
Cultural Shifts, Multimodal Representations, and Assessment Practices: a case study

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ABSTRACT Multimodal texts involve the presence, absence, and co-occurrence of alphabetic text with visual, audio, tactile, gestural, and spatial representations. This article explores how teachers' evaluation of students' multimodal work can be understood in terms of cognition and culture. When teachers apply a paradigm of assessment rooted in print-based culture to multimodal texts created with digital tools, they may fail to capture students' content learning and meaning-making processes that draw on diverse semiotic resources and involve multiple modes of representation.

Introduction

In secondary English classrooms, students are now expected to engage in meaning-making activities with modes that extend beyond written and oral language. The process of constructing multimodal texts involves the presence, absence, and co-occurrence of alphabetic print with visual, audio, tactile, gestural, and spatial representations (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Curwood & Gibbons, 2009). Teachers, whose formal education and lived experiences have likely privileged printed texts, must then design learning contexts in order to scaffold and evaluate students' meaning-making processes that draw on diverse semiotic resources and involve multiple modes of representation. In this article, I begin by exploring how the shift from print-centric to multimodal composition within the English curriculum can be understood in terms of cognition and culture. While theoretic culture is marked by the ability to read and write alphabetic texts, virtual culture is defined by multiple, multimodal, and multifaceted textual representations. Next, I review the literature on multimodal assessment within the English classroom in order to show how teachers privilege composition elements, technical skills, modes, or meanings in their evaluation of students' work. I then present a case study of one secondary English teacher, focusing on her design of a unit on the Harlem Renaissance and her evaluation of students' online multimodal posters of a specific poet, writer, artist, or musician. Through an analysis of discourse and artifacts, it is clear that this teacher applies a paradigm of assessment rooted in a print-based theoretic culture to multimodal texts created with digital tools in a virtual culture. Consequently, her evaluation may not fully capture students' meaning-making processes and content learning within and through multiple modes.

Theoretical Framework: conceptualizing shifts in literacy, cognition, and culture

In *Origins of the Modern Mind*, Donald (1991) argues that anatomical evidence shows that humans have evolved through four stages: episodic, mimetic, mythic, and theoretic. Donald further suggests that each progressive stage was driven by specific cognitive advancement, which engendered a cultural change in communication and social interaction. Early cognitive advancements include the ability to recall events and create symbolic representations through gestures, signs, and sounds. Later cognitive advancements, such as the ones that define theoretic

culture, include the ability to produce written symbols and engage in paradigmatic thought. Donald (1991) states that *theoretic culture* is marked by the external storage of memory that 'introduced new cognitive skill clusters that are generally referred to as "literacy" skills' (p. 746). Thus, in a theoretic culture, literacy skills consist of the ability to read and write alphabetic print texts. Within the realm of education, Shaffer and Clinton (2006) explain that, 'theoretic schooling emphasizes the production and consumption of symbolic text as a primary literacy activity' (p. 295). For hundreds of years, these skills were sufficient. However, Shaffer and Kaput (1999) argue that digital tools now allow for external processing to occur. Where pen and paper facilitate the external storage of memory, technology now enables us to readily compute algorithms, run statistical analyses, and create multimodal compositions. Consequently, Shaffer and Kaput (1999) posit that we are now in a fifth stage, that of virtual culture.

Culture, in this sense, is defined by the ways in which individuals privilege specific modes and use diverse communication tools in order to construct meaning, share ideas, and create a dialogic space with their audience. Within a virtual culture, digital tools take information in one form and return it in another. 'Whether the [digital tool] "understands" the information in any sense is irrelevant here. The point is that a person can use ... [the] tool to augment or replace not only memory, but substantial mental processing of information as well' (Shaffer & Kaput, 1999, p. 103). *Virtual culture*, then, is marked by multiple modes of representation and the externalization of mental processes. While Shaffer and Kaput's (1999) work focuses on mathematics, I am interested in how cognitive and technological advancements have impacted literacy. Within a virtual culture, literacy is increasingly visual – written or oral language may no longer be the dominant carriers of meaning. Digital tools within a virtual culture allow individuals to externalize (and essentially, outsource) some of the design work that is an inherent part of multimodal texts. Over time, these cognitive and technological changes have resulted in cultural shifts, which have created great (and perhaps, necessary) upheaval in our social practices, literacy skills, and instructional methods. For instance, the shift to theoretic culture that allowed for the external storage of memory alarmed Plato. In evolving from orality to print literacy and thereby relying on written language as a means to store narratives, chronicles, and all that was sacred, Plato was concerned with what would change and what would be lost. While possessing traditional print literacy skills was sufficient in a theoretic culture, the demands of digital media within a virtual culture require complex new literacy skills, and the ability to interpret and make meaning within diverse modalities is paramount.

