

Notes Toward the Role of Materiality in Composing, Reviewing, and Assessing Multimodal Texts

Matthew Davis^{a,*}, Kathleen Blake Yancey^b

^a *University of Massachusetts Boston*

^b *Florida State University*

Received 17 November 2013; accepted 6 January 2014

Abstract

In a discussion of validity in writing assessment, Pamela Moss and colleagues call for attention to ethical “IDAs” that constitute assessment: interpretations, decisions, and actions. Our purpose in this article is to engage such a hermeneutical conversation—that is, an exploration, analysis, and interpretation—focused not on how we assess material and multimodal texts, but instead on the preliminary question of how we encounter and interpret them. Here we focus on two genres—the scrapbook and the student ePortfolio—the first emphasizing materiality and the second multiple approaches to multimodality and multimedia.

In this article, our goal is to understand more and better the practices teachers and scholars engage in as they encounter these two kinds of texts, believing that situating this inquiry through materiality and multimodality will help us understand each and assist us in moving toward an ethical and informed assessment practice of them. Ultimately, our argument is that such an approach may be very useful in helping teachers and scholars design both a language and an assessment process for multimodal texts.

© 2014 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Keywords: multimodality; materiality; writing assessment; validity; scrapbooks; portfolios

Although multimodal texts are often associated with the late age of print, such texts have been composed for about as long as humans have roamed the earth. As Lester Faigley (1999) pointed out,

Images and words have long coexisted on the printed page and in manuscripts, but relatively few people possessed the resources to exploit the rhetorical potential of images combined with words. My argument is that literacy has **always** been a material, multimedia construct but we only now are becoming aware of this multidimensionality and materiality because computer technologies have made it possible for many people to produce and publish multimedia presentations. (p. 175)

With increased attention to and the attendant inclusion of such texts in our teaching (e.g., Atkins et al., 2006) has come an increased need for ways of assessing such texts. Simultaneously, so too has the assessment community been rethinking how to provide what Pamela Moss, Brian Girard, and Laura Haniford (2006) called ethical “IDAs”: interpretations, decisions, and actions. Toward that end, Moss et al. have identified three discourses that, concurrently,

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: matthew.davis@umb.edu (M. Davis).

work toward such an effort: educational measurement, hermeneutics, and socio-cultural studies. Taken together, Moss and colleagues argued, these discourses allow us to address (1) the soundness of particular IDAs about learning, (2) the resources of the activity systems in which they are developed and used, and (3) the opportunities for learning that different activity systems provide their learners (students and professional educators) (p. 149).

Together, the two frameworks provided by [Faigley \(1999\)](#) and [Moss, Girard, & Haniford \(2006\)](#)—the one emphasizing materiality and the other multiple approaches to assessment—may be useful in helping teachers and scholars design both a language and an assessment process for multimodal texts. As a first step in taking up the task of assessing such texts, however, it would be wise to focus on the first of Moss's IDAs and interpretation, because it sets the stage for any decision or action. Moreover, before interpreting texts, we read them; we thus also need to inquire into and theorize how we read or process such texts, in large part because we know so little about how such texts are read ([Yancey, McElroy, and Powers, 2013](#)). Indeed, reading may not be the appropriate term to describe the practices we engage in when, for example, we encounter an electronic portfolio including multiple kinds of texts: print texts, a Prezi, a video, a poster. Even in what seems to be a simpler and related text—a print scrapbook, one antecedent of portfolios—the ways we “read” photos are likely different than the way we read their captions, different still from the ways we read them in concert and in context.

This, of course, raises another question that we attend to as well: What is the role of genre in assessing multimodal texts?

As to the specific texts—A first set includes scrapbooks depicting two different situations: The San Francisco earthquake of 1906; and, a sustained correspondence during 1942 and 1944 between Japanese-American women in internment camps and Japanese American soldiers fighting for the United States. In these scrapbooks, we see composers bringing together multiple resources for meaning making, both within the scrapbook-text and across the world. A second set of multimodal texts, student electronic portfolios, emerges from an advanced writing course keyed to three different spaces: the print, the screen, and the net (Davis, Fleckenstein, and Yancey, forthcoming). These eportfolios evolve from and constitute new kinds of activity systems with digital forms of meaning making and different affordances for networking and circulation than we see in the scrapbooks.

Interestingly, however, *both* the scrapbooks and the electronic portfolios speak to one dimension of multimodality that hitherto has been largely absent from our discussion of both multimodality and writing assessment, the modality of touch: It is on this modality that we focus our attention.

**

Our thinking has been informed by these propositions:

- Multimodality varies across time and culture; affordances and the uses to which they are put vary.
- Electronic multimodality adds at least one layer of mediation to the reception of a text. Ironically, even on a touch screen, you can't actually touch the text. Which raises the question: In multimodal texts, what role does touch play?
- Electronic multimodality promises a network of distribution, a Benjaminian mass distribution of the single text, one unavailable to one-of-a-kind scrapbooks, unless of course they are digitized. Does that matter?
- Texts are intended—aren't they?—to facilitate some interaction. In other words, texts stage a dialogue; in the language of genre, any text responds to a recurring situation but it also forwards, *qua* Bakhtin, a new situation as it contributes to what we might call the “lifestream” of a genre. Still: a text, a composer, a reviewer, a dialogue.
- Assessment is about what dialogue one might have. Historically, it's been something of a Platonic dialogue, with test-makers knowing the answers all along; in Peter Elbow's terms, it's been more about ranking and evaluating than about liking; more recently, it's been more about the efficacy of a program, about outcomes, about a feedback loop. Perhaps, per [Moss et al. \(2006\)](#), it could be about meaning-making, about how we make meaning and what meaning we make of that. And, central to this claim is the role of materiality in the making of meaning, whether in composing, reading, reviewing, and/or assessing.

The propositions above provide a context for our thinking about validity. As a defining term for writing assessment, validity points in many directions. It suggests, for example, that what is being measured, tested, evaluated, or assessed ought to be the thing we are attempting to judge; that our assessments measure what they purport to measure. It includes a dimension called “consequential,” referring to the power of an assessment to help the person whose work

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/347909>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/347909>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)