THE POSSIBILITIES OF PUBLICS: NEW MEDIA
AND GENRE IN THE FIRST-YEAR
COMPOSITION
COURSE

A Thesis
Presented
to the Faculty of
California State University, Chico

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
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in
English

By
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Spring 2011
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I dedicate this work to everyone that has helped me to get where I am and will continue to help me get where I’m going. Thank you to my committee: Tom Fox and Chris Fosen. Tom, you are one of the most influential and inspiring teachers I have, or will, get the chance to work with. I am not able to describe how much you’ve shaped me as a teacher, researcher and mentor. Chris, and Kim Jaxon, thank you for guiding me through Chico State and helping me to recognize that I had found a profession I love. To my parents, my brother, my friends and my roommate: I love you – thank you for putting up with me. Last, thank you to the Academy of Communications and Technology teachers I had during my time at Chico High. Becoming an English teacher, and so many of you guessed I would, has made me recognize the way your program shaped me into the student and teacher I now am. Many thanks and much love to all of you.
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ABSTRACT

THE POSSIBILITIES OF PUBLICS: NEW MEDIA AND GENRE IN THE FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION COURSE

By

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Master of Arts in English

California State University, Chico

Spring 2011

This thesis analyzes work produced by students in my First Year Composition courses, after implementing a syllabus focused genre study and new media technologies in order to promote public participation through writing. To analyze the work of my course, I review the public sphere theory of Jürgen Habermas and other modern public sphere theory, particularly that related to FYC instruction, which suggests that the internet has brought about a need for a re-examination of how the formation and practices of publics occur. In the following chapters I examine the relevance of public sphere theory, genre theory, multimodal and new media practices to illustrate and review the work done by my students in two sections of FYC courses I designed and taught. The
first chapter reviews not only Habermas, but also more recent theorists who use public sphere theory and use of new media in inquiry-based FYC classes. The second chapter describes how inquiry is taught in my syllabus and summarizes my research methods. The third chapter examines students’ public participation through the use of Google sites as e-portfolios (digital portfolios of student work) and introduces definitions of new media genres and the genre mashing done by students in the final productions of their inquiry projects. Throughout, I examine issues of responsible agency and engagement in order to assess possibilities for student learning.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: COMPOSING

IN THE 21ST CENTURY

After being a part of Chico State’s English program for seven years, I’ve seen how much FYC is expected to do. I’ve been a writing center mentor, writing workshop leader, writing classroom in-class mentor and now a First Year Composition (FYC) Teaching Associate. From these experiences, I walked away thinking about how FYC could better prepare students to enter civically engaged publics.

Since I am still a student, I was learning not only from my teaching experiences but also by being an active learner. The more I read about and experienced new media in FYC classrooms, the more ideas I have. The study of new media is difficult because of the perpetual modal and generic evolution that occurs online. While I’m not suggesting that FYC teachers and students can possibly work with or experience everything the internet has to offers in terms of writing, I am suggesting that knowing how to assess exigencies for writing includes a personal investment in exploring or imagining audiences and consciously choosing effective genres and modes. In my courses, I moved from using one blog as the class’s “public” to having each student build their own website. FYC students have always been the next generation of potential public participants, but as Howard Rheingold points out in his “Using Participatory Media and Public Voice to Encourage Civic Engagement:”
What is new is a population of “digital natives” who have learned how to learn new kinds of software before they started high school, who carry mobile phones, media players, game devices, and laptop computers and know how to use them, and for whom the Internet is not a transformative new technology but a feature of their lives that has always been there, like water and electricity. This population is both self-guided and in need of guidance: although a willingness to learn new media by point-and-click exploration might come naturally to today’s student cohort, there’s nothing innate about knowing how to apply their skills to the processes of democracy. Internet media are not offered here as the solution to young people’s disengagement from political life, but as a possibly powerful tool to be deployed toward helping them engage. (Rheingold 99)

Today’s students know the tools of new media, but may not yet know how to use them for public participation.

To support teaching students to participate in public discourse, Rheingold believes that other peers in the class and the teacher could serve as the “first ‘public’ that reads/views/listens and responds” (Rheingold 99). Use of new media technologies, such as class blogs or student-built websites/e-portfolios, move peer response, assignment modeling and revision to public, digital places. While much of the same peer response work could be done by passing papers around the classroom, the use of new media technologies engages students in activities that could also help them participate publicly outside the classroom.

Prompted by Rheingold, I decided to focus my FYC classes on new media as a means to encourage public participation. I wanted to create a class that I would then study for this thesis to see what new media actually enable students to do, or not do. To think through issues of the public, I turned to Jürgen Habermas. In The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, Habermas traces how state institutions and the media privatized spheres of public concern and discussion. Habermas concludes his book by pointing out that the media had privatized the public sphere, but doesn’t suggest that
possibilities for the public sphere were gone forever. Modern public sphere theory, particularly that related to FYC instruction, suggests that the internet has brought about a need for a re-examination of how the formation and practices of publics occur. The internet affords more access for public discussion that ever before. The internet mixed with FYC practices could address the needs of modern students as public participants. What I still needed to do was think about how this type of study relates to larger goals of writing instruction.

In the following chapters I examine the relevance of public sphere theory, genre theory, multimodal and new media practices to illustrate and review the work done by students in two sections of FYC courses I designed and taught. The first chapter reviews not only Habermas, but also more recent theorists who use public sphere theory and use of new media in inquiry-based FYC classes. The second chapter describes how inquiry is taught in my syllabus and summarizes my research methods. The third chapter examines students’ public participation through the use of Google sites as e-portfolios (digital portfolios of student work) and introduces definitions of new media genres and the genre mashing done by students in the final productions of their inquiry projects. Throughout, I examine issues of responsible agency and engagement in order to assess possibilities for student learning.

The advent of media technologies, such as Google sites, has given young adults the ability to write more publicly and this writing, as described by Jenn Fishman, Andrea Lunsford, Beth McGregor, and Mark Otuteye in “Performing Writing, Performing Literacy,” is “emotional, immediate, and unconstrained, self-sponsored writing [that] takes on additional characteristics when it is directed toward external
audiences, especially public rather than personal ones” (Fishman 230). The public writing
students already do online encompasses many of the traits that my FYC classes intend to
promote, such as student engagement and public participation. As Fishman et. al’s work
with the Stanford Writing study has shown, writing in and out of the classroom can be
called “writing performances” or “students’ live enactment of their own writing”
(Fishman 226). This definition of writing as a performance encompasses writing as it
happens anywhere, in and out of class.

As I’ve learned from watching my students, making decisions about genre and
mode are complex. With the possibilities afforded by the web and new media
technologies, these decisions are ever more complicated. The vocabulary for how
students make those decisions doesn’t seem to exist or is in the process of being defined.
How instructors observe student work in terms of “when” or “how” it becomes public is
no easy task. In trying to create a space for students to focus on making generic and
modal decisions, I use new media tools in a mapping/outlining assignment (see Fig. 1 on
next page). By creating an Inquiry Map, I asked students to think specifically about their
purpose and audience but then gave them options for designing the organization of their
project. Debategraph, the website offered as a tool for this assignment, affords a chance
for organizing thoughts in a visual and non-linear cloud (this assignment and the
outcomes are dealt with further in Chapter Three). Since websites and other new media
resources are not necessarily linear, the Inquiry Map assignment encourages play with
design.
Inquiry Map

Student-Teacher Memo

- Short letter to me
  - a. Audience: Who do you imagine reading this work? What might a reader get out of reading it?
  - b. Purpose: What actions do you want your readers to take? What could they do after reading your piece?
  - c. What do you hope to get out of doing this project?
  - d. Are you creating a multi-modal project, or writing a research paper? Just let me know which you are doing and a few sentences on why.

Proposal Options

- Create a map for your Project using the website discussed in class (linked below)
  - http://debatemhp.org
  - If you have a site you like more, email me.
  - a. At the center: What is your claim? What will it accomplish?
  - b. Branches: Which forms or modes will the project take? Explain each section of your research and which mode they will be in and why.
  - c. What ideas are connected to one another, lead into one another or contradict one another.
  - d. Add comments and sources in the Annotation section to help organize your research.
  - e. Use this map to outline your entire project.

OR

- Write me a Proposal that outlines your project and explain the different modes.
  - a. This is much like the map option, but written instead.

Models on Blackboard

Fig. 1 Inquiry Map Assignment; by Lauren Alpert; Spring 2011 Syllabus; PDF file.

After students complete all of the steps of my inquiry syllabus (as described in Chapter 3), students design in the Inquiry Map and then compose their projects. After doing a few drafts, they turn in their final projects via their Google sites. These sites created an opportunity for constant access to student work from day one all the way through their final project. For this thesis, I reviewed the sites of several students and then chose three to research. These three raise implications about theories of public participation, genre and new media.

Ashlen’s website works to reach an imagined, public audience and affords the possibility of using modes to reach that audience. Her identity as a young, “digital native” helped her to see that the use of these modes, genres and media better addressed her imagined audience.
Madeline’s website genre mashes in that it is both an academic essay and a website. Genre mashing can be defined as: when an author takes a genre and combines it with another to create a new entity or genre for his/her specified purpose. By mashing genres Madeline was able to use new media tools to re-mix traditional writing practices. For example, Madeline’s use of hyper linking affords possibilities of audience interaction with, and an added transparency to, her sources.

Jake’s video is a new media genre, modeled after the work of Mike Wesch. A new media genre can be defined as: genres that live online and are connected to public sharing of information. Jake’s work seems to recognize that his position as an author and his purpose as a researcher and writer are similar to those of Wesch, so he models his work after Wesch’s work. This academic YouTube video is a new media genre. Jake’s work includes videos clips, music and text that defines the audience and communicates his purpose.

