e.pluribus plures: DMAC and its Keywords

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Abstract

The Digital Media and Composition Institute (DMAC) offers professional development opportunities through its diverse perspectives, experiences, lessons, tools, and resources. In short, the culture of DMAC is rich and prolific. We find it difficult, then, to settle on any one characteristic that best represents what DMAC affords concerning professional development and scholarly methods. DMAC's values are skills, knowledges, and capacities that work together to form a complex exchange of professional possibilities. It is a complex endeavor. With this complexity in mind, our article explores the culture of DMAC as a circulating culture of diversity. Our multivocal essay traces keywords we associate with DMAC and its capacities for professional development. Our keywords include access, assemblage, assets, community, conversations, intensity, novice, and participation.
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Perhaps the biggest draw for attending the Digital Media and Composition Institute (DMAC) at The Ohio State University is its reach. That is, DMAC is valuable because it offers professional development opportunities through its diverse perspectives, experiences, lessons, tools, and resources. In short, the culture of DMAC is rich and prolific. It is difficult, then, to settle on any one characteristic that best represents what DMAC affords concerning professional development and scholarly methods. DMAC's task is similar to recent upstart digital coinage efforts such as BitCoin or Dogecoin. Like those digital currencies, DMAC's professional opportunities lie less in a central reserve than in the communal, shared circulation of value and exchange. In DMAC's case, those values are skills, knowledges, and capacities that work together to form a complex exchange of professional possibilities. The institute itself, along with the ways in which these values are articulated and shared, is a complex endeavor. With this complexity in mind, our article explores the culture of DMAC as a circulating culture of diversity. We offer here a multi-authored essay that collectively makes explicit what we as DMAC alumni consider to be the program's implicit ethos: *from many, many.*

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To best demonstrate this *ethos of many*, we utilize a keywords approach inspired by cultural theorist Raymond Williams (1983). Following Williams, we trace individual terms that thread through and characterize DMAC's professional development culture. In this way, we not only organize our own multiple perspectives, but also attempt to retain and enact DMAC's characteristic culture of diversity. Like Williams (1983), we too understand our own keyword project as "an inquiry into a *vocabulary:* a shared body of words and meanings" (p. 15, emphasis in original). DMAC does not have the range and pervasiveness of the institutions or culture that Williams investigated, so it might be better understood as a micro-institution, one that emerges from and later circulates through the many different institutions its participants come from and return to after DMAC's conclusion. Like Williams's work, however, DMAC does hold a vocabulary, a shared body of words and meanings for its many participants. This vocabulary, however, is in no way monolithic. A keyword is not static but fluctuates in meaning and value as it circulates with its many interlocutors. As readers will notice, many of our keywords collide, overlap, and echo one another as we explore how a single trait of DMAC is experienced and shared.

Our multivocal essay provides each past participant of DMAC and author of this article a space to trace one keyword we associate with DMAC and its capacities for professional development. Our keywords include *access* (Yergeau), *conversations* (Vie), *assets* (Dadas), *novice* (Micciche), *intensity* (Boyle), *assemblage* (Morris), *community* (Smith), and *participation* (Blankenship). Within each subsection, an author works from his or her singular DMAC experience along with relevant secondary scholarship to trace a keyword and explain how that keyword characterizes the institute. Ultimately, we offer a polyvocal text that is multiply focused, a collective composition that aims to offer as rich an account of the DMAC experience as the experience of DMAC has offered its participants.

Our overall goal to sustain DMAC's circulation keeps with this special issue's larger impetus on best practices in technological professional development. It also relays DMAC's overall goal to "suggest and encourage innovative rhetorically based approaches to composing that students and faculty can use as they employ digital media in support of their own educational and professional goals, in light of the specific context at their home institutions and within their varied personal experiences" (Selfe & DeWitt, 2015). We hope that from this multivocal discussion of key concepts, terms, and ideas from DMAC's past, readers can take away potential "best practices" for similar professional development opportunities at their institutions.

1. Access (Yergeau)

I first attended DMAC in 2008 while a graduate student at Ohio State. In the weeks preceding the institute, attendees were asked to come with a project in tow—something to work on during our time together.

What I longed to build during DMAC seemed risky: a webtext that debunked myths about autistic people and their supposed litany of deficits, using self-disclosure as my rhetorical frame. Upon beginning my program at Ohio State, I made the conscious decision to be open about being autistic. On campus, my disclosure (or, really, series of disclosures) resulted in my becoming involved in disability rights activism. I attended (and later organized) my first disability-related protests; I served as a mentor for campus support groups; I began blogging about autism under a pseudonym; I even joined an autistic book club.

And yet these disclosures, each of them monumental in their own way, had not gone beyond the university bubble. DMAC became the site from which I cultivated my scholarly identity as a disabled person. The conversations there, and my resulting webtext, were my access point into a more public disability identity.

Even several years into practicing disclosure, I write this piece with some trepidation. As well, I frame this piece under the heading of *access* with some caveats.

Access, what Charles Moran (1999) once termed the A-word, is a fraught term. It has in many respects become an empty signifier, a shiny buzzword that sounds lovely on its surface level but isn't fully realized in practice. Often there is a presumption that once we bring people into a space, a conversation, an economy—access has been achieved. Scholars across disciplines have commented on these and other problematic constructions of access. Jason Palmeri (2006) figured access as a rehabilitative project, one that divides the normal helpers from the abnormal in need of help. Adam Banks (2005) critiqued those who would theorize access as being only in the domain of the material or economic, rather than view access as participatory, resistant, or subversive. Both Banks and Jay Dolmage (2009) suggested that access, instead, requires radical social transformation. Transformative access, as they described it, involves the redesign of those normative social systems that define, prevent, or limit access to begin with.