I suggest that virtual culture is marked by literacy practices that include multiple, multimodal, and multifaceted textual representations (Coiro et al, 2008). While literacy skills are still grounded in decoding, comprehension, and production, the modalities within which they occur extend far beyond written language (Luke, 2003; Curwood & Gibbons, 2009; Hassett & Curwood, 2009). Multimodal composition, therefore, can include the layering of written and oral language with visual, audio, tactile, gestural, and spatial representations (New London Group, 2000; Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). In this respect, modes function as socially and culturally shaped resources for meaning making (Bezemer & Kress, 2008). In 1984, Harste et al noted, 'the multimodal nature of the linguistic sign is a key feature not only in literacy but in literacy learning' (p. 208). Other literacy scholars, including Dyson (1983), argued decades ago that emergent literacy learning does not need to privilege alphabetic text above all other modes of representation. Rather, young children's writing process involves talk, gesture, dramatization, and illustration, all of which serve as integral parts of the writing process (Harste et al, 1984). However, in many secondary and post-secondary English classrooms, 'attention to literacies has largely been confined to knowledge and practices involved in the reading of literature' (Burroughs & Smagorinsky, 2009, p. 171).

The introduction of media and technology into the secondary English classroom challenges alphabetic text as the dominant mode of representation and the literary canon as the privileged textual corpus. According to Lewis (2007), the adoption and integration of digital tools demand that teachers acquire new orientations to time, space, performance, creativity, and design. She adds that it's not just middle-aged teachers who are ill at ease with this – pre-service teachers are often uncomfortable as well. Lewis (2007) explains that, 'Popular technologies are to be used and shared out-of-school. To do so in school challenges the materiality of what it means to be a teacher, in their minds' (p. 235). Despite this tension between theoretic and virtual cultures in secondary English classrooms, a growing amount of research over the past decade has shown how the process

of multimodal composition can facilitate content area learning, collaboration, audience awareness, and critical engagement (Gomez et al, 2010; Curwood & Cowell, 2011). In my work as a teacher educator, I have seen more and more teachers integrate digital tools into their curricula. But there's a perennial question: 'How do I grade this?' While teachers understand the relevance of formative assessment to guide students through the process of composition and the importance of summative assessment to evaluate the end product, their assessment of students' multimodal texts invariably falls short. As Yancey (2004) notes, teachers 'seem comfortable with intertextual composing, even with the composed products. But we seem decidedly discomfited when it comes time to assess such products and processes' (p. 90).

In a theoretic culture, school-based composition privileged alphabetic print and tended to be individually created, linear, other-oriented, and created for an audience of one (namely, the teacher). But in a virtual culture, composition is more likely to be multimodal, nonlinear, self-directed, digitally created, and shared with an authentic audience. That's not to say that an analytical essay on *Julius Caesar* or a chemistry lab report are not relevant in a virtual culture. Rather, digital tools within a virtual culture allow for additional mediums and modes to represent knowledge. For years, these practices have been encouraged and facilitated at the elementary level, but not necessarily at the secondary level. At its core, assessment attempts to address product and process, form and function, medium and message. But problems and disconnects arise when teachers attempt to apply a paradigm of assessment that was effective in a theoretic culture to multimodal and multifaceted compositions that were created in a virtual culture. In the following section, I review the literature on multimodal assessment in order to understand how specific literacy practices, multimodal representations, or meaning-making activities are privileged within the English curriculum. I then argue that tensions between a theoretic culture and virtual culture can be evident when teachers foreground specific skills, dispositions, or cultural meanings in their evaluation of students' multimodal texts.

Literature Review: assessing multimodal composition

According to Kimber and Wyatt-Smith (2008), few scholars have addressed how student-produced multimodal compositions can be considered or critiqued as valid assessment items in their own right. To date, scholarly work on multimodal assessment has primarily focused on composition elements, technical skills, modes, or meanings. Here, I review the relevant literature and show how the emphasis on one of these pieces functions to foreground its role in the composition process and by doing so, diminishes or negates the other relevant skills, perspectives, and choices involved in creating and sharing multimodal texts. Yancey (2004) warns against taking the frameworks and processes of one medium in order to interpret and evaluate work composed in another medium. First, we err when we take the key elements and processes of print text and apply them wholesale to multimodal texts. This happens when we draw on an assessment paradigm that was effective in a theoretic culture and use it in conjunction with texts created in a different medium within a virtual culture. Second, we err when we fail to recognize the dynamic nature of multimodal texts and instead focus on discrete parts or skills involved in their creation.