After reviewing these projects and experiencing the difficulty of trying to describe students’ work with new media, I have more questions than answers. I want to think of more productive ways to study genres in writing classes. I want to see if I can promote more participation and examine how to assess, track, and describe how participation occurs. I constantly think about whether I use too much class time teaching technology and wonder if I am doing my students an injustice by doing so. I worry that my course may not do the work expected of it by the university, and I wonder if it will fit well in another school’s program. I am curious about what does actually happen after students take my course.
Additionally, I want to be a part of protecting the tools afforded to us currently by the internet and other communication technologies from those that would commodify or privatize them. I want to teach 18 year olds how to work with genres and modes to try to show those who ignorantly doubt them that not only do young adults have something to say, but that it is important and productive. I want to teach and I want to participate in research and discussions that help us all teach better. This thesis is just a little part of that.
CHAPTER II

NEW PUBLICS, NEW GENRES, NEW MEDIA

New Publics

New media technologies and genres designed for and by its users have created countless new spaces for public discourse. These new spaces re-created possibilities of public discussion and participation that had previously been privatized by institutions. With the internet, the work of Habermas becomes relevant again in that it makes private interests public in a way that has not happened since the evolution of the public sphere in bourgeois society in 18th century Europe. Anyone with access to the internet and basic literacy skills can reach a wider audience, making the study of how to better use the tools of new media an important aspect of building strong and effective publics.

According to Habermas, the public sphere in the 18th to 19th centuries moved out of the salons and the coffeehouses and into the control of private institutions. In his *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas explains how the private became public and then private again due to private interests dominating the media. Habermas researches the bourgeois public sphere, whose origins he traces from the ancient Greeks to Western Europe during the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. While the people were free to meet and discuss, the media (although it was only print based) was
and still is, controlled by state institutions and corporate interests. Due to this control, Habermas observes that the idealized public broke down:

The communicative network of a public made up of rationally debating private citizens has collapsed; the public opinion once emergent from it has partly decomposed into the informal opinions of private citizens without a public and partly become concentrated into formal opinions of publicistically effective institutions. (Habermas 247)

During these three centuries, the public sphere evolved and “developed to the extent to which the public concern regarding the private sphere of civil society was no longer confined to the authorities but was considered by the subjects as one that was properly theirs” (Habermas 23). In this time, citizens of western European nations were able to recognize that by meeting and discussing their interests and concerns, they could envision a way to become a part of judicial processes in their own cities, states and countries. Yet, this freedom of discussion in salons and coffeehouses across Europe had limitations due to institutional and governmental control over media and publication.

Without the space within the hierarchy of society to air public opinions and be heard and acted upon by institutions, the public lost its power. Yet, Habermas hints at the idea that not all is lost with his repeated choice of the word “partly.” At this point in Habermas’ book, the conclusion, there is room for speculation and hope due to the partiality of his observation; he suggests that private citizens still have opinions, they just need a space in which to air them.

As Habermas explains, a public sphere is a:
discursive space in which strangers discuss issues they perceive to be of consequence for them and their group. Its rhetorical exchanges are the bases for shared awareness of common issues, shared interests, tendencies of extent and strength of difference and agreement, and self-constitution as a public whose opinions bear on the organization of the society. (Public 1)

FYC instructors can help students to recognize that they can claim a place in a public sphere (especially through new media technologies) that allows for them to actually voice their awareness, interests and dissent. While there is no one "right" way to write, FYC instructors can teach practices such as organizational skills, research, inquiry and technologies that can enable students to move from genre to genre, purpose to purpose, to function within a varied definition of what writing is.

New Genres

There are many ways scholars define writing and this is further complicated by studies, such as Josh Keller’s discussion of the Stanford Study in "Studies Explore Whether the Internet Makes Students Better Writers,” where he explains that some research is shows that students are writing outside of class and in more varied genres then ever before (Keller). Since much of their engagement with reading and writing practices happens via the internet and other digital forms of communication, it follows that an FYC classroom that values civic engagement would also work with modes (text, image, audio, video) and genres (blogs, text messages, emails) associated with new media. New media can be described as internet-based technologies that encourage users to not only read, but to write as well, making participants become contributors and producers and not only consumers. Since new media creates more access to more audiences for composers and produces than ever before, new genres are constantly being created, making new media
New media genre study as a practice in FYC classroom creates room for experimentation with new media for both teachers and students. As Charles Bazerman points out in his “Speech Acts, Genres, and Activity Systems: How Texts Organize Activity and People,” an important question in genre pedagogy is: How do we move beyond a reliance on “native speaker intuitions” and create a learning environment where students can become better prepared for unknown, new situations that call for specific practices for reading and writing (Bazerman 321)? Scholars such as Bazerman suggest the use of new media technologies and genres in FYC classrooms as a way to combat issues that arise with genre study when writing is taken out of its context and/or made into some sort of socially disconnected assignment or teacher expectation.

Given the complexity of genre, educators and scholars, such as Bazerman, suggest that working with new media genres will help students to be more effective members of society because we are becoming more and more dependent on these forms of communication in the workplace. As Larry Lessig points out in *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy*, new media genres are creations where writers “remix, or quote, a wide range of “texts” to produce something new” (Lessig 69). Similarly, Steven Fraiberg in “Composition 2.0: Toward a Multilingual and Multimodal Framework” comments on remix culture by explaining that “...remixing is, in fact, a rhetorical act of composing and meaning making” (Fraiberg 118). Remixes can create new genres that allow for the making of meanings that were possibly not accessible before. By taking text, video, image and audio, all modes that existed before the
development of new media technologies, new media users are doing work that John Swales in “Toward a World of Genre,” describes happens in any genre work: where writing “involves extrication from a text or discourse, or from a genre of texts or discourses, and the fitting of this part or aspect into another context, i.e. another text of discourse... and its use and environment” (Swales 22). When the work is put into a new space, Swales explains it is recontextualized (22), allowing these “stabilized for now” genres to be worked with while they are evolving or being created ” (Swales 23; Fraiberg 105). In FYC classrooms, work with these ever-changing genres exposes students to new genres, making them more practiced in dealing with genres, situations and audiences unfamiliar or less familiar to them.

A concern that remains is finding a balance of depending on “native speaker intuitions” and creating practices that help all students participate. With the advent of new media technologies, as suggested by Rheingold “… there is a strong disparity between interest and involvement, an activation gap, and there is significant room for growth” (Rheingold 98). Recognition of this gap is important if a goal of FYC instruction is for its young public participants to engage and become responsible agents within the university and society at large.

Marilyn M. Cooper’s “Rhetorical Agency as Emergent and Enacted” helps us understand the complexity of what responsible agency is. She defines agency as, “the process through which organisms create meanings through acting in the world and changing their structure in response to the perceived consequences of their actions” (Cooper 420). In an FYC classroom, student “rhetors - and audiences - are agents in their
actions, and they are responsible for those actions, but they are not the sole cause of what happens” (Cooper 439). Cooper explains that rhetors work in a cycle of perturbations, where the situation for writing perturbs the writer into responding, and further perturbs them into writing in a specific way. As Cooper explains, agency is “a response to a perturbation that is shaped by the rhetor’s current goals and past experiences” (Cooper 426). Cooper then extends her work with agency to show how responsible agents recognize those aspects of a situation that perturb them and also recognize how their actions perturb their audience. The outcome of these cycles of perturbations is that after a “prolonged interaction,” writers and their audiences “gradually [become] more attuned to one another” (Cooper 437). As writers and audiences become more attuned to the cycle of perturbations, there is possibility for meaning making and knowledge building because all involved are agents for deciding which genres and modes of communications are appropriate and understandable for the given purpose.

Recognition of audiences as agents helps writers to become “responsible rhetors by recognizing the audience not only as agents, but as concrete others who have opinions and beliefs grounded in the experiences and perceptions and meanings” (Cooper 442) that they already possess. Instead of focusing on student empowerment, a recognition of how agency influences writers and their audiences helps to foster rhetors that are not just empowered, but responsible. Cooper is arguing for a rhetoric of responsibility in writing that is not centered on the writer, but on the agency of writers and audiences as they work together and are influenced by one another in the process of making meaning.
While rhetorical agency is a defining factor in communication, it is also poignant to look at how Rheingold illustrates an activation gap that calls for students to assume a new awareness of and comfort with their identity as responsible agents because for students to be participant citizens they have to know how and be willing to participate in responsible public communication. While our students can be seen as “digital natives” (Rheingold 99), that does not mean educators should then feel that we have little to teach them. As Rheingold suggests:

This population is both self-guided and in need of guidance: although a willingness to learn new media by point-and-click exploration might come naturally to today’s student cohort, there’s nothing innate about knowing how to apply their skills to the processes of democracy. Internet media are not offered here as the solution to young people’s disengagement from political life, but as a possibly powerful tool to be deployed toward helping them engage. (Rheingold 99)

The engagement that students already have with online publics can be a stepping-stone to the types of critical, analytical engagement that is valued by the university and other institutions. In addition, work with new media based genres can be used in FYC classrooms to help students become more practiced with genres in spaces that these genres actually live.

New Media and Its Limitations

In a technology-and-text-based world, writing is an invaluable skill that will allow for interaction and success in almost any field. As I tried to keep this in mind while building my classroom, our class websites have proven to be a useful introduction to our thinking, writing and participating in publics. Google sites, websites hosted by Google but (mostly) designed and put to the use of any user, allow students to feel at ease in
speaking their mind and hashing out their ideas in a way that leads me to think the genres afforded by Google sites allows them to work through complex issues of community, communication, literacy and identity that inhibit public participation. By including new media technologies in class, students become active in an ecology of public spheres of the classroom. Student engagement in this kind of writing leads to the use of writing for building knowledge, exploring ideas, and effectively participating in publics.

In the 21st century, issues of access and participation have inevitably become more complex due to the internet and new media technologies. In the 18th century and now, “The public sphere of civil society stood or fell with the principle of access. A public sphere from which specific groups would be eo ipso excluded was less than merely incomplete; it was not a public sphere at all” (Habermas 85). In reaction to privatized and institutional control of publics, the general public de-institutionalized the internet, which originally created for state and military purposes and made it available to more users. The internet has become the new coffeehouses and salons where citizens see discussions, share them and take back some semblance of control. The context of the internet created a space where no one was supposed to be excluded. The internet created more possibility for public participation by creating more access to publics and as Lessig argues, “as individuals realized they could simply hit a single button and post a comment or reply to thousands of computers worldwide, the temptation to speak could not be resisted” (Lessig 57). New media has created a new want to write, giving FYC classrooms a population of students that are already actively choosing to write.
While the internet is potentially accessible by all and students may be willing to write, it is unrealistic and non productive to think of composing online as something everyone can and does do. What is important about the possibility of access and chance to write publicly is that new media technologies afford users the opportunity to, if they are willing to learn the practices, aid in defining how and for what purposes public spheres function online. In looking at how public spheres are formed, Susan Wells in “Rogue Cops and Health Care: What Do We Want from Public Writing?” argues: “that the public sphere is always constructed” (Wells 32). Public spheres don’t just exist, citizens have to create them by composing texts that lead audiences to engage in discussion and action. By using new media technologies in FYC classrooms, students are afforded the opportunity to practice writing for publics in the places these public genres live, online.

