System xxx (2018) 1–11

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

System

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/system

Harnessing writers' potential through distributed collaboration: A pedagogical approach for supporting student learning in multimodal composition

Michael-John DePalma*, Kara Poe Alexander

Baylor University, Department of English, One Bear Place #97404, Waco, TX 76798, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 19 July 2017
Received in revised form 7 December 2017
Accepted 26 January 2018
Available online xxx

Keywords:
Multimodal composition
Distributed collaboration
English language teaching
L1 and L2 writing pedagogy
Instructor expertise
Technology
Distributed cognition

ABSTRACT

In response to the widely acknowledged challenge of instructor expertise in multimodal composition (MC) teaching, our article discusses a pedagogical approach called *distributed collaboration* (DC)—an approach that facilitates collaboration among specialists with varied expertise (e.g., new media specialists, software specialists, community members, local professionals, student teams) in an effort to provide L1 and L2 writers with the support required to deepen their multimodal literacies, develop communicative expertise, and enhance the quality of their multimodal texts. To illustrate the ways that students' multimodal writing knowledge, English language learning, and multimodal texts might be improved through distributed collaboration, our article profiles a graduate-level course in which student writers were tasked with composing multimodal texts for an on-campus program. In sharing our findings, we hope to provide instructors of English language teaching (ELT) and L1 composition with a generative pedagogical approach for harnessing writers' full potential in MC projects.

© 2018 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Over the last two decades, scholarship on multimodal composition (MC) has rapidly proliferated, so much so that in college classrooms today pedagogical approaches that speak to multiliteracies, multiple composing modalities, and new media are the norm. The growing number of English language teachers utilizing MC approaches in university classrooms is due in large part to the important kinds of learning opportunities multimodal work can engender, specifically learning that can shape English language learners (ELLs) into writers equipped to meet the demands of the twenty-first century. Recent studies have shown that MC enables writers to develop digital, rhetorical, linguistic, technological, and composing skills; expands multiliteracies; broadens opportunities for ELLs to acquire and display communicative expertise; increases motivation for language learners; utilizes more pathways for making meaning; and develops multicultural and democratic values (e.g., Alexander, Powell, & Green, 2012; Alexander & Rhodes, 2014; Ball, 2006; Bowen & Whithaus, 2013; Hafner, 2014; Jiang & Luk, 2016; New London Group, 1996; Selber, 2004; Selfe, 2007; Selfe & Hawisher, 2004). Such knowledge and abilities are highly relevant to the rhetorical, language, and literacy work ELLs and L1 learners need to develop in a range of professional, academic, and civic contexts—both locally and globally. In short, given the rich learning opportunities that MC educational

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: michael-john_depalma@baylor.edu (M.-J. DePalma).

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2018.01.007
0346-251X/© 2018 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Please cite this article in press as: DePalma, M.-J., & Alexander, K. P., Harnessing writers' potential through distributed collaboration: A pedagogical approach for supporting student learning in multimodal composition, System (2018), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2018.01.007

initiatives can cultivate, along with the clear need to help ELLs and L1 students develop forms of communicative competence central to rhetorical exigencies in our present moment, MC is a valuable enterprise.

Although MC can be an extremely valuable endeavor for L1 and L2 writers,[1] implementing it into classrooms can be difficult for English language educators. Numerous scholars have noted the challenges that can arise from an instructional standpoint when teaching MC in both L1 and L2 contexts—chief among them being a lack of training, experience, and expertise on the part of instructors. Some noted pedagogical challenges include structuring and assessing MC assignments and courses, revising and editing multimodal texts, obtaining high-quality texts from students, and keeping up with the fast-changing rate and accumulation of technologies. Other challenges include teaching disciplinary-specific concepts and theories typically outside the purview of English teaching in L1 and L2 contexts but important to MC and a lack of institutional resources to accommodate digital composing in the classroom.[2]