In his work with undergraduate students, Kittle (2009) adapts a print-based framework that he applies to multimodal compositions. He identifies six areas of evaluation: topic and ideas, narration, multimodal attributes, creativity, audience, and multimodal effects/technical aspects. Upon reflection, he notes that these areas closely aligned with those used to assess students' written work. Kittle (2009) states:

The content of the projects would be evaluated in essentially the same way as a written piece, as would the attention to the audience. The narration category roughly equated to organizational issues, and multimodal effects (technical aspects) paralleled presentation issues (surface errors and the like) This left two areas – creativity and multimodal attributes – that coincided most closely with craft and/or style in an essay. (p. 172)

Hicks (2009) takes a similar approach. In terms of formative assessment, he focuses on mode and media, audience, purpose, and context. For summative assessment, Hicks draws on the six-plus-one traits model, which was originally developed to evaluate students' print compositions; it includes ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions, and presentation.

In the United Kingdom, the *More than Words* study (United Kingdom Literacy Association/Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2005) applies nationally established descriptors, or strands, for the assessment of print-based texts to multimodal compositions. The research report details how one strand, composition and effect, can be effectively used with paper-based and screen-based texts. However, the other two strands, text structure and organization, as well as sentence structure and punctuation, do not adequately capture the dynamic and multimodal nature of screen-based texts. Burke and Rowsell (2007) adapt this framework in order to assess students' processes of reading multimodal texts in online environments. Their framework includes four key strands: composition and effect, structure and discourse, grammar of visual and linguistic design, and repertoires of practice. Consequently, Burke and Rowsell's (2007) proposed framework values the situated meanings, modal choices, and contexts in which multimodal texts are composed and distributed rather than simply the textual and rhetorical elements. This echoes the approach taken by Schofield and Rogers (2004), which values imaginative and transformative storytelling and incorporates reflections and artist statements.

While some scholars focus on composition elements, others draw attention to the technical skills required to design multimodal texts. Since multimodal texts can be created with a variety of software, including Photostory iMovie, as well as online digital tools, such as Animoto, the requisite skills may vary. Moreover, since media and technology are constantly evolving, designers must be able to readily adapt to new versions or entirely new tools. Schwartz (2009), for instance, attunes to the process of video editing, which includes storyboarding, shooting, and editing. He also examines the creative, interpretative, collaborative, and transformative elements of digital poetry. By focusing on how poetry functions in different mediums, Schwartz (2009) encourages students to critically consider how the introduction of multimodal elements shapes the design and interpretation of poetic works. In his research on blogging, Allison (2009) uses a self-assessment matrix that includes four key actions that a blogger may take: participating (responding), producing (drafting), perfecting (revising and editing), and publishing across modes and resources, including text, image, audio, and hyperlinks. Here, the focus is on how technical skills and the iterative process of design interact with multiple modes of representation.

Since multimodal texts include modes beyond written language, some scholars focus specifically on modes for the purposes of assessment. In their case study of a middle-school social studies class, Hagood et al (2009) highlight how one teacher focuses on three specific modes during a Photostory project: visual (photos), print language (captions), and audio (narration). The content of the project, Roman history and culture, is integrated into the rubric through each of these three modes. Selfe's (2007) assessment looks beyond specific modes and instead emphasizes their function in terms of multimodal impact and statement, multimodal organization, multimodal salience, and multimodal coherence. Within each area, Selfe (2007) poses questions that focus on the presence, absence, co-occurrence, and foregrounding of modes of representation in order to create a specific effect. This approach to assessment is supported by Stein's (2007) work in South Africa. She argues that multimodal pedagogies only have value if they 'form an integral part of assessment practices in which each mode is accorded a specific value and the sociocultural diversity of students' local knowledges and modes of representation is valued and privileged in forms of productive diversity' (p. 112). In this sense, a designer's modal choice is intricately tied to their identity, context, and purpose. Kimber and Wyatt-Smith (2008) also view modes in this way. They introduce the term 'transmodal operation' to describe how students work across the performance terrain, which includes e-proficiency, content, cohesion, and design.