There are limitations to the use of new media technologies in FYC classrooms attempting to study public writing since the work FYC students do is done for a class. Having students create websites to house their work does not immediately mean the work is public; there are often privacy settings to overcome and it is not yet possible to track the ways in which these texts are taken up by an audience. Instead of assuming the publication of a text online makes the text a part of public discourse, classrooms that employ new media technologies can be seen, as mentioned earlier as the “first public” (Rheingold) or, similarly, as Rosa Eberly terms in “From Writers, Audiences, and Communities to Publics: Writing Classrooms as Protopublic Spaces,” protopublics (Eberly 166). Classrooms are protopublics in that the work composed in them is not
voluntary, but new media technologies affords FYC classes with a population of students that are more active and willing writers. Although the work may not be voluntary, use of new media technologies allows FYC classes to better connect students to the public places many genres lives in in a way that wasn’t possible before. These places can then be used to: “help [students] realize the particular and situated nature of rhetoric and the need for effective writing to respond to particular needs of particular publics at particular times” (Eberly 167). FYC is limited as a public but by using new media technologies and collaborative practices of peer response and revision to simulate the practices of public, online writing students gain practice in responding to the exigencies of digital publics.

If FYC can couple this public want of students with the new media possibilities of new media genres and modes, teachers can reinforce the idea that FYC is not simply here to teach them a set of rules that they then must conform to in order to be successful and then send them off to the next requirement. Instead, by bringing new media into the university classroom, students forge a connection between their school experiences and the publics they are or will become members of, creating a relationship between the private world of the institution to publics that college is meant to prepare students to join. New media has made writing an even more integral part of communication practices and activities, private and public, which makes the assumption of responsible agency an even more important writing trait. As Cooper quotes, “the rhetorical performance that enacts agency is a form of kairos, that is, social subjects realizing the possibilities for action presented by the conjecture of a network of social relations” (Herndel and Licona; Cooper 435). Agency is the process of recognizing the
exigencies of a situation and reacting to them, and in a world where the situations for writing are as varied and diverse as they are in the 21st century, it seems necessary more than ever that writers are comfortable and aware of their position as rhetorical agents.

My FYC courses take into account the trends of young adult engagement with new media genres. By *new media genres*, I mean genres that live online and are connected to the public sharing of information. A perfect example is that of the YouTube video; YouTube videos can and do use several modes to share information and are socially connected through tagging and linking properties of new media technologies. Rheingold’s “Using Participatory Media and Public Voice to Encourage Civic Engagement” suggests that current college students, as members of the new media generation, “seek, adopt, appropriate, and invent ways to participate in cultural production. A recent Pew study found that more than 50 percent of today’s teenagers have created as well as consumed digital media” (Rheingold 97), such as YouTube videos. At least half of FYC students are already participants in cultural production, which situates them as already productive members of the new media culture. A synthesizing of academic goals and expectations with skills students are already employing would then encourage FYC students to use the new skills they will acquire in college to be more effective public participants.

The inquiry process used in my FYC classes, with the incorporation of multi-modal genre work, raises awareness of students as rhetorical agents who are responsible not only their content but also the design for and audience of their work. In doing so, students draw from their outside lives where they function online and through other
media-based genres and use these life experiences to make decisions about genre and multimodality within academic settings. With this type of work, students constantly connect the work they do outside of the classroom with what is expected of them in the classroom. As final projects, their works can be multi-modal, if this suits their intended audience and purpose and is appropriate to the content itself. Students make these decisions by first assessing how they negotiate this type of agency outside of class during their everyday communications (they text their friends but write letters to their grandmothers), which then allows them to project or layer this identity into their classroom identity where they recognize and more deeply understand their responsibilities as multimodal composers.

As our culture has begun to accommodate new technologies, classroom practices have had to evolve. In his book *Literacy in the New Media Age*, Gunther Kress defines multimodality and its effect on reading and writing. Kress defines a mode as: “a culturally and socially fashioned resource for representation and communication” (Kress 45). In the digital age, this encompasses not only the written word, but image, audio, video. A mode is a technology that is employed in a specific situation based on audience and intention. For example, a simple text message can employ more that one mode; the author of a text message may write something sarcastic and in order to convey this sarcasm to their audience, may write “haha” (slang) at the end, or display an emoticon (image) to convey the intended meaning. From this definition, Kress moves to genre theory to explain the social processes associated with modes. Genre theory explains how culture and context shape the purposes and practices for reading and writing. As
described by Carolyn R. Miller in her article “Genre As Social Action,” genre is defined as “a situation-based fusion of form and substance” that “becomes pragmatic, fully rhetorical, a point of connection between intention and effect, an aspect of social action” (Miller 153). In relation to modes, a genre is a rhetorical form that comes out of similar issues of intention, audience and purpose and can employ several different modes.

Multimodal genres are nothing new (think of medieval textbooks describing plant classifications or illuminated Bibles), but with the increased access to modes due to new media technology, FYC classrooms must, as Peter Kittle points out in “Student Engagement in Multimodality: Collaboration, Schema, Identity,” “[note] the ways that different media (written, audio, and visual texts, for instance) require different - and sometimes competing - literacies to decode. The intermingling of modalities requires increasingly dexterous literacy on the part of the reader” (Kittle 167). Multimodal texts are a part of new media seen on almost any website, but the access that new media technologies create gives anyone the ability to be a contributor. FYC classrooms are spaces that must address this repositioning of students as contributors and recognize that in order for students to engage thoughtfully in our internet infused society, they have to be aware of the decisions behind, and the affordances of, multimodality. By introducing multimodal documents into an FYC class, Kittle argues that:

The genre of the multimodal document, coupled with the technology used to produce it, seemed to support students’ ability to vest themselves in what Gee (2003) calls a ‘projective’ identity (p. 55). This is the simultaneous creation of a new identity related to a particular project (activity or practice), and the projection of oneself into that identity... (Kittle 178)
Student work that utilizes new media, and the modes and genres associated with them, creates opportunities for public identities of our students to be re-shaped and re-mixed with the practices of composition studies. The remix encourage students to use their work to explore and share the information they gather, synthesize, comment on. They use Google sites and the community of my FYC classes to promote and publicize their purposes. As Rheingold explains:

Participants, like literate citizens, aren’t automatically produced by computer ownership: access to the Internet and the capability of publishing a blog by a population is not sufficient to guarantee that blogging will have a significant positive impact on the political public sphere. There way in which that population uses the medium will matter... Knowing how to take a tool into one’s hand is no guarantee that anyone will do anything productive, but without such knowledge, productive use is less likely—and hegemonic control becomes more likely by those who do know exactly how to exercise the power of the new media. (Rheingold 103-4)

New media tools are powerful when they are employed and employed well. If teachers ignore the potential for public engagement and influence that new media can bring to its participants, then we are doing a disservice to our students who look to us for guidance and opportunity. When given the opportunity to not only research their own interests, but to use new media practices with which they are already fairly comfortable, students can then feel more at ease when asked to go beyond their assumed limits and enter in new discourses and publics.

In addition, many General Education (GE) requirements, such as those of CSU Chico, state that GE courses are for: “showing you that knowledge is not isolated, that what you know of one subject is related to what you know of another, that there is always more to know, and that what you know affects the way you live” (“General”).
New media and the practices of FYC are uniquely connected in that they complement and encourage participants to use the new media tools and writing practices to engage thoughtfully and publicly. FYC teachers are then positioned to work through what it means to engage new media practices and to ask students to join in on the fun.

In his discussion of public engagement, Rheingold explains that:

By showing students how to use Web-based tools and channels to inform publics, advocate positions, contest claims, and organize action around issues that they truly care about, participatory media education can draw them into positive early experiences with citizenship that could influence their civic behavior throughout their lives. Formal theories of the public sphere could be introduced most productively after, and in the context of, direct experience of exercising a public voice. Talking about public opinion making is a richer experience if you’ve tried to do it. (Rheingold 102)

Before new media technologies were available to large numbers of people Habermas suggested there was a lapse in possible spaces for public participation. New media has carved out a new space for public discourse. We, as modern citizens, have to learn and create new ways to utilize our public identities and voices. In turn, new media needs to find a place in the university and since much of new media is social and writing based, FYC classes are poised as prime spaces for exploration.

Exploration in FYC classes of how student writers take on public identities can address a common General Education goal of helping students to see connections between their interests and experiences and to then learn to act and teach using those ideas. FYC educators can create classrooms that recognize that:

Because entry into the virtual public sphere is cheaper and less burdensome than making one’s presence felt in the conventional public sphere, it is particularly attractive to young people whose experiences and aspirations might otherwise be marginalized or forgotten. The inclusion of these voices and traditions in the
development of e-citizenship is of the utmost importance, if there is a genuine commitment to cultivate a democratic culture of participation. (Rheingold 114)

New media technology remixes the coffee houses and salons of 19th century Europe that Habermas describes. At a time where our President is calling for a renewed focus on innovation and education (Obama) it seems particularly poignant for educators, and especially FYC instructors and students, to recognize the opportunity for public engagement that the new media technologies they employ afford us all.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Classroom Inquiry

My responsibility of as an FYC teacher is to create contexts where students “focus on deepening… research skills, developing [the] ability to read and respond to difficult texts, and helping [students] through the writing process in a social, collaborative, revision-focused environment” (Alpert). To address this, my courses need to include not just practices of research, but activities that question and bring to attention how choices of design are made and how genres and modes respond to the exigencies of audience and author. In my classes, I ask my students to become conscious of genre choices and the effects such choices have on the audience. To do this, I start the semester by helping the students realize they make these types of choices daily, and then show how these are important skills within the academy.

When students engage with new media in the classroom, they are engaging in practices that signal the agency they already aware of in their public lives outside of the classroom. The particular action of public agency within multi-media contexts outside of the classroom can inform and reinforce the work of inquiry in my FYC classes. In “Teaching New Mediated Student Bodies: Five Applications,” Stacey Pigg suggests that the incorporation of new media into the classroom teaches “students to shift media - and voices - as they change rhetorical situations and purposes for composing [which] helps
students take a major step in deliberately thinking through the material aspects of producing texts that span genres and delivery systems” (Pigg 250).