Given these challenges, there has been a recent increase in scholarship on instructor expertise that aims to offer resources that can assist L1 and L2 English language educators in assigning, structuring, and evaluating students' multimodal projects (e.g., DeVoss, Ball, Selfe, & DeWitt, 2015; Schrum, 1999). Some scholars, for example, propose that instructors assign low-tech or task-based assignments, so that the learning curve for instructors (and students) is lessened (Alexander, 2013; Shipka, 2005). Other scholars attend to promoting language proficiency, increasing communicative competence, and fostering motivation in ELLs through MC (Ajayi, 2009; Hafner, 2014; Hafner & Miller, 2011; Jiang & Luk, 2016; Pirbhai-Illich, 2010). This scholarship has resulted in a range of resources for instructors on topics such as assessing MC (e.g., Borton & Huot, 2007; McKee and DeVoss, 2013; Sorapure, 2006), structuring peer review and revision (Alexander, 2007), composing collaborative multimodal projects (Alexander & Williams, 2015; Pedersen & Skinner, 2007), and teaching multimodal concepts such as affordances, materiality, genre, transfer, and semiotic modes (Alexander, DePalma, & Ringer, 2016; Alexander et al., 2012; Alexander & Rhodes, 2014; Bowen & Whithaus, 2013; DePalma, 2015; DePalma & Alexander, 2015; Wysocki, Johnson-Eilola, Selfe, & Sirc, 2004).

The scholarly resources listed above and the professional development experiences that we have pursued (e.g., Digital Media and Composition Institute and StoryCenter's Digital Storytelling Workshop[3]) have certainly been valuable to us as we have taught and revised our curricula, assignments, and courses over the years. Nonetheless, we have still felt that the challenge of our own lack of expertise is difficult to overcome in teaching MC.

As a means to address the challenge of instructor expertise, we developed *distributed collaboration* (DC), a pedagogical approach that builds on the notion of distributed cognition (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978; Wenger, 1998) by facilitating collaboration among specialists possessing varied expertise (e.g., new media specialists, software specialists, content experts, community members, local professionals, student teams). Collaborating with specialists can deepen learners' multimodal literacies, improve L1 and L2 writers' communicative abilities, and enhance the quality of students' multimodal texts. In DC, the writing instructor inhabits two overlapping roles, namely collaborator and designer. In the role of collaborator, the instructor acts as one expert among many who shares her knowledge and experience with student writers in order for them to learn the subject matter, writing practices, communicative modes, and technological literacies that are essential to effectively carrying out their assigned multimodal writing task. In the role of designer, the instructor designs the writing task, the learning outcomes related to the writing task, and the conditions necessary to cultivate the kinds of learning needed to fulfill the multimodal writing task. In both of these roles, the writing instructor coordinates the multimodal project by designing the task and collaborating with others to fulfill that task.

In DC, the instructor's design of the writing task is based on the learning outcomes she deems essential for students within her writing course and in the target contexts she envisions for students beyond her course (e.g., academic, professional, civic). For L1 and L2 students, these outcomes might include learning to coordinate semiotic modes, developing a familiarity with the editing capabilities of digital writing platforms, and gaining an understanding of the affordances available in different writing media. This process first entails identifying the kinds of prior knowledge and experiences that students bring to the writing task—expertise that students can use and reshape as they navigate the rhetorical demands of the assignment—along with gaps in students' knowledge and experiences that must be addressed in order to prepare students to effectively carry out the writing task. In addition to assessing students' knowledge, expertise, and experience, the instructor also inventories her own knowledge, expertise, and experience in order to identify places where she can and cannot support the learning required for students to fulfill the writing task. The purpose of identifying gaps in expertise is to consider the kinds of collaborators that she might seek out to support student learning in areas where she cannot adequately do so. By identifying points of overlap between student learning needs and gaps in instructor expertise, the instructor then determines the areas that necessitate the forging of connections with various expert collaborators who then enable the instructor to meet the desired learning outcomes. DC thus offers instructors a pedagogical approach for facilitating student learning while also addressing the challenge of instructor expertise in MC teaching. Fig. 1 offers a visual model of DC.

[1] In this article, we use L1 to refer to students whose native language is English; we use L2 to refer to students whose native language is one other than English. We use the terms ELLs and L2 interchangeably.

[2] See, for example, Alexander, 2013; McKee & DeVoss, 2013; Hafner, 2014; Selfe, 2007; Sorapure, 2006; Wysocki et al., 2004.

[3] StoryCenter, founded in 1993 as a way to "create spaces for transforming lives and communities, through the acts of listening to and sharing stories," founded the Digital Storytelling Workshop. These workshops are now hosted all across the United States and "support individuals in creating and sharing stories" (storycenter.org).

Please cite this article in press as: DePalma, M.-J., & Alexander, K. P., Harnessing writers' potential through distributed collaboration: A pedagogical approach for supporting student learning in multimodal composition, System (2018), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2018.01.007

Download English Version:

https://daneshyari.com/en/article/10150886

Download Persian Version:

https://daneshyari.com/article/10150886

Daneshyari.com