While multimodal texts are defined by the presence of different modes and semiotic resources, the result of the interaction of these function to shape processes of meaning-making (Jewitt, 2005). Unsworth (2008) suggests that the shared theoretical underpinnings of systemic functional linguistics and functional grammars of visual design can provide a basis for English teachers to foster students' metacommunicative knowledge about multimodal texts. He explains,

The core of these shared principles is that images, like language, always simultaneously construct three types of meanings. These are ideational meanings or representations of material reality; interpersonal meanings or the interpersonal interactions of social reality and the personal reactions to it; and textual or compositional meanings, which are concerned with the ways in

which images and language cohere into textual compositions and so realize semiotic reality.
(p. 191)

This emphasis on meaning is also central to Cope and Kalantzis' (2009) grammar of multimodality. They highlight five key elements, representational, social, organizational, contextual, and ideological and ask five corresponding questions: 'What do the meanings refer to? How do the meanings connect the persons they involve? How do the meanings hang together? How do the meanings fit into the larger world of meaning? Whose interests are the meanings skewed to serve?' (p. 365). By foregrounding the meaning of multimodal texts, Unsworth (2008) and Cope and Kalantzis (2009) examine how meaning is a textual, personal, cultural, and critical construction within multimodal texts. While composition elements and technical skills are relevant in such a framework, the focus is instead on the construction and interpretation of meaning through multiple modes and within specific contexts.

Given the current research landscape on the evaluation of multimodal texts, what implications does this have for teachers' formative and summative assessment of students' work? Burke and Hammett (2009) argue, 'By its very nature, assessing is a political act – an act of power – that is usually carried out by gatekeepers who define and codify knowledge' (p. 7). Teachers, then, must decide if the six traits of writing, a common assessment framework used for written texts, can adequately capture the dynamic nature of multimodal texts. They must figure out if students' identities, cultures, and counternarratives have a place in the classroom (Curwood & Gibbons, 2009). They must choose whether to integrate formative and summative assessment, self- and peer assessment, and reflection into the design process. They must decide whether to privilege composition elements, technical skills, modes, or meanings in the assessment of students' multimodal texts or attempt to integrate specific elements relevant to the project and objectives at hand. A key part of this process involves shifting away from our assessment frameworks that were effective with print text in a theoretic culture in order to critically consider what literacy skills, rhetorical devices, social interaction, and meaning-making processes that we value in our present-day virtual culture. Kimber and Wyatt-Smith (2008) argue, 'If our pre-digital influence means that we cannot assess evidence of students' higher-order thinking in multimodal texts, then we are failing our digital-age students' (p. 331). In the next section, I present a case study of one secondary English teacher in order to illustrate how her background, values, and meaning-making processes influence her design and evaluation of students' multimodal compositions.

Case Study of a Secondary English Teacher

In order to explore how the tensions between theoretic and virtual cultures, coupled with teachers' meaning-making processes, influence their design and evaluation of students' multimodal texts, I present a case study of one secondary English teacher, Kate Williams. During the 2009 to 2010 school year, Kate took part in a professional learning community that explored the role of media and technology in the English classroom (Curwood, 2011a). This learning community consisted of six English teachers as well as two library media specialists who often worked closely with teachers to plan and implement technology-infused lessons. I served as an active member of the learning community, in the dual roles of facilitator and researcher. Yin (2003) argues that multiple sources of data should be collected for case study research, including interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts. In this ethnographic case study, I draw on several types of data, including video recordings of professional learning community meetings, field notes of my observations within the learning communities, audio recordings of two semi-structured interviews with individual teachers, teachers' written reflections, and artifacts, including school district policies and teachers' lesson plans. In this article, I focus specifically on one teacher in order to provide an example of 'real people in real situations' (Cohen et al, 2000, p. 181).

Context and Research Questions

Kate is an English teacher at Milltown High School, which is located in the Midwestern part of the United States. Kate has been a teacher for eight years; like many of her students, Kate is white and middle class. Milltown is a suburban town, and it is located close to a larger city, Lakeland. (All

names of cities, schools, and research participants have been changed). Milltown High School can be characterized as a technology-rich school. Compared to other high schools in Lakeland and the surrounding area, it has a higher number of computer labs, more recently updated hardware and software, and an increased use of interactive white boards and hand-held devices. In addition, Milltown High School has more support staff, such as library media specialists and technology coordinators, who are available and interested in working with classroom teachers to design, implement, and reiterate lessons that integrate technology. As Kate says,

Our department is very close with each other, we support each other. I think there is encouragement to be innovative. There is encouragement to take risks involved with learning and to not pigeonhole yourself and do things one way. I think the administration wants us to take those risks, and they support us in taking those risks.