If I ask students to recognize the affordances, or possible benefits, of the use of specific modes and genre in their everyday activities, then the work of my FYC classes is directly related to practices and analyses of purpose, audience, mode and genre they already feel comfortable doing. Pigg quotes Wysocki’s definition of “new media texts as those that ‘have been made by composers who are aware of the range of materialities of texts and who then highlight the materiality,’” which Pigg suggests, “reinstated human agency, decision making, and, I suggest, rhetoric into the definition of new media” (Pigg 235). It then makes sense to use new media, and the modes and genres associated with them, in a process of inquiry as the purpose of such inquiry is intended to respect processes of agency, while still serving the writing goals of the academy. The less-definitive idea of genre as “stabilized for now” (Fraiberg 105) makes explicit the need for responsible agency in the creation of multimodal documents that illustrate decisions about purpose and audience, while showing a high level of engagement.

If the actions of a writing class are to be respectful of student interests and experiences, then classrooms must also raise awareness of agency in writing. As Cooper explains, agency is an awareness of the potential reactions and actions of author and audience. This chapter will first examine the pedagogy of my FYC classes, followed by a description of research methodologies used to examine student work.

In my FYC classes, the process of agency is enacted by students’ ability to make specific generic and modal choices based on audience and to put those choices into action. For students to have this agency, CSU Chico’s Academic Writing Program has
employed an inquiry-based FYC model wherein students choose their own areas of research based out of their own interests. The inquiry process starts with students creating research questions around a particular interest. Then, students work to find answers. In class, students use quickwrites, annotations, proposals, and multiple drafts. Instructions center on genre knowledge, academic and public writing practices, and research practices, with the students choosing the specific topics. The purpose of my research is to explore the ways that students engage with the syllabus in order to discern the degree to which they participate in publics.

In order to facilitate student articulation of their own interests and how they relate to purposes and uses for reading and writing, my FYC classes start with students reflecting on their own writing practices. Students begin by talking about their purposes for reading and writing, in and outside of the classroom, which often leads to the students realizing that they all write a lot more often than they thought, from to-do lists to text messages. These purposeful real world interactions are what Mari Haneda and Gordon Wells comment on in “Writing in Knowledge-Building Communities” when they note that, “Learning is not a separate form of activity, but an inherent aspect of engaging with others in purposeful actions that have significance beyond themselves for all the participants” (Haneda 437). The inquiry process models how learning happens in the world through experience and interaction with others.

A classroom that is structured by the inquiry process believes that learning happens through interaction with society; as Rheingold points out, “Citizens act as a public when they deal with matters of general interest without being subject to coercion; this with the guarantee that they may assemble and unite freely, and express and
publicize their opinions freely” (Rheingold 101). This belief that learning occurs in interaction with others and this interaction is what then enables citizens to build knowledge informs the student-interest basis of my FYC classes. In an exit survey after a FYC class, I asked “In what ways did this class challenge your purpose for writing?” One student responded:

I feel that by being given the choice to write what I wanted challenged me to really know why I wrote. Was it just for a grade or was I really interested in what I was writing? This semester I feel it was easy to write about something I wanted to write about. (ENGL)

While the purpose of FYC is not to be “easy,” it is a class that has the opportunity to help students feel that what they do in college is meaningful within and beyond the bounds of the university. The first step to enabling student writers to publicize their opinions is, as Rheingold points out, the lack of coercion and a right to assemble and unite freely. An inquiry process based on student interests allows that freedom.

Part of the introductory work of my FYC classrooms shows the connection between student interests and multimodality using Peter Kittle’s “Student Engagement in Multimodality: Collaboration, Schema, Identity.” Sydney, one of my students, explains that Kittle defines multimodality as “a document in which a point, idea, or theory is made and explained through the use of various modes of technology (video, Internet, writing, etc.)” (Oliver). Sydney then goes on to say that the purpose of multimodality is to: “craft and/or style a project through words, images, and sounds... a project where student’s choices as composers were most evident, and where their individuality was on display” (Oliver). As young adults that have grown up during the advent of new media technologies, current students are uniquely positioned to understand the purpose,
affordances and issues of audience behind the use of different modes and genres. Agency and identity are intertwined as students need to view themselves as creators and contributors and not just consumers in order to recognize their own interests have worth. The process of agency is illustrated in the responses to Kittle’s article, as Sydney pointed out, by explaining that FYC classes can be places where students can create their identities as responsible contributors and experts within the context of their interests and intended audiences.

To work on reflection and awareness related to identity, the students and I talk in class and through quickwrites and blogs, about which modes students use to communicate and which genres employ these. While students are already immersed in the culture of new media, they often times are not aware of the choices they are making and my FYC classroom provides an occasion for students to learn to recognize the generic work they do everyday.

New media enable a student sitting in the back of my class to text a friend just as easily as they could write an email or send a picture. In this short example, the choice that can be made between these different modes and genres shows how new media users always work with audience awareness and display an understanding of how genres and modes function. As Stacey Pigg suggests, FYC classrooms can provide opportunities for students to “consider what the best medium and the best delivery.... might be for a message before composing and exchanging texts” (Pigg 236).
Research Question and Data Collection

On the first day, I ask students to create a Google site where they house all of their work for the semester, from quickwrites to the final Inquiry Project and Reflective Essay. My purpose for using Google sites is that it creates a digital space where each student builds an e-portfolio, a digital portfolio, of their assignments as we move through steps of the inquiry process. Instead of keeping a binder, which is easily forgotten or lost, they record each piece of work online, where it is accessible wherever there is a computer with internet access. These sites not only store student work, they function as public records for each student’s progress and make it so that at any given time each student can access the work of their peers to give responses and share ideas.

On the first day of the Fall 2010 semester, I introduced a template I had created on Google sites and showed students how to use it for creating their own site. As homework, I asked students to go home and create their own site using my template that has the syllabus and the assignments for the whole semester on it. Then, as they were given each new assignment, I taught them how to add new pages to the site and post their work. Since students used their sites almost everyday and for every assignment, including quickwrites, my students started to bring their laptops into class (out of 60 students, one didn’t have a computer she could bring in; most days this student used my laptop or did the work by hand and uploaded it to her site later).

The public nature of websites and the ability to comment and discuss each other’s work is where the use of Google sites relates to the inquiry process. In terms of student engagement, these sites built an instant public where students knew that their work was always being done for an audience that was larger than just me, the instructor.
The inquiry process is meant to engage students so that what they learn has a purpose and significance beyond the classroom. As Wells and Haneda assert:

To fully understand and be able to solve a similar problem in the future, one either needs to have engaged in collaborative knowledge building with the person who helped or, when a similar problem actually arises, to engage in solo knowledge building, in the effort to integrate the memory of what the helper did and said with the specifics of the situation with which one in currently confronted. (Haneda 438-9)

In the inquiry process, my students helped one to another answer questions or to model ways of completing assignments via their Google sites to build knowledge and to be shown models for how to complete assignments on their own. The sites became databases, much like the databases students use to research, where different modes and genres were used to complete the same assignment.

The public nature of Google sites makes visible students’ inquiry processes. On these sites, their inquiries, research and writing make possible a digital identity for them as individual students and members of academic new media discourse. These sites are public to anyone at CSU Chico. The peer response and revision practices of my classes emphasize the public nature of their work, with students interacting with one another’s sites throughout the semester. The public and social nature of these sites promotes audience awareness, while at the same time connecting the work of our class to digital, social practices students already engage in outside of class.

Throughout the inquiry process, use of reading and writing practices that are valued in the university (annotations, proposals, research) along with social practices of peer response/revision on our Google sites, helps our FYC classroom to “[take] account of the functions and forms of the genres that are important in school and society”
(Haneda 435). Much like Facebook, Twitter and other popular social networking sites, our sites become a hub for work and communication. The content of the students’ work is chosen by them, but inevitably wrapped up in pre-existing interests and social processes. What the students learn is a re-shaping and re-mixing of what they already like, what they already know, and what they are just learning, illustrating that “knowledge is not a thing at all; the term is simply an abstraction that is sometimes useful for referring to the knowing that is manifested by individuals in particular situations of action and discourse” (Haneda 438). My work in FYC classes makes available to students the resources, practices, genres and modes that will enable them to participate effectively in thoughtful, critical discourse. I teach practices, including processes for knowledge development, critical questioning, revision and others.

After creating inquiry questions, my students were assigned the first of three annotations. To complete this assignment, I asked students to look at their research questions and use an annotation to answer one of them. The annotation assignment entails finding a source (for this one I did not designate scholarly or otherwise, I just wanted them to get used to the genre), citing it in MLA format and then introducing and explaining the significance of the source. Annotations often involve paraphrasing, summarizing and incorporation of direct quotes, which were defined and illustrated in class activities. A typical introductory sentence in an annotation would be, “In an editorial in the New Scientist, there’s an idea being concocted in the near future to create life-like avatars on the web (database) and fill each avatar with personal information and memories about that person” (Oliver). This opening shows how students begin to work with sources and analyze them for their significance. These annotations were written in
Google Docs that students then posted to their sites. After three annotations, the students wrote two research memos where they built a primary research tool, most often a survey or interview, and then gathered data to analyze in relation to their inquiry. After these five assignments, I asked students to write a research narrative synthesizing their research thus far.

The research narrative assignment was presented as the first step for synthesizing students’ research into one larger whole. It is meant to be narrative in structure; I want students to tell me the story of their inquiry process so far. I ask for specifics on background (how they came up with their research questions) and what they are learning from their research. We read the assignment together, pull up examples from past classes on the large screen in class and have group discussions about the moves the author makes throughout the sample narratives. This is also a point in the semester where I ask students to think specifically about the publics involved in their area of research: who are the participants, how do they become participants, and what publics are the sources a part of. For instance, the assignment asks questions such as: “What is the history of this topic? What conversation has been going on about this before, and now? What are the social demands or needs that created this discussion?” (Alpert) in order to get students thinking about the exigencies that created the texts they are reading and form the imagined publics they are researching.

