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Adaptive Remediation and the Facilitation of Transfer in Multiliteracy Center Contexts

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Abstract

This essay considers the question of transfer in relation to processes of remediation. In particular, we explore the interrelationships between transfer and new media in multiliteracy center contexts. Drawing on a case study of an undergraduate student named Sophie, we offer a multidimensional approach called adaptive remediation that helps composers develop meta-awareness about how they might use and reshape prior composing knowledge and available semiotic resources in ways to suit media affordances and their rhetorical objectives in processes of remediation. Specifically, we propose four dimensions of adaptive remediation, including charting, inventorying, coordinating, and literacy linking. Our hope is that adaptive remediation will prepare multiliteracy center directors and consultants to help students transfer knowledge across media and, in the process, make rhetorically sound decisions about how to adapt and reuse literacies, skills, and ideas in a variety of contexts.

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1. Introduction

Since John Trimbur's (2000) prediction fifteen years ago that "writing centers will more and more define themselves as multiliteracy centers" (p. 30), scholars have made significant gains in theorizing what multiliteracy centers might look like, how they might best operate, and which consulting approaches might allow multiliteracy center consultants to engage productively with writers' emerging needs. Theorists have examined the physical spaces needed to facilitate multiliteracy center consulting (Fishman, 2010; Inman, 2010), considered the interactions between writers and technologies (Selfe, 2010), discussed how to adapt traditional tutoring practices to account for new media (McKinney, 2009), and outlined theories and practices of training multiliteracy center consultants (Fishman, 2010; McKinney, 2010). Scholars have also investigated the roles and functions of writing centers on campus and in the community (Cooper, 2010; Hicks, 2010), explored the materiality of multiliteracy centers (Sheridan, 2010a), and defined the resources available to facilitate multimodal composing (Sheridan, 2010b). Multiliteracy center consultants—along with the faculty and administrators who train them—have at their disposal a range of theoretically- and pedagogically-sound resources that can help them lead successful consultations. When taken together, these advances suggest not

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only that David M. Sheridan (2010a) was right when he contended that multiliteracy center consultants “are asked to be ‘all things to all people,’” but also that such a state of affairs is increasingly possible (p. 82, original emphasis).

There is, however, a significant blind spot in this scholarship, one we hope to address in this article. None of the scholarship about multiliteracy centers and the consultants who work in them deal explicitly with the question of transfer. More specifically, scholars have yet to address fully the question of how multiliteracy center consultants might help facilitate writing transfer across media and modes of writing. Current scholarship has taken up the question of transfer in relation to multimodal composition (Alexander, 2014; Alexander & Rhodes, 2014; Clark, 2014; DePalma, 2015; DePalma & Alexander, 2015; Moore, 2012; Yancey, 2004), though it is not specifically related to multiliteracy centers and does not address the question of how multiliteracy center consultants might help students facilitate such transfer. And while Rebecca S. Nowacek (2011) argued recently that writing center tutors are well-positioned to function as “handlers” who serve to “facilitate transfer of writing-related knowledge for student writers” (p. 136), she did not broach the issue of multiliteracy center consultants who might need to help students transfer composing knowledge across media. In other words, while scholars have theorized transfer as it relates to multimodal composing and have identified writing center consultants as potential handlers of transfer, no one has yet theorized how multiliteracy center consultants might help students transfer composing knowledge from one medium to another. Failing to address how multiliteracy center consultants might facilitate such transfer for student composers constitutes a significant theoretical and pedagogical gap, particularly given the pervasiveness of assignments asking students to revise alphabetic texts into multimodal ones (Palmeri, 2012; Selfe, 2004).

In response to this exigency, our article examines the interrelationships between transfer and new media composing and forwards a set of suggestions that multiliteracy center consultants can use when working with students in multiliteracy centers. Our purpose in this article is to work toward a theory that might enable multiliteracy center consultants to become handlers who can help students more adeptly remediate existing knowledge into new media and multiple modes of composing. Toward that end, we offer a theory of adaptive remediation, a multidimensional approach that helps students transfer knowledge across media and is particularly suited to the work of multiliteracy center consultants. Adaptive remediation derives from theories of adaptive transfer (DePalma & Ringer, 2011; DePalma & Ringer, 2013), multimodal composition (Alexander, 2014; Alexander & Rhodes, 2014; Yancey, 2004), and remediation (Bolter & Grusin, 1999) and prepares multiliteracy center consultants to help students who are well-versed in alphabetic literacies transform, adapt, or reshape that knowledge to achieve parallel effects in digital, analog, or other new media/multimodal contexts (see Wysocki, 2004b). Adaptive remediation provides multiliteracy center consultants with a theoretical foundation they can draw on in order to help students 1) make rhetorically-sound decisions about how to adapt and reuse literacies, skills, and ideas in novel contexts, and 2) develop meta-awareness in processes of reshaping composing knowledge and remediating semiotic resources to fit new tasks and contexts. To explore adaptive remediation’s potential for multiliteracy center consulting practices, our article addresses the following questions:

- When remediating alphabetic texts to suit a digital medium, how might multiliteracy center consultants help writers draw on or reshape their print-based composing knowledge?
- What kinds of meta-awareness might multiliteracy center consultants help writers develop in remediation projects?
- What pedagogical approaches might multiliteracy center consultants use to facilitate transfer across media?

We address these questions by drawing on a case study we conducted with Sophie, an undergraduate student who was one of over fifty participants in an ongoing empirical research study on multimodal composition. By exploring Sophie’s experiences remediating a print essay into a digital story, we aim to offer empirically-supported pedagogical strategies that multiliteracy center consultants can use to help students transfer composing knowledge across media and traverse a range of rapidly-changing contexts.¹ Ultimately, adaptive remediation can help scholars, teachers, and multiliteracy center consultants assist writers who desire to build connections among literacies, genres, and activity systems.

¹ All policies regarding human subjects were followed. All names used here are pseudonyms.

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