

A CEA Forum Roundtable

Teaching Writing in New Spaces: Access, Design, and Application in the Technology-Equipped Classroom

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It is not uncommon to expect students to produce texts using the broadest definition possible. While certainly more instructors still expect traditional texts, non-traditional and multimodal texts are no longer a rarity in the composition classroom. Across the country, teachers and entire programs are beginning to integrate these new approaches into writing courses. From the inclusion of blogs to the creation of videos, when students are asked to create multimodal texts they are demonstrating their ability to write in new spaces, to new audiences, and with new purpose. Changes to disciplinary definitions of “literacy” and “text,” in addition to countless conference presentations, articles, chapters, and books, have illuminated the current discussion surrounding the changing nature of writing. While other articles discuss the implementation of new media in the classroom, one area where scholarship has been less exhaustive is in covering the practical issues.

The way in which writing is taught is changing, and scholars have been moving the process forward for years (Moran; C. Selfe; Sidler, Morris, and Smith). The spaces in which students are writing outside of the university are changing as well, and as this generation of students enters the writing classroom they bring with them certain expectations and

understandings of writing. The expectations and understandings of texts are quite different, and so too are the expectations and understandings of the writing that graduates should be prepared to produce when entering the workforce. Changes in writing have led to a need for a new definition of literacy. A literate individual must “possess a wide range of abilities and competencies, many literacies. . . . from reading online newspapers to participating in virtual classrooms” (NCTE). The fact is, “[t]eachers in every discipline, but especially teachers of writing, must eventually grapple with” issues of technology, literacy, and culture “if we are to uphold our historical roles as teachers who prepare students for civic as well as academic discourse” (Sidler, Morris, and Smith 2).

The changes to what we are teaching and where students are composing requires more careful reflection; however, this increased need for reflection has in large part been ignored, particularly with regards to the physical spaces within which we meet. In the new spaces where we are teaching writing, particularly computer-equipped classrooms, we must realize that there are many benefits, but also many challenges. Although these environments are conducive to composing texts, “computer classrooms [have] significantly higher levels of contact among classmates and between students and teachers” and the “conversations among students in the computer classrooms [are] more likely to address issues related to student writing than social issues” (Palmquist, Kiefer, Hartvigsen, and Goodlew 54). Even though the computer classroom may lead to increased participation, the affect of classroom environments on pedagogy is one that must be considered.

This roundtable attempts to address issues of access, design, and application that have been undervalued in scholarly work. In “Teaching Writing in a Digital Age: Addressing Issues of

Access,” Brittany B. Cottrill looks at how issues of access are more complicated than just possession; instead, access includes multiple levels of support. Vanessa Cozza’s “Reflecting on Teaching Experiences in the Lab: Challenges with Classroom Design” focuses on her experiences in computer-equipped classrooms at two different institutions. Her analysis serves as an example of how classroom dynamics affect a student-centered pedagogy and collaborative learning environment. While traditional environments lack the tools students need to compose, technological classrooms often eliminate comfortable discussion environments. Katherine Fredlund’s “Teaching in a Laptop Classroom: Merging Traditional with Technological” addresses how a laptop classroom eliminates both these issues but also creates new problems for the instructor to deal with. Bret Bowers’ “Disrupting Determinism: Classroom Design as a Technology” looks at how classroom design functions as a technology. His analysis will provide examples of the problems of classroom design and how the classroom design serves to limit and/or determine classroom pedagogy and ideology. Finally, Bowers offers possibilities for subverting the dominant ideology present within classroom spaces. Ultimately, these four articles come together as a means to discuss various challenges that instructors face but that are often overlooked.