As a whole, my syllabus moves from teacher-led activities surrounding common readings to student-driven inquiry work. In the first six weeks of the semester, we read or watch a text per week that I choose to create provide a variety of lenses through which to view their research. We read about public spheres, multimodality and
several articles that model processes of inquiry. Students quickwrite, blog and discuss constantly throughout this period of the class, thinking mostly about what, how and why they write each day (in and out of class). Through discussions of new media practices, public sphere theory and multimodality in college classrooms, students begin to hone in on an area of research. I also show them model after model of inquiry projects other students have done or that I’ve found online or through colleague recommendations.

I believe that the work students do during the beginning of the semester, where they work through how they understand the functions of reading and writing in their experience, allows them to recognize that they already make genre decisions based on publics everyday, and that the work they do is always, already multimodal. This allows students to recognize their responsibilities as agents who are creators, writers, researchers. Once they have done their research narratives, they feel more confident as insipient experts and now they have to decide the modes and genres that will best present their work. As far as my assignments go, this part of the semester is focused on organization. We talk about outlining and they create timelines for finishing their project. Much of class time is for work and small group discussion and revision. Their last step before the project is a “proposal” where they make a traditional outline or create a “debate graph” to organize their work. As shown on the next page (see Fig. 2), the debate graphs are an online tool used for outlining arguments, but can also be used as a tool for organizing clusters of thought and research:
Papers don’t always move from one topic sentence to the next with the thesis moving linearly until the conclusion. Writing often moves from one point to the next, counters back, makes a side note, questions, analyzes, and revises. As illustrated by M.M. Bakhtin in “The Problem of Speech Genres,” as speakers and writers people, “quite frequently within the boundaries of his own utterance the speaker (or writer) raises questions, answers them himself, raises objections to his own ideas, responds to his own objections, and so on” (Bakhtin 72). A traditional outline isn’t always the best fit for a non-linear form of organization. Debate graphs allow students to connect “bubbles” of ideas together, to cross-link and spatially organize. In addition, debate graphs have room for students to attach extra notes and citations to keep their ideas clearly attached to their data and research.
Once students have outlined their work, they put their plans into action and end up turning in generically diverse projects such as traditional research papers, websites, videos and texts that use more than one of these genres. During this part of the semester, I show several models of websites, videos, research essays and other final students projects as examples of what my current students could do. I have students view their projects and work in small groups to outline what they do and then, as a large group, students create a list of goals they think inquiry projects should achieve. Since many of new media genres call for learning several new technologies, such as how to take screen shots or edit videos, I hold in-class tutorials to teach these technologies. This part of the semester provides many moments of shared knowledge building, where I know enough to help students begin to edit videos or build websites, but often the students and I are together in not knowing. Together, students and I assess what we do not know and work together to learn the skills and practices we need to know to facilitate the creating of their ideal, or nearly ideal, final projects.

These final projects will be described in detail in subsequent chapters. Essentially, all of their work, from the first annotation through the drafting and finalizing process, builds to one final project that is posted to their site and reflected on through a reflective essay and a digital conference. In the digital conference, on our finals day, students post their work to a website I build along with three questions that they still have in relation to their inquiry. Students then spend the finals class time reading and responding to one another’s texts. This last activity enables students to not only see their work published in a public space, but to guide and see dialogue pertaining to their work.
The digital conference mimics the real world practice of conference and symposium workshops, where groups of people gather to share and respond to each other’s work.

Process of Analysis

Once the semester was over, I reviewed each student’s progress by reading through his or her site. This particular semester, Fall 2010, I taught two sections of ENGL 130: Academic Writing at California State University, Chico. There were 60 students in total, 30 in each sections, and were made up 59 freshmen and one sophomore (although a few were “freshman status” but older and had been in school for more than a year). One class, section 50, was made up solely of first-semester freshmen and was tied in to a business course-link, which means that the students had already declared themselves as Business majors prior to the start of the semester. My other section of ENGL 130, section 17, was mixed, with a few sophomores and freshmen who were undeclared or from various majors. These discrepancies are a part of why I leave the focus of their research as unbounded; I want students, especially in their freshman year, to explore whatever interests them and use the work of FYC to question and focus these interests into useful moments of information sharing and knowledge building.

Out of these sixty students, there were 22 men and 38 women, making my student sample 37% men and 63% women. This differs from the overall student population at Chico State where 52% of Chico students are female and 48% male (“About”). This discrepancy could be due to the small group of students I could work with and also due to the course-link involved in my study, which is an unusual course in that first semester freshman have already declared a major and committed to taking three
courses with the same 30 students.

Prior to the start of the semester, this research was approved by the Chico State Office of Graduate Studies as a study of human subjects. All participants signed a form that allowed all of their work for the semester to be eligible for use in my thesis. All sixty of my students agreed, but I’ve chosen to focus on work from four students; Sydney Oliver, Ashlen Best, Madeline Mills and Jake Weber. Sydney and Ashlen are from the business courses link section and Madeline and Jake are from the mixed section.

Instead of collecting hundreds of pages of work, coding and then recording different traits and behaviors the students exhibited throughout their work, I could open their website and click through their entire opus of work as it was housed in one space. While my larger inquiry question concerned how public sphere theory, genre work and multimodality in FYC classrooms affected processes of agency and student engagement, when it came time to review student work, other than these general topics, I began with few expectations.

To begin analysis, I looked at several student sites. I then took copious notes of what I saw in their work, the public nature of their voice, the organization of their websites, and the mashing of genres in a video. From there, I moved into specific case study work of four students. Out of this review process, I was able to note how the use of public genres like a website encourages the use of a public voice and reinforces the importance of audience awareness. I also noted the ways in which students take up genres and remix and mash them for their own purposes.

This study is a practice in grounded theory, “the discovery of theory from data” (Glaser 1), where all evidence is directly quoted from student-produced work
within the bounds of my sections of ENGL 130 and used to form theory for my FYC pedagogy. As Clifton Conrad explains, “grounded theory must not only be induced on the basis of evidence; it must also include plausible explanations for purported relationships” (Conrad 105). This study is grounded in student work that is then used to assess the relationship between my FYC classrooms and the work produced by students in order to understand processes of agency in their decisions about genre and mode and the assumption of a public authorial identity.

As context, my class is described above and particular assignments are at times described in greater length. Beyond this added context and the literature used to support and further explore the data collected from my FYC courses, I construct theories for implementation of practices that promote student engagement in public writing. The theories arise out of the observation and analysis of student work, with the research process based in the idea presented by Kathy Charmaz that: “grounded theory methods do not detail data collections techniques; they move each step of the analytic process toward the development, refinement, and interrelation of concepts” (Charmaz 251). My data collection and analysis methods were simple and malleable in order to allow the student work to construct and re-construct the concepts that explain the work students do in my FYC courses.

The following chapters work to examine these projects in order to outline how students took the expectations of my ENGL 130 syllabus and designed inquiry projects that displayed not only engagement but also processes of agency in choice of inquiry, mode and genre. These chapters further explore the sites and inquiry projects of Sydney, Ashlen, Madeline and Jake and then analyze their work to explore not only issues of
student engagement and responsible agency, but how the use of new media technologies and their accompanying new media genres aid in studying and learning the practices of contributing to publics via writing.
CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS

Public Participation

Since writing is a form of communication that is suitable for many purposes and activities, students need practice with assessing their own interests through inquiry and an awareness of how they make decisions about genre and how to learn new ones. In my FYC classes, there are, of course, assignments and writing that are done for me. I assign them, students turn them in, I respond. In order to counter the private nature of this writing, each of my students builds a website from day one and use this site to turn in and display their work. Every assignment is on their website and made public to the entire class and all CSU Chico students. Despite the public nature of these websites, their writing still tends to be clearly geared toward an audience of one: me, their grader.

For the first assignment in the inquiry process, I don’t assign any parameters for what genre of source they can use for their annotations. Students pick anything from lyrics from a pop song to a scholarly article they find on JSTOR. One student, Ashlen, chose to annotate the lyrics to a Black Eyed Peas’ song as she felt it related to her initial curiosity about the media and its role in our ideologies. In response to the prompt “Signify: Show the reader that the text is important to your paper” from the Annotations assignment (Alpert), Ashlen writes “I can use these questions that the Peas’ asked America in my research and try and figure out what happened to humanity and how the
media has changed the world we live in today” (Best). The annotation questions ask her to explain the importance of this source in relation to her work, and she states that the questions the song elicits, such as “Whatever happened to the values of humanity, whatever happened to the fairness in equality?” (Best) will help her shape the rest of her inquiry. This is a clear conversation between assignment and homework, between a teacher and a student. The writing is meant to respond to a specific exigency and a specific audience. The inquiry is still a search for an answer that she will find and give to me; the two of us are the only participants in the conversation.

When we came into class on the day the first annotation was due, I asked my class to give me some general feedback on how they understood and felt about the assignment. One of the first comments was from Ashlen as she was concerned about whether or not she had fulfilled the requirements of the assignment. Although Ashlen was unsure if her decision to use a pop song helped her to fulfill the requirements of the assignment, her question signaled agency by taking a chance and doing the work even though she was unsure. The lack of specificity in the assignment perturbed Ashlen to ask a question and Ashlen’s response to the assignment was a perturbation in that she used lyrics from a popular song as a potential source for a scholarly research project. As discussed earlier, this mutual perturbation, or structural coupling, is described by Cooper as, “a process of mutual adaptation that occurs when organisms or systems perturb one another in a prolonged interaction, gradually becoming more attuned to one another” (Cooper 437). As it turned out, Ashlen’s question led to several students saying they were not sure if their sources “counted” as sources. I pulled Ashlen’s site up on the large
screen in front of class and then we compared it to the assignment. Together, we decided that Ashlen had fulfilled the requirements of the assignment, reinforcing that her decision, and her process of agency, was constructive.

