrip Flight	\$500
Hotel (Pittsburgh Hampton Inn at \$120 dollars per night for 3 nights)	\$360
Conference Fees	\$45
Total:	\$1,245

Timeline:

Summer 2018:

- Read and annotate at least fifteen sources regarding technological literacy, composition pedagogy, and writing across disciplines.
- Establish an online space for my project.

Fall 2018:

- Read and annotate at least fifteen additional sources regarding technological literacy, composition pedagogy, and writing across disciplines.
- Speak with professors across disciplines in the College of Arts and Sciences about incorporating technology in the classroom and assignments that have worked for them and assignments that haven't.
- Speak with students to learn more about their opinion on composition in the classroom and incorporating technological literacy by visiting classrooms or sending out a short survey.
- Begin drafting my model for transmodal composition.

Winter 2019:

- Hold focus group testing in the College of Arts and Sciences to test my transmodal classroom models on students from different disciplines.
- Attend CCCC conference in March.
- Continue working on curriculum model while doing additional research. Continue building online presence.

Spring 2019:

- Have a finished model and best practices for transmodal composition that can be adapted for use in classrooms across disciplines and is available for access online.
- Present model and findings in a poster presentation format for CCCC Conference and Canterbury presentation.

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