Chapter 13
Multimodal Response and Writing as Poetry Experience

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ABSTRACT

What affordances do multimodal and digital information provide to the student and teacher with regard to responding to and writing poetry? This question juxtaposes one of the oldest literary genres in human history (i.e., poetry), with some of the newest technologies available. To enrich the content and affect as students experience poetry, technology may seem like an unwelcome stranger. Research has found, however, that "multimedia texts and multimodal composing may actually shift classroom culture toward a more learner-centered paradigm" (Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003, pp. 381-382). This chapter explores the integration of technology with both response to poetry and authorship of poetic works as a means to enrich English classroom experiences. In the authors' view, important work in this arena must not use technological tools for the sake of using technology in the classroom, but, rather, for the sake of enriching literary experiences. Ultimately, by connecting response, authorship, and multimodal technologies, the teaching of poetry may be enhanced by the teaching of 21st century literacy skills. Toward these ends, the authors share opportunities for intertwining multimodal text with the teaching of poetry to enrich literacy and literary experience in middle and high school classrooms.

INTRODUCTION

Acknowledging poetry as arguably the oldest literary genre in human history, it is intriguing to juxtapose some of the oldest texts with some of the newest technologies. Recent research has begun to examine approaches to teaching poetry that embrace *either* response *or* authorship merged with new technologies (See, for example, Bailey, 2009; George, 2002; Jewitt, 2005; Hughes & John, 2009; McVee, Bailey, & Shanahan, 2008; Pappas & Varelas, 2009; Reilly, 2008; Wissman, 2009).

This chapter explores the integration of technology with *both* response to poetry and authorship of poetic works as a means to enrich English classroom experiences. In our view, important work in this arena must not use technological tools for the sake of using technology in the classroom, but, rather, for the sake of enriching literary experiences. We also believe that any effort to teach writing must also include aspects of responding to mentor texts. Ultimately, by connecting response, authorship, and multimodal technologies, the teaching of poetry may be enhanced by the teaching of 21st century literacy skills—and vice versa. Toward these ends, we share opportunities for intertwining multimodal text with the teaching of poetry to enrich literacy and literary experience in middle and high school classrooms.

What do multimodal and digital information afford to the student and teacher with regard to responding to and writing poetry? In this chapter, we present findings from a research study that was conducted in a high school English classroom. The research helped us identify and evaluate the pedagogical affordances that technology lends to reading and writing poetry. This work, which has been tested by pre-service and in-service public school teachers, reflects an ongoing exploration of theory, research, and practice by the authors (PhDs and university professors in Literacy, English Education, Curriculum and Instruction, and Educational Technology, who are all former public school teachers).

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

This section captures and shares the introspection on the part of the authors, as we worked with and expanded our own thinking on the theory and practice associated with this work. The rich theory and research that informed the work relied in part on that which informs writing and literature instruction. However, the evolving nature and constant state of flux of multimodal literacy practices led us

to consider additional theoretical perspectives as we reflected critically on our findings. Though we based our initial research on the tenets of Rosenblatt's transactional theory (1938/1995; 1978) and on the theory, ethics, and philosophy of Bakhtin (1981), we also relied on perspectives arising from the abundance of work on multimedia, design, and visual literacies (Rose & Meyer, 2002; New London Group, 1996; Alvermann, 2002). Thus, we ultimately aimed to define multimodal poetry as it is enriched by the interweaving of theoretical perspectives from the realms of literature, literacy, and technology.

Transactional Theory

Rosenblatt's transactional theory of literary work (1938/1995; 1978) diverges from the New Critical perspective that readers examine texts in order to extract "the meaning." Rosenblatt states that during transactions with literary texts, readers draw on past and present literary and life experience to create meaning and posits that "'[t]he poem' comes into being in the live circuit set up between the reader and 'the text'" (1978, p. 14). Faced with traditional curricular and new high stakes testing requirements, today's literacy educators are pressured by technology's promise to expand the repertoire of students' literacy experiences. At this juncture, Rosenblatt's theory offers an important reminder that regardless of, and perhaps even because of increased pressures, it is the role of the teacher to "foster fruitful... transactions" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 26) between readers and *all kinds of texts*. Transactional theory also highlights the active, recursive, and multifaceted nature of reading and response, creating a model of classroom reading that values students' initial responses as a significant first step in meaning negotiation toward mature, considered responses (Rosenblatt, 1938/1995, 1978; Probst, 2004). In our research study, students selected multimodal content from the Internet and used it to negotiate meaning with poetry. Our work serves to complicate and enrich

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