In Ashlen’s work, she begins to describe her thought process as she worked from simply finding research questions to answer to understanding why and to whom these questions are important (besides herself and me). In the introduction to her research narrative she writes, “When I was first assigned the inquiry project, I was confused on how I could relate sex in the media to a public because it is such a broad topic” (Best), which answers appropriately my question to her: sex is everywhere, so what public is she *not* talking about? Yet, as she focuses her research, and within the same paragraph, Ashlen begins to hone in on the root of her research:

> Eventually, after two weeks of trying to figure out what my final topic was going to be about, I settled in on: Sex education in the media and Sex education at school or home. I decided to add the sex education from a school/home setting necessary because I needed show how sex is portrayed outside of the media. (Best)

Earlier in the semester, I talked in class frequently with Ashlen about focusing her research. Above, she mentions sex in the media and sex education, each of which are research projects individually. As I tried to get her to focus on one, we began to see connections between the increase of sex in the media and the decrease of home and school sex education. Ashlen then realized she wanted to focus on her own age group and learn more about their ideologies regarding sex, especially safe sex. Her friends were hearing varied and often un-true “facts” about safe sex and she wanted to find out the facts and what to do about it.
With this in mind, she went back to a survey she had made earlier in the research process where she asked her friends and family basic questions about sex. As she explains:

As the research process went forward, I wanted to add how sex education in schools and parents also has influenced people’s ideologies on sex. As a way to get the answers I needed for my primary research, I created a survey in Google forms that was responded by classmates and friends through Facebook. (Best)

From this survey, she discovered an exigency within her friend group; between school, family and the media there were varied and sometimes a troubling lack of awareness of safe sex practices, which would increase the likelihood of catching an STD/STI.

Although she doesn’t say in her research narrative whether she will be writing a research paper or designing some other sort of document (website, video, etc), she ends her narrative with a clear purpose: “But I would like to continuing to prove how sex education has or has not had an effect on someones ideologies or sexual choice to be active or not” (Best). All that was left was figuring out a genre that would best suit her purpose and audience.

After this step in my class, we focus on inquiry project work all the time. While their proposal, quickwrites, student-to-teacher memos and in class discussion all push them to tell me the modes and genres they are working with, I can’t always keep track. It is almost as if the students disappear into their work and all I have access to is what they post on their sites. I have at least one rough draft they have to turn in to me, but these can be skeletal and very rough. Ashlen was one student that struggled at this point, constantly telling me she knew what she wanted to say, she just didn’t know how. Then one day, she walks in and says, “I know what I’m doing and I spent hours last night
learning how.” She had talked with another student in class about her trouble with one website building tool she tried, and the other student suggested a new tool, Yola (Yola). While she told me she had tried a website earlier, the tool she was using was too complicated. When Yola was suggested to Ashlen, her project came together. Suddenly, I had this full draft on my computer screen and lots of work to give feedback to.

Somewhere within this “other” space, Ashlen determined that a website would best accomplish her goals and address her purpose and audience. While I don’t have a step-by-step outline from Ashlen of how she determined that a website was appropriate for her project, as explained by Bakhtin, these kinds of generic “choice[s] [are] determined by the specific nature of the given sphere of speech communication, semantic (thematic) considerations, the concrete situation of the speech communication, the personal composition of its participants, and so on” (Bakhtin 78). In essence, Bakhtin points out the effects that situation and audience have on how an author chooses genres. The audience Ashlen wanted to communicate with was best addressed by a website due to her generation’s common and influential connection to new media.

Once Ashlen began composing her website, a glaring and exciting difference in voice, audience, and purpose arose. Suddenly, Ashlen writes to a specific group of people: her peers, who may or may not be sexually active. She makes it clear that she has made this website to educate them on safe practices around sex and what it means to be unsafe. The website is not for me, the teacher. This work is for people that Ashlen cares about, her peers, including her classmates and survey participants. She wants to encourage her audience to take care of themselves and their partners. By looking a
specific instances of audience awareness, we can see how the medium of the website helped Ashlen to address a particular audience or public.

On the first page of her Yola site (Best), Ashlen writes “Dear Readers.” This seems to signal that this website is not for the teacher, or for Ashlen, it is meant for an imagined public. From there, her work includes several pages devoted to: what the website is meant to do, the creator’s motivation, facts, practices for safe sex, possible outcomes of unhealthy sexual activity and ways/reasons to change sexual habits for the better. What became new and apparent for Ashlen was the clarity with which she describes her purpose and imagined audience:

This website should be viewed by all men and women who are sexually active, or who are thinking about being sexually active because it contains actual facts, statistics and pictures which all have the potential to inform readers with knowledge they may not know. (Best)

Ashlen’s work displays an awareness of the kairos, the possibilities for action within the network of social relations (Cooper 435), of her audience and chosen area of research, exhibiting “links between structure and agency” (Giddens; Fraiberg 107). By clearly stating her intended audience and choosing a genre she feels will best address this audience, her work illustrates “the ways that situated practices shape and are shaped by wider sociocultural contexts” (Fraiberg 107). Her website is shaped by her experiences with new media, while also displaying an awareness of the affordances of using a genre for a specific purpose and audience.

Ashlen’s work, and how she talks about it, shows that she is aware of the gravity and relevance of her knowledge for everyone she can reach. The website was the medium of choice because of her knowledge of the tools of new media as a participant
and analyzer of new media in and out of class. Her work signals a process of agency that is directed toward public change as she is responding to the kairos of the class, her intended audience and the purpose of her inquiry as she uses this site to speak to an audience she is not only aware of, but concerned about and ready to educate. The website, which is published online, shifts her identity from student to potential public participant. The questions of my assignments and follow-ups perturbed Ashlen to write; after creating an inquiry and researching it she was perturbed by her peers knowing about safe sex practices (from the media and school) but choosing to ignore this information. This cycle of perturbations led her to choose a genre that she felt would best respond to the exigencies of her inquiry while also displaying responsibility and care for the agency of her audience.

It is difficult to illustrate how Ashlen’s work exhibits a possibility for public participation, since it is only a possibility until it is actually taken up and tracked as being viewed and used by someone else. For instance, in this excerpt from the page “Talk about IT” on Ashlen’s site, she is talking directly to an imagined audience and asking them to take action:

Whether you choose to have sex or not, it is important to talk about it with your partner. Having direct conversations about sex, protection, pregnancy prevention and STDs can be difficult or embarrassing, but if you are confident about your facts and able to express openly how you feel it should be easier. So take some time to get informed and to think through what feels right for you. It may be helpful to talk these decisions over with a close friend, parent, doctor, or other trusted adult before you talk to your partner. (Best)

This same text could function well in a paper essay, but Ashlen’s choice to place this call to action on a website page with images and links provides direct access to the resources
she mentions. There is more opportunity and access to put into effect these suggested actions. Since Ashlen, herself, is a member of the young, “digital native” audience she seems to be imagining, she was able to assess the affordances of using a website to share this information in a medium that is strongly connected to new media tools of research and discussion, making possible perturbations of her audience seems more likely.

Student sites facilitated a cycle of perturbations as they could work together to define and assess student work, while also modeling possibilities for future writing experiences. Between a clear purpose and the public setting of student work done on Google sites and the websites used in final projects such as Ashlen’s, this technology enabled student writing to act “...as a means of mediating the enhancement of understanding, [reinforcing that] writing is most powerful when the text already written, or in process of being written, is treated as an object with which the writer dialogues in the effort to improve it” (Haneda 439). The sites as a technology enable my students to engage with the work of their classmates. This engagement helps facilitate peer response, modeling and large group discussions to improve student writing, while staying in the context of student interests. The Google sites and our class act as the “first “public” (Rheingold 99). Then, when students move to create their final inquiry projects they have already begun to understand the moves that are made in public writing and discourse. Students like Ashlen then take all of the group work they have done with their classmates and move it into public mediums, such as a website, with the experience needed to understand the exigencies and practices of public writing.
Genre Mashing

Ashlen’s website shows an audience awareness, demonstrating her understanding of the public nature of websites and thus the text she is producing. Within this site, she also uses video and image to reinforce and comment on the text she has produced. In copyright lawyer and professor Larry Lessig’s book *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy*, he outlines the fact that quoting text in the traditional sense with the appropriate citation and giving of credit allows writers to use each other’s work. This norm does not apply, however, to that of image, sound or video. While this is an understandable distinction for copyright laws decades ago - due to the amount of skill, money and support needed to create these modes and genres - it is no longer realistic. Today, any sixteen-year old with access to a web cam can potentially be viewed by millions. Lessig asserts that this shift in access calls for a shift in the norms surrounding copyright and re-production of modes other than text.

An example of this is my current situation with writing this thesis. While attending a workshop for “How To Format Your Thesis,” I found out that using quotes (words) from others is acceptable with citation, but in order to use video or image I would need formal, *signed*, consent. So, even though I had university permission to perform a human subjects study on my classrooms, students and all work involved, I could not use anything from their work that was non-text. As is apparent, most of what I’m analyzing within this thesis is work that involves more than just text. As of now, I am not allowed to include videos or screenshots of the websites or videos that students composed without signed consent. Instead, I have to describe or only pull out the written
text. This displays how the university’s rules for permissions have fallen behind the technology and work of current students and instructors.

Outside of university processes like writing a thesis, we all mode-and-genre mash; we take a genre and combine it with another to create a new entity or genre for the author’s specified purpose. While my students enter my course thinking they will be writing ten-page research papers, many of them leave with YouTube videos, websites, Prezis (online presentation tool) or any number of multi-modal, multi-generic texts. Specifically in the YouTube videos and the websites, I see not only multimodal but multi-generic processes. This is partially due to my expectations and demands as a teacher. You do not see MLA formatting on most websites, but in my classes I require it because that type of documentation is valued in university settings. It then makes sense to see work created where genre and modes are all remixed and mashed together because I am asking students to pick modes and genres that apply to their area of research, and make sure to use MLA citation, avoid dropping quotes and other conventions of academic writing, because ENGL 130 is meant to enable students to join a community of university writers.

An example of a genre-mashing project was created by a student named Madeline. She wrote a more traditional research essay such as those done in many other university classes and broke it up and molded it to be the content of a website. This mashing was relevant to Madeline’s work since she was researching and writing about the effects of Google on our literacy practices. Similar to Ashlen, she seemed hesitant about moving from the genre of a research essay into the unknown, even though her
project dealt with Google and its effects on user cognition. In fact, the assignment just
before students move into drafting their inquiry project is to create an Inquiry Map,
which (as explained in more detail in Chapter 2) entails a letter to me and then a
traditional outline or a debate graph mind-map. In Madeline’s Inquiry Map letter she
closes with, “I’m going to write a research paper that will answer a variety of questions
for people to understand how technology is changing our world and how Google’s
actions are in a sense ‘taking over’” (Mills). Yet, in the opening line of her letter she does
more work with her imagined audience and describes:

I want my students of all ages to be able to read my paper and relate to this topic,
but I would really want students of my generation to read this because it’s
something we all can relate to because we’ve seen the world without technology
and we’ve seen it grow to what it is today. (Mills)

While she may end her letter with the plan of writing a research paper, her audience
awareness mentions a specific age group (her own) that she describes as technology
reliant.