In many ways, Milltown teachers have an ideal environment to learn about digital tools, receive support from colleagues and administrators, and be innovative with their classroom instruction. Given this context, this article explores several key questions:

- Are tensions between theoretic and virtual cultures evident in her assessment practices?
- How are composition elements, technical skills, modes, and meanings present in Kate's design and assessment of students' multimodal compositions?
- Does Kate's approach to multimodal assessment effectively capture students' learning?

Interactive Poster on the Harlem Renaissance

In Kate's American Character class, grade 11 and 12 students examine the literature of various historical periods. Their study of the 1920s and 1930s includes the Harlem Renaissance, a cultural movement that was then known as the 'New Negro Movement.' As a cultural, social, political, and artistic movement, the Harlem Renaissance included multiple modes of representation and drew from diverse semiotic resources. From Langston Hughes' *The Negro Speaks of Rivers* to Duke Ellington's riveting jazz, from Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* to Lois Mailou Jones' vibrant paintings, the Harlem Renaissance involved the public performance of lived experiences, including the creation of multimodal counternarratives that pushed back against oppressive ideologies. Because the Harlem Renaissance is known for literature and poetry as well as music, art, and dance, Kate sought to incorporate these diverse artistic forms into her class. First, students read and discussed poetry by Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, and Jean Toomer. They then worked in small groups to collaboratively analyze these poems. As part of their group work, students sought out music and art that related to specific poems in terms of content, theme, mood, or imagery. Finally, groups created an interactive poster through Glogster, an online digital tool, which included specific elements such as connections between poets, songs, and works of art from the Harlem Renaissance. Students were also required to perform and videotape two performance pieces to include on the interactive poster, like a music performance, poetry reading, dance, or art show (see Figure 1). Previously, when Kate had taught this unit, students created two-dimensional posters that included written language and visual images. By using Glogster, she sought to make the poster more dynamic, multimodal, and interactive.

As an English teacher, Kate's expertise is in literature. However, she knew that she would not fully capture the dynamic nature of the Harlem Renaissance if she focused exclusively on the essays, memoirs, plays, poems, and stories. While Kate often used media and technology in her classroom, she did not consider herself an expert. That role was left to students:

If it's not something they are familiar with, they figure it out much faster than I would. It's just their reality. They're not afraid to get dirty with it. Play around with it. I'm afraid I'm going to break something. They just sit down and start plunking away with it and they figure it out.

Harlem Renaissance Interactive Poster

Your group will work together to create an interactive poster on the Harlem Renaissance based on the rubric below. You will have two class periods to work on this with your group. All other work must be completed outside of class. This requires your group to assign tasks to each group member so everyone knows what to work on outside of class. Each poster will consist of three components: Basic, Connections, and Performance

Basic: Your poster must have all of these items as listed in the rubric. You will use the poetry analysis you did for your group's assigned poet as the basis for most of this basic section.

Connections: In order to get the most out of the Harlem Renaissance, you must look beyond the poet your group was assigned and explore other poets as well as other forms of expression. Your job is to find other poems, songs, and art that relate to the theme you identified. You may choose works from the Harlem Renaissance, from today, or a combination of both. You must make connections to *TWO* of the following:

- Another Harlem Renaissance poet
- A poet from today
- Lyrics from a Harlem Renaissance song
- Lyrics from a song from today
- Work of art from the Harlem Renaissance
- Work of art from the today

No matter which you choose, provide a copy of the item, the artist's name, and your analysis.

Performance: In order to liven up the poster, your group will also be required to include two performances which will be videotaped and uploaded to your poster. Choose *TWO* from the following:

- Dance: Demonstrate a popular dance from the Harlem Renaissance.
- Dress Up: Dress up like a prominent figure from the time of the Harlem Renaissance and be prepared to talk about the things this person would talk about.
- Live Music: Sing or play on an instrument a song from either the Harlem Renaissance or today
- Poetry Reading: Read with dramatic expression a poem from either the Harlem Renaissance or today.
- Art Show: Explain a collection of art (at least 5 pieces) from either the Harlem Renaissance or today.
- Play Music: Play a recording of a song from either the Harlem Renaissance or today (class appropriate)

Be sure to introduce each performance. After each performance, you must explain how this connects to the theme to which your group was assigned. Each performance may be completed by one or more group members.

Figure 1. Kate's instructions for the Harlem Renaissance interactive poster.

