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Remediating Knowledge-Making Spaces in the Graduate Curriculum: Developing and Sustaining Multimodal Teaching and Research

Meredith Graupner, Lee Nickoson-Massey *, Kristine Blair

Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH 43403-0001, United States

Abstract

Functional, critical, and rhetorical training in multimodal teaching and research must span all aspects of professional development within the graduate curriculum in order to best prepare emerging professionals for success in the age of digital media. The authors call upon multiple perspectives of their home program and offer a range of benchmarks for other programs that want to promote digital teaching and research as integral, sustainable components of their knowledge-making spaces.

Keywords: Graduate education; Professional development; *Responsive Ph.D.*; Multimodality; Digital teaching and research

At one time, doctoral programs in English studies sought to produce graduate students who were highly specialized in one or two areas of research and interested in landing tenure-track positions at Research I institutions. However, as the call for this special issue suggests, this strategy is changing as we seek to connect the university with the community and address the need for innovation and competitiveness. These changes affect how current doctoral programs and, as explained by Kevin Brooks, Kathleen Blake Yancey, and Mark Zachry (2002), new doctoral programs incorporate "the employment realities of higher education" (p. 91), which foster the need for English studies programs to prepare graduate students for careers inside and outside the university. Therefore, in response to the need for professionalizing graduate students who are likely to work in a range of spaces, including digital environments, it is only fitting that programs take a multimodal approach to teaching and research.

In "The Importance of Belief," Joanna Castner (2006) highlighted the diverse range of social and academic spaces in which she was able to develop her teaching and research interests in technology while a graduate student in rhetoric and composition at Texas Tech. But while computers and writing specialists such as Castner and her TTU colleagues acknowledge the importance of graduate education and programmatic culture to develop such expertise, not all graduate programs equally foreground the role of technology in the composition curriculum or even as part of the rhetorical tradition. Moreover, as Debra Journet (2007a) acknowledged, established faculty are reluctant to relinquish hard-won power-knowledge positions in favor of the collaborative knowledge-making spaces that technology literacy has the potential to foster.

Although it is admittedly unrealistic to expect that all faculty will jump on the digital teaching and research bandwagon, we nevertheless explore the possibilities of graduate education in experiencing a paradigm shift from print

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: leenick@bgsu.edu (L. Nickoson-Massey).

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to digital, a "remediation" (Bolter & Grusin, 1999) that we argue is vital to the relevance of the composition curriculum in the 21st century. Because rhetoric and composition is a multimodal discipline—equally valuing the pedagogical with the theoretical and the historical—the task of promoting digital teaching and thus digital research seems on the surface an easy one. However, the focus on the digital in most graduate programs, if it exists at all, continues to be the single technology course, though it is more than possible to foreground the use and application of technology to all aspects of graduate curricula in rhetoric and composition. Ultimately, as the DigiRhet.org (2006) group at Michigan State concluded, "all the effort put forward helping students learning digital rhetoric is wasted if those same students aren't also able to see the relevance of digital rhetoric to their own lives once they leave the digital rhetoric classroom" (p. 247).

Both Castner and Journet emphasized the concept of space: the former of supportive spaces for her own professional development, and the latter the acknowledgement of the shift to a "rough space" in which risk-taking and reciprocal mentoring displace positions of mastery. Similarly, this article advocates a range of face-to-face and virtual spaces within graduate programs for both students and the faculty who work with them to foster multiliteracy acquisition (Selber, 2004) in ways that span the curriculum, not to mention the classroom. The article offers multiple, intersecting perspectives from within the Rhetoric and Writing program at Bowling Green State University: a doctoral candidate preparing for a career in computers and writing and two faculty members who have had differing roles and responsibilities with regard to preparing future faculty. We examine the experiences with technology first-year doctoral students bring to their studies and illustrate how those experiences foster expectations that change as students develop their professional identities through involvement in a series of social and academic spaces. We also explore the possibilities and problematics of using and applying digital literacy in what might be considered non-technology venues—"rough spaces" such as a research methods class. Intersecting with these conversations is a discussion of the institutional challenges digital literacy proponents face in working to legitimize multimodal dissertations and capstone projects. As we argue, functional, critical, and rhetorical training in multimodal teaching and research must span all aspects of professional development within the graduate curriculum, from the beginning of one's graduate career to the job search and first position as a tenure-track faculty member. Though we came to this project with distinct institutional identities and somewhat disparate professional interests, experiences, and thus perspectives, we nonetheless bring a shared interest in exploring the many ways multimodality remediates our roles as writing teachers and researchers. Thus, our conclusion offers a range of benchmarks for graduate programs that want to promote digital teaching and research as integral, sustainable components of their knowledge-making spaces.

1. Educational histories and professional identities

In his 2006 dissertation, *Computers*, *Composition and Context: Narratives of Pedagogy and Technology Outside the Computers and Writing Community*, Richard Colby concluded that computers and writing specialists need to "pay attention" to the "educational histories of those who teach composition to see how technologies are adapted" (p. iii). We quote this source in part because Dr. Colby is a graduate of Bowling Green's doctoral program in rhetoric and writing, and while his quote is a call to action for the computers and writing community, it certainly should extend to the discipline of rhetoric and composition on the global level and to our graduate program at the local level.

When students enter doctoral programs in rhetoric and composition, it is likely that they bring with them both educational histories and professional histories in areas that are both similar to and different from the rhetoric and composition field. Depending on these histories, students will inevitably need varying amounts of support with professionalization activities. As Cindy Moore and Hildy Miller (2006) explained in *A Guide to Professional Development for Graduate Students in English*, students need to be cognizant of both the "visible and hidden agendas" that guide their actions in graduate school as they are directly correlated with their future success as faculty or as professionals outside the academy. Though Moore and Miller (2006) gave useful suggestions for participating in mentoring and apprenticeship activities, not much time is devoted to explaining the importance of integrating and sustaining digital literacy skills throughout one's degree.

As the New London Group (1996) asserted, "Effective citizenship and productive work now required that we interact effectively using multiple languages, multiple Englishes, and communication patterns that more frequently cross cultural, communication and material boundaries" (p. 64). These multiliteracies call for equally multimodal media, a combination of the visual, the verbal, and the aural developed and delivered through a range of digital literacy tools. Although Stuart Selber (2004) outlined these important multiliteracies for students in the digital age—the functional,