From there, it was no surprise to me that she moved from a research paper to a
Wix website (Wix). Her mention of audience in her Inquiry Map suggests that she is
concerned with how to best reach her imagined audience. She created her final project on
Wix as an academic research essay mashed with a website. She remixes these two genres.

As Larry Lessig explains, one can:

remix, or quote, a wide range of “texts” to produce something new. These quotes,
however, happen at different layers. Unlike text, where the quotes follow in a single
line - such as here, where the sentence explains, “and then a quote gets added” -
remixed media may quote sounds over images, or video over text, or text over
sounds. The quotes thus get mixed together. The mix produces the new creative
work - the “remix.” (Lessig 69)
While Lessig is talking about remixing on a content level, I would like to move into a realm of remixing at the genre level. When there is remixing of content or remixing of genre, the successful mashing leads to communication that displays a more sophisticated understanding of situation and audience, and thus more successfully meets composers’ goals. As Lessig asserts, “Their meaning comes not from the content of what they say; it comes from the reference, which is expressible only if it is the original that gets used... it’s because the actual thing has a power about it” (Lessig 74-75). Again, Lessig is working on the content level, but even with genres, mashing illustrates that the author understands the history and value of the original genres and wants to use both to reinforce the purpose and value of their new work.

Genres have a history to them, where the use or application of specific genres for specific purposes situates them. Genres don’t arise from the ether, but are used in one situation because of how, why and how effectively they were used in a similar situation. When genres are mashed together, they bring these social histories with them into the new multi-generic product. As John Swales explains in “Toward a World of Genre,” genres connect in networks where, as Bakhtin explains, “... each utterance is filled with various kinds of responsive reactions to other utterances of the given sphere of speech communication” (Bakhtin 21). If you replace the idea of speech utterance with that of a genre, you see how genres can respond to and be shaped by their interaction with other genres in a network. Genres are used in their networks as what Anne Freadman in “Anyone for Tennis?” calls “ceremonial” times and places, but when they are taken out of their typical network “they take with them the signs of the lost ceremony, connoting
that ceremony and the social relations it governs… the formal properties of a genre will not go away” (Freadman 61). These formal properties and awareness of their history of being placed and used elsewhere socially move with the genres into the mashed genres of new media networks.

Genres can come into contact with and can be re-shaped, with their purposes redefined by other genres within a network of genres. In Swales’s article, he suggests Linell’s term *recontextualization* as a way to describe the process of generic evolution in their respective networks. Recontextualization is defined by Linell as involving, “the extrication of some part or aspect from a text or discourse, or from a genre of texts or discourses, and fitting of this part or aspect into another context, i.e. another text of discourse (or discourse genre) and its use and environment” (Swales 22). This relates to the idea suggested earlier of genre mashing, in that when genres or aspects of genres are recontextualized they are moved into new environments and formed together with other genres. In addition to aspects of genre, like organization or structure, being mashed with other genre aspects, they carry with them the history of the genre, or utterance. As Bakhtin suggests: “[w]hen we select words in the process of constructing an utterance, we by no means always take them from the system of language in their neutral dictionary form. We usually take them from other utterances” (Bakhtin 87). These utterances have a relation to other utterances because the words have been used before and thus are contextual and social, just as genres have been used before and are inherently social and contextual. As students work with modes and genres in new contexts, they use them for “new” purposes, but retain the histories of these forms with them; websites and academic
essays have histories that carry authority, audiences and much more.

In Madeline’s reflective essay, she explains how her views about why and how she writes have evolved during the course of the semester. While she doesn’t use specific terms like “genre” and “mash-ups” her reflection shows her awareness of why she chose to create a website and why putting her research paper online connected her work to genre networks and social histories. As Madeline explains:

In the beginning of the year my writing was less confident, I wouldn’t say what I wanted to say, I would say what I wanted my teacher to hear. I also believed what I wrote didn’t mean anything, the only person that would read it was the teacher. Being in this class I realize my writing doesn’t just have to be read by one person, I can share it online and people will agree on my opinion, no matter what side of the issue I am taking. (Mills)

When Madeline formed her own research questions, found the answers, synthesized them for one purpose and then presented her work digitally, her work signaled a process of agency that she had not experienced before in her education. Not only that, she imagines that she can address a wider audience by presenting them with a genre they understand and a form of writing they can inherently respect as members of the new media generation. She then felt a confidence that told her she had the ability to persuade, educate and share. The genres of websites and research papers both hold their own history of use, and when pulled together into one text they work together to simultaneously become public while also meeting more limited institutional requirements.

As mentioned above, the genre of a research, or any academic, text carries its own worth within its particular public. A successful research paper will have organization, scholarly sources, a clear purpose; we can trust it and know we are
supposed to build knowledge with it. A website will carry different issues of audience and organization and will draw often not only from scholars, but from the shared knowledge of differing publics. We trust websites to build knowledge because websites represent not necessarily researched facts but what people, somewhere out there, are thinking about; as such, websites holds their own value. When both are brought together, their strengths are connected and turned towards the same audience, the same people. The content of Madeline’s mashed genre is thoughtful; it is well researched; it is purposeful and multi-modal.

A specific affordance of Madeline’s use of the website medium is that it allows her to use new forms of citation with hyper linking to satisfy the anti-plagiarizing and citation expectations of the university, while engaging in the new media qualities of websites. Instead of defining “knowledge” and “information” for us and then citing and moving on, she hyperlinks these words directly to the sources she paraphrases (hyperlinks shown by underlining):

The definition of knowledge is, acquaintance with facts, truths, or principles, as from study or investigation. Knowledge is acquired from reviewing and exploring information and being familiar with a certain topic thoroughly. The definition of information is, knowledge communicated or received concerning a particular fact or circumstance. Information is being aware of a small aspect of a larger topic. (Mills)

By mashing the conventions of citing and hyper-linking, she is using the institutional and social histories of both to support her work. Citations deem her work as credible and honest, and the hyper linking reinforces these qualities by showing that she is giving credit where credit is due. In addition, Madeline’s use of hyper linking provides an opportunity for her audience to more easily access her sources, which could then lead to
discussion over how the author and the audience do or do not understand these sources in similar ways. While hyper linking is possible in a simple text-based document, it is not a widely accepted practice in academic writing. Madeline’s academic work is afforded the opportunity of using this new technology because she has mashed it with a public, digital genre.

In Madeline’s Reflective Essay at the end of the semester, she reinforces her choice to mash-up genres when she comments on how “Technology seemed to be a big part of this course, which is helpful because everyone can relate to this topic. Technology is something that has changed right in front of our eyes as we got older and something we don’t go a day without using” (Mills). If “everyone” is using these new technologies everyday, maybe they are on to something; if there is great potential for publication there, then it can be utilized. Madeline worked to pull these genres together as a display of her scholarly identity in the academic world while also acting as a responsible agent as a participant in public medias.

New Media Genres

Madeline’s project mashes an academic essay moved into a website but could stand as a strong traditional research essay. Yet, her mashing of genres placed her where she could use new media technologies to make circulation and public discussion about her work possible. In order to encourage students’ knowledge about how and why they create multi-generic and inherently multimodal projects, I show examples of inquiry-type work multiple times throughout the course of the semester. The use of several models of online texts leads to some students creating projects that mimic new genres that they see online.
On the first day I show a video called “The Machine is Us/Ing Us” by Mike Wesch, an anthropologist and professor at Kansas State University (Wesch). In this video, Wesch studies the social and organizational structures of the new media technologies and how internet based new media genres can encourage participation and engagement for anyone, anywhere. By devoting so much of his work to studying and defending the power of new media genres, Wesch teaches novice viewers that new media holds social and structural power while also speaking up for the experienced viewers that create these genres, who are often marginalized by publics that don’t value the practices of new media.

In his videos, Wesch mixes text, video, screen shots, screen casts and audio to walk his audience through what, how, where, when and why he researches new media movements and social phenomena such as YouTube. His goal is to make his audiences understand and pay attention to the potential for public information building and sharing that new media genres afford. As Wesch illustrates, and as Lessig has suggested, one of the potential uses of new media genres lies in their ability to take something old and make it new again. Websites like Wikipedia are similar in construction to Encyclopedia Britannica, but Wikipedia’s take on authorship, how information is shared and how knowledge is built, has evolved due to technological advances that allow anyone to edit and remix Wiki entries.

In Wesch’s “The Machine is Us/Ing Us,” Wesch uses all of the modes mentioned above for the purpose of educating his audience about the affordances of new media technology in organizing and sharing information online. Wesch develops or extends a new media genre, the academic YouTube video, where he mashes the work of a
university teacher with the new medium of YouTube, invoking the histories of both. In the video, Wesch uses screenshots to show how anyone with internet access can share information, but then explains the complex ways that websites like digg.com allow users to validate information, mark it as valid or important and organize and signify information based on how helpful or productive it could be to other users. Wesch illustrates the potential of new media genres; they allow anyone with internet access the possibility to be seen, heard, talked about and shared. The power in speaking is created when the speaker is heard, and with media such as YouTube, we could all be heard (Wesch).

When students hear their teachers validating how users of new media genres communicate, they become more responsible rhetorical agents as they participate in the work of digital writing. Students use the resources, practices, modes and genres of my FYC courses and apply them to thoughtful, critical discourse. One student, Jake, chose to research slang and what it can teach us about the publics in which it is employed. He took a small assignment focused on creating primary research and created a survey that he sent to over 100 people and then analyzed it by gender, location and word usage. His project was a YouTube video he had created, titled “A Commentary On the Use of Slang” (Weber). Jake follows Wesch’s model as he uses scholarly practices such as citation, transitions, and primary research but mashes them into a new media genre by presenting them through video, screen casts, the genre of an academic YouTube video, for the purpose of sharing information and educating an audience on a particular facet of public interaction.
Since Jake had technical skill when it came to new media and video editing, his video includes clips of music videos, commercials, screencasts, and a variety of other internet-based media programs. Jake’s introduction is a clip of a music video by a popular Bay Area hip hop artist who is involved in a specific musical genre and culture within the hip hop community called “hyphy.” At first, I felt this might be ostracizing to a general audience. Someone viewing Jake’s video might think the word is meaningless and made up and might not even classify it as slang, but simply as “other” or “not real.” As his video continues on, he gives two definitions for “slang,” one that defines it as “The ever-evolving bastardization of the written and spoken language as a result of social and cultural idolization of uneducated, unintelligible celebrities” (Urban). And another that defines it as being, “frequently ridiculed by culturally-ignorant people who feel it is the product of insufficient education and believe it to be counter-evolutionary” (Urban).