Before she designed the interactive poster project, Kate had limited experience with Glogster and her students had none. Her first experience with this specific tool occurred as the learning community worked individually and collaboratively in a computer lab. After Kate registered for a free account through Glogster EDU, she was able to start designing her own interactive poster (see Figure 2). The toolbar on this page readily allows users to add multimodal elements, such as still and moving images, audio, video, and text. Drag-and-drop features and editing options allow users to easily manipulate the design of their interactive poster. These tools, coupled with the ability to upload or link to videos, photos, and sound recordings as well as multiple choices of available backgrounds, fonts, and graphics, facilitate the external processing inherent in virtual culture. With the interactive poster project, students engaged in a process of design through remixing historical and contemporary elements across multiple modes of representation. Glogster's user interface facilitated this process by allowing for external processing of multimodal elements to readily occur. Students could input hyperlinks to make YouTube videos appear or quickly select shapes and images from a pre-existing gallery to add to their interactive poster. As a digital tool, Glogster facilitated (and some would say, automated) the design process.

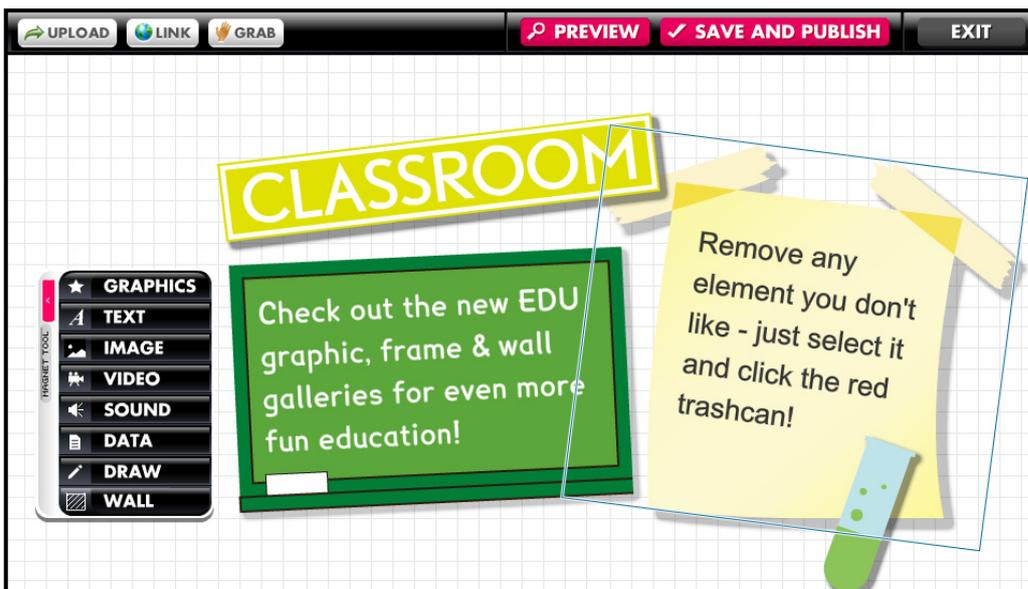


Figure 2. Glogster EDU.

Kate included three main elements in her assessment of the interactive poster: a basic analysis of poems, connections between historical and contemporary works, and performance of relevant artistic forms (see Figure 3). This rubric was based on the one that Kate had previously used for students' two-dimensional posters, but she added the performance pieces. By the time they started their interactive poster, students had already worked in small groups to analyze a selection of two to three poems. On the poster, they expanded on that work to identify a key theme and add a biography of the poet and 'decorations and images' related to the poem. Students were then asked to connect this theme to two historical or contemporary poets, songs, or work of arts. In addition, they needed to videotape two performance pieces to include on their interactive poster. In one of the meetings of the professional learning community, Kate discussed this project with me and with the school's library media specialist, Laura:

Laura: Students are getting so good at media projects.

Kate: So they're a lot of flash but not a lot of substance?

Laura: Yeah, for so many of them, they look at the rubric and want to check it off. I need four pictures? Okay, picture, picture, picture, picture. And they slap it on there. But is there a reason why they chose that?

Kate: I get that. They think it looks good on the surface, but there's no depth.

In her design of the assignment, Kate wanted to value that depth. Laura and I suggested that she focus on the design process involved in creating multimodal texts and encourage students to critically consider their design choices related to their interactive poster. We noted that a separate reflection sheet could be useful to facilitate the design process. Weeks later, the initial instructions that students received (Figure 1) clearly specified how many songs, videos, or images students should add. However, in the rubric (Figure 3), these multimodal elements are not mentioned at all. Rather than having students use written language to critically consider their design choices separate from the interactive poster, Kate opted to have them provide written explanations and bulleted lists on the interactive poster itself. Despite Laura's suggestion to avoid prescribing the number of audio or visual elements, Kate gave specific requirements. In the following section, I consider how Kate's assessment framework may reveal tensions between cultures and literacy practices.

	Item	Excellent	Good	Emerging	Ouch!
Basic	Theme	5: Displays <i>theme_statement</i> prominently; the theme that ties your poster together is obvious	4: Displays theme as a general topic; the theme that ties your poster together is obvious	3: Displays theme somewhat clearly; may be difficult to find in display	2-0
	Poems	5: Clearly and neatly displays 2-3 poems of assigned author; no typos	4: Includes poems, but they have 1-2 typos	3: Includes only 1 poem, or poems be sloppy or have 3-5 typos	2-0
	Explanation	20: Includes a well-developed bulleted list of reasons as to how each poem demonstrates the theme; reasons are insightful and reflect class criteria	16: Includes a brief bulleted list of reasons as to how each poem demonstrates the theme; reasons reflect class criteria; some may be a stretch	12: Includes a bulleted list, but most reasons are surface-level interpretations; some reflect class criteria	10-0
	Poet	10: Provides a brief biography of poet that highlights the most interesting aspects; biography is in own words	8: Provides a brief biography of poet; biography is own words	6: Provides a biography copied from another source; source is provided	5-0
	Images	20: Provides several additional images and decorations that relate to theme, poet, etc; help make poster attractive and appealing	16: Provides several additional images and decoration that relate to theme, poet, etc, but some seem unrelated	12: Provides additional images but could use more, or most don't seem to relate	10-0
Connections		15: Includes a legible/clear copy of the item; includes a well-developed bulleted list of reasons as to how the item demonstrates the same theme; reasons are insightful and reflect class criteria	12: Includes a legible/clear copy of the item; includes a brief bulleted list of reasons as to how the item demonstrates the same theme; reasons reflect class criteria; some may be a stretch	9: Includes a copy of the item; includes a bulleted list, but most reasons are surface-level interpretations; some reflect class criteria	7-0
		15: Includes a legible/clear copy of the item; includes a well-developed bulleted list of reasons as to how the item demonstrates the same theme; reasons are insightful and reflect class criteria	12: Includes a legible/clear copy of the item; includes a brief bulleted list of reasons as to how the item demonstrates the same theme; reasons reflect class criteria; some may be a stretch	9: Includes a copy of the item; includes a bulleted list, but most reasons are surface-level interpretations; some reflect class criteria	7-0
Performance		15: Briefly introduces show with an effective attention getter; performance shows great enthusiasm, thought, creativity, and effort; explains how performance connects to theme in a succinct, clear and insightful manner	12: Briefly introduces performance; shows great thought and creativity; explains how performance connects to theme in a clear manner	9: Gives little or no introduction to performance; simply goes through the motions to complete the performance; attempts to explain how performance connects to theme, but may be confusing or related only on a surface level	7-0

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Figure 3. Kate's rubric for the Harlem Renaissance interactive poster.

Cultural Tensions in Multimodal Assessment

In a theoretic culture, it would have been sufficient for students to respond to the Harlem Renaissance through written language. However, Kate understood that 'literacy pedagogy must now account for the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies' (New London Group, 2000, p. 9). Despite her own lack of expertise with technology and multimodal composition, Kate saw digital tools as a way to facilitate students' learning and increase their engagement:

I always think that technology can be a way to get them excited, to get them into something they weren't able to get into before. So many kids walk in the door saying 'I'm not into reading. I don't read books. I don't do this ...' and I'm like, 'Let's get past that so we can get on to the learning and everything else.'

Consequently, Kate conceptualized multimodal texts as a means to overcome students' resistances to written texts. To her, students may not see themselves as readers and writers, but they did see themselves as users of digital tools. Through the interactive poster project, Kate attempted to capitalize on students' interest in digital media and their perceived expertise with technology in order to teach them about the Harlem Renaissance.