After defining slang in these two opposing ways, Jake goes on support the latter, pointing out the ways that slang enables publics to communicate in new ways, creating words for topics or practices that have evolved or come into existence. Within the first minute, Jake positions his audience by using video to show the defining processes of slang. Whether his audience does or does not know about the hyphy movement is not the point. What is important is that this video clip accurately illustrates how slang enables private communication in public spaces. This introduction “frames” his work for his audience, which is explained by Kress in his work with images:

The framing brings together ‘means’ - the information, and ‘ends’ - the desired goal, in one single new semiotic entity. Just as with some of the framings in the written instances, the fact that what is brought together is categorically unequal
disappears; the new semiotic entity makes its own new semiotic-social sense. (Kress 138)

Throughout the entire video Jake skillfully situates his audience to become a part of a public that is affected by slang; in other words, Jake uses the video itself to demonstrate the effect of slang on diverse publics by including or excluding his audience on the basis of whether or not they understand the meaning of “hyphy.” From the first segment if his video, Jake makes his audience feel the effects of slang by introducing a word that some will know, and some will not.

Throughout the rest of Jake’s project, he uses written text on the screen, so the project becomes a moving essay with other modes mashed in for specific purposes. As Jake’s video moves from text and screenshots of internet slang (ttyl, brb, lol) to written text about slang’s ability to define generations, he uses video instead of words. The transitional segment is a video from a commercial, where a mother asks her daughter who she is constantly texting. The daughter replies, verbally, “I-d-k, my b-f-f Jill” as subtitles write out “I don’t know, my best friend forever Jill.” Within this video clip, Jake moves us from internet slang to generationally defined slang by showing a mother and a daughter having a communication breakdown that is attributed to both age and differing levels of new media familiarity.

While I have no doubt that Jake could have made this transition with the written word, the affordance of using a video clip is it mashes familiar genres and signals responsible agency by his ability to decide to use a mode that better aligns with his purpose and content. This genre mashing of essay writing in the genre of a video with additional modes allowed Jake to use his “outside” composing practices, which as
Fraiberg points out, “... offers a [chance] to examine how these flows or scapes are co-constituted in everyday reading, writing, speaking, and design practices” (Fraiberg 104). His everyday practices melded with his work in my classroom, creating a final project that displays skillful and thoughtful analysis of audience, purpose and situation.

As a way to test my response to Jake’s work, I showed his video to my current students. It seemed relevant to have them respond to Jake’s work with modes and genres since my interpretation of his work suggests that his work illustrates functions of slang in a way that is effective for younger and older audiences, just in possibly different ways.

One of my current students responded to Jake’s work and said, “When he initially used urbandictionary.com as a source I knew that the video would be relevant to college students like myself... By first bringing up that website, he was targeting young adults, that audience that probably knows most about "slang"” (Baldwin). As a young adult, Christina notes how his use and display of definitions from the *Urban Dictionary* website makes her feel as if she is a member of his target audience, which makes her think his work could be relevant to her own interests and experiences. In turn, as a member of an educator audience, I recognize that Christina’s response illustrates her feeling as an insider, the use of a website based on slang would mark many teachers or older audience members as outsiders; slang is not used or responded to with the same sense of social or institutional authority by these two different audiences.

In the end, Jake’s use of alternative-type sources and his display of several modes and genres illustrates the socially defining power of slang, but with different effects on different audiences. Had Jake used other sources, modes and genres, I can’t say
that his work would or would not have had the same effect. As Rheingold and Lessig pointed out, the use and implementation of these technologies and genres are up for grabs; and who better to help explore these potentials that current members of the new media generation, with the guidance and help of experienced and open-minded composition mentors and instructors.
As research tends to do, this study leaves me with several questions. A major concern in the area of new media in FYC studies is that there has not been enough time to truly study and wait for the ramifications and outcomes of using new media in FYC classrooms. While I believe this to be an obvious truth, I do not think that means that we should side step these technologies and continue on other, more traditional paths. As Howard Rheingold explains:

Media technologies and practices are moving too quickly for us to wait for empirical understanding of changed learning and teaching styles before engaging young people with the civic potential of participatory media: it is important for the future of the public sphere and the future of the young people who will constitute it that today’s young people should be included—should demand inclusion—in the discussion of how they are to be educated as citizens. (Rheingold 114)

As any student of rhetoric knows, discussions do not always lead to conclusions. In fact, they often lead to more questions and more discussion, just like this thesis. Instead of waiting to let the academic world reach a conclusion (as if that has ever really happened), researchers like Rheingold and Fraiberg believe that FYC classrooms can be sites where meaningful and practical discussion should be taking place in order to constantly assess issues of authorship, agency, audience, genre, mode and civic participation.

In regards to the effects of new media on how authors understand their writing processes, Jonathon Alexander writes in his article “Media Convergence: Creating Content, Questioning Relationships:”
Media convergence needs to be understood not only as a powerful way of manipulating ‘texts’ to create new meanings, but also a site of authorial contestation, particularly as more traditional definitions of composing, authoring, and ownership come under scrutiny, are challenged, and shift in the production of multimedia texts. (Alexander 4)

FYC classrooms are situated in a space that allows for this contestation without ignoring that these same classrooms are situated in an academic setting that requires students to learn some of the norms and practices of academic communities, which themselves are being challenged by new media technologies. Responsible FYC classrooms are already immersed in discussion of authorship, agency, audience, genre, mode and civic participation. What is new are the situations that students now have access to due to the technologies and genres of new media. Ideally, I would want my classrooms to be spaces where students take part in conversations about and are a part of “how they are to be educated” (Rheingold 114) and that this discussion deal with redefining issues such as authorship, genre and agency.

In order to for these conversations to take place, FYC teachers need to approach new media and technology from an inquiry stance. The pedagogy of teacher inquiry, and inclusion of students in the discussion on how they are to be educated and why, will help to guard against the re-privatization of new technologies and ward off the institutions and hierarchies that so easily co-opt public tools for anti-democratic purposes. Just as Habermas explains the ways in which the bourgeois public sphere was privatized by government and its control of media, 21st century citizens are primed to either take further control over the communicative tools new media affords them, or once again lose
them to those organizations that already hold so much influence, like corporations, governments and other non-egalitarian hierarchies.

New media brings rhetorical situations into classrooms and allows for new possibilities for implementation, evolution and creation of genres. These new, and often mashed up, genres then address how:

The public you choose to address could be a public in the sense of a political public sphere that undergirds democracy—the communications you engage in with your fellow citizens, with whom you share responsibility for self-governance. The public doesn’t have to be political, however. It could be an engaged community of interest—others who share your profession, avocation, or obsession. (Rheingold 108)

While I doubt that Cooper, Rheingold, myself or any of the other scholars mentioned in this thesis intend to only teach writing solely as a public process of democracy, in an age where technology has caused public participants to write more often and in more ways than ever before, the democratic possibilities writing affords are harder and harder to ignore. In classrooms, writing does not need to be encouraged solely for use in public and political forums, but the use of new media does bring the public nature of writing into the classroom in a way that can be used in many different publics at many different levels (from a board meeting of 12 to an online forum of hundreds).

By using new media technologies in FYC classrooms, instructors and students are part of using, innovating and protecting public agency. While it easy to see schools and individual classes as disconnected from larger social processes of communication, the use of new media begins to repair this disconnect. Students have the potential to enact a process of public agency in classrooms that use social new media technologies. Within these spaces, Cooper explains that:
Though their actions do not directly cause anything to happen, their rhetorical actions, even if they are embedded in the confines of a college class, always have effects: they perturb anyone who reads or hears their words. They need to understand that this their rhetoric can contribute to the effort to construct a good common world only to the extent that they recognize their audience as concrete others with their own spaces of meaning. (Cooper 443)

It is with authorial awareness of “this process of mutual attribution that agency does, indeed produce an agent” (Cooper 443) and with this agent identity, students like Madeline or Ashlen are able to perturb norms and create new genres.

An issue that arises with public writing is the question of whether new media will cause its publics to become more fragmented or more unified. As Rheingold points out, public writing can be for political purposes or it can be used to any level of “publicness,” with each public sphere having its own complex and diverse network of genres that are constantly changing. This makes fragmentation and the possibility of privatization real all over again. As Habermas points out, media can be used by larger institutions and networks to privatize and alter processes of public discourse. New media genre study in FYC classrooms has the potential to alter the ways in which students use the internet for communication, but the fragmentation that these same technologies could cause could be spaces where larger institutions could intervene. When a user on the TED website decides to write anti-Arabic slurs in the comments on a video about Al-Jazeera, a moderator steps in and erases the comment and writes a stock message about TED’s beliefs (Khanfar). The irresponsibility of the commentator allowed room for the larger organization, TED and the powers that be within TED, to erase this person’s comment forever. This is an example of the importance of responsible agency, where FYC can help young rhetors recognize that misuse of new media tools could lead to loss of the open
spaces of new media.

Another issue that could affect the access and possibilities for contribution afforded by the internet is that of material conditions, especially in a university setting. If FYC courses are supposed to prepare students for the writing expectations of the university, then all university courses that call for writing need to provide the same technological and pedagogical tools and practices. Every classroom would need to be networked, with every student having access to a computer and the internet, all the time. Professors would all need to be well versed in the pedagogy of their university in regards to writing, technology and public participation. Equipment and professional development puts financial pressure on institutions as well as pressure on departments at a time when resources are extremely scarce. Despite economic challenges, it would be shortsighted to teach writing without supporting students participation in or entry into new media technologies.

In order to perturb, a technology has to be employed, and within a class that values student inquiry, the technologies and genres of perturbation have to be employed by both teacher and student to facilitate responsible agency. With new media tools, the work of the classroom is then already a protopublic but can be put to use at whatever level of public the student chooses. FYC instructors have the opportunity to teach these tools and practices within spaces that encourage student engagement and hope that as students recognize themselves as public participants that they use writing as a democratic tool “to construct a good common world” (Cooper 443) that values and protects the technologies and genres that enable public spheres to exist.
WORKS CITED
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