However, her rubric shows that she still privileged written language as the primary carrier of meaning and, consequently, that her assessment practices were still firmly rooted in a theoretic culture. Not only did she specify that excellent responses would take the form of written language, she also noted whether students' work should consist of prose or bulleted lists. In the performance section, even if students opted to play music or produce art, they must also include an oral or written explanation of how the performance connects to the theme of the interactive poster. Jewitt (2006) suggests that when alphabetic print dominates the screen, it can be seen as a kind of resistance to the multimodal potential of new technologies:

In other words, a large amount of writing on screen is becoming a sign of convention or tradition. It functions to reference the values of specialist knowledge, authority, and authenticity associated with the printed era ... It takes a considerable amount of work to maintain writing as the dominant mode on screen. It also serves to assert the connection between the old and the new. (p. 108)

The ways in which Kate designed the interactive poster project clearly reinforce the privileged status of written text. When students created or included multimodal elements, she specified that they must be explained via written language in order to reinforce their relevance and authenticity. Even though she focused on written language, she did not address how students' choices in regard to font style, size, shape, and placement afford particular effects. While typography can serve as an 'ethos of innovation' (Van Leeuwen, 2005, p. 142), all written language within the interactive poster was evaluated in a similar manner regardless of design choices.

In her reflection of the project, Kate viewed the digital tool itself, rather than her design of the project, as a limiting factor:

But I think there were elements of Glogster, though, that maybe hindered some of that creativity because they were boxed into that little space. And they were frustrated with that. But that's true no matter what you choose to do.

While Kate attuned to the role of composition elements and modes in this project, certain modes and semiotic resources are clearly viewed as the primary carriers of meaning. Furthermore, technical skills are not explicitly taught, discussed, or assessed; Kate assumed that all students possessed the requisite skills and design knowledge demanded for this project. The focus here is on textual meanings, and to a lesser degree, on ideational meanings. While interpersonal meanings may be constructed, they are not valued within the context of Kate's assessment of students' learning. Within a virtual culture, digital tools facilitate the creation of multimodal texts. However, as always, the ways in which these texts reveal students' meaning-making processes and content learning are still paramount.

At the end of the project, each group shared their interactive poster with the class. While Kate had designed the interactive poster project on her own, she later had a pre-service teacher in her classroom. Her pre-service teacher, Annie, opted to have each group stand in the front of the classroom and share their poster on the interactive whiteboard, with each group discussing their poster one at a time. Consequently, the audience did not have the opportunity to individually 'read' the group's poster by playing the videos, listening to the songs, or reading the related text. Kate didn't agree with this approach, but noted:

It was [Annie's] choice, she was teaching at the time. She chose to have them present them and I wouldn't. I think they need to be interactive and students need to be at a computer and be able to pull them up one at a time and look at them.

This is an important point. Kate acknowledged that students need to individually navigate the interactive posters in order to truly make meaning from them. As Burke (2009) puts it, 'Reading books and reading screens are not the same experience, though they may share elements in common' (p. 51). By simply hearing about what a group chose to include and why, they were not able to fully engage with the material. Furthermore, the way the group 'talked through' their poster functioned to reinforce a linear, unilateral approach. With interactive, multimodal texts, it is essential that individuals find and create their own reading path. As Jewitt (2005) explains, 'The design of modes often offers students different points of entry into a text, possible paths through a text, and highlights the potential for readers to remake a text via their reading of it' (p. 329). This process of making and remaking a text reflects the considerable design efforts of its creators (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). By not creating space for this individual, multidirectional reading to occur, Kate and Annie limited students' learning from each other and from the multimodal texts about the Harlem Renaissance.

Conclusion

'Teaching that incorporates, models, and challenges work in communicating within new media spaces provides students with a different degree of knowing' (Kajder, 2010, p. 87). If we recognize that learning and knowing within a virtual culture occur within and through multiple, multimodal, and multifaceted textual representations, our approaches to design and evaluation must change. Rather than specifying certain tools or offering a limited range of acceptable modes of representation, perhaps teachers need to engage students in a critical discussion of the affordances and constraints of modes, mediums, and tools for given purposes. Instead of teachers developing a clearly delineated rubric that specifies criteria related to these elements, students and teachers can jointly construct formative and summative assessments that can capture the design process, modal choices, and meaning-making. For instance, Sadler (1989) argues that when students are able to identify the specific dimensions of criteria and see how they function in their own and others' work, they are more apt to value the criteria to monitor their own learning.

Moving forward, the assessment of students' multimodal text must value the complex ways in which technical skills, composition elements, modes, and meaning interact. The dialectical process of designing and reading multimodal compositions needs to inform students' self-monitoring of their own learning and their metaknowledge of their design choices. This process

can be supported through ongoing technology-focused professional development that features opportunities for hands-on learning, collaboration, and critical reflection (Curwood, 2011b). It's not enough for teachers to use digital tools in the classroom. The transformative power of technology can only be realized through the ways in which teachers design the learning environment, create space for formative and summative evaluation, and value students' use of multiple modes of representation.

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