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Benefits of Multi-Modal Pedagogies in First-Year Composition Classrooms

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by

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Abstract

Most first-year college students today are "digital natives." They have lived with computers and other digital technologies all of their lives, and they have used these technologies as pupils during virtually their entire pre-college education. Does the use of these technologies make these young people better students?

To explore this question further, I will concentrate on the first-year composition classroom and how multi-modal teaching that takes advantage of digital technologies may aid in the acquisition and retention of writing skills. As part of this study, I will also examine whether or not some aspects of writing pedagogy are better taught using more traditional modes of instruction. Based on my experiences as a graduate teaching assistant, a consultant in a writing center, and a former student of both types of classrooms, I believe that I can identify gaps that may exist in both traditional and digital modes of instruction, and suggest how the two modes can complement and enhance each other.

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To Dr. James Heiman, who through his mentorship showed me that composition instruction is not just about teaching. It is about lifelong learning of the subject as a whole, and if I am ever to remain in academia, I must leave preconceptions at the door and open my mind to change.

"Even if we grant that digital natives think and learn somewhat differently than older generations, we may be doing them a disservice to de-emphasize 'legacy' content such as reading, writing, and logical thinking, or to say that the methodologies we have used in the past are no longer relevant. Digital immigrants and natives alike are bombarded with vast volumes of information in today's electronic society, which calls for an even greater emphasis on critical thinking and research skills—the very sort of 'legacy' content that teachers have focused on since classical times."

—Timothy VanSlyke, educator and author

Table of Contents

Appendices

List of Figures

Chapter I: Introduction

"Our job as teachers was to find out how, in some way and in some measure, to reacculturate the students who had placed themselves in our charge"
~ Kenneth A. Bruffee (as cited in DeLuca, 2002, p. 65)

Most first-year college students today are "digital natives." They have lived with computers and other digital technologies all of their lives, and they have used these technologies as pupils during virtually their entire pre-college education. Unlike my generation, these young people do not know what it is like to live without the Internet. Vast amounts of information are just a search-engine command away. It is no longer necessary to spend an extraordinary amount of time scouring the library shelves after-hours for that perfect source since Google and Bing have neutralized that particular need with a combined 4.14 billion pages. However, it should be noted that although the number of results from these searches is impressive, many of them require either an expensive subscription or access through a portal of a library that has paid for that expensive subscription. Also, reliability of the sources should be considered regarding these vast amounts of information. Laptops, notebooks, and smartphones are now virtual "book bags" amongst teenagers in America for that student who is always on the go. Blogs, wikis, and discussion boards riddle the web so that one never needs to wonder where to find information. Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace have replaced face-to-face conversations when considering social interactions, unless someone yearns for the days of yore. In this case, there is always Skype or Tango. Texting exemplifies the immediacy of the times. According to Gardner and Davis (2013):

> Desktops, laptops, smartphones, tablets, and other digital technologies do more than
> allow us to contact any and all individuals around the globe. In sharp distinction to the

mass media of the last century, they are intensively personal and invite activity on the

part of the user. (p. 23)

Remembering all of these mediums and how they have impacted our lives, there is one question

that needs to be asked when considering the topic of this thesis: In the first-year composition

classroom, will these same digital technologies allow them to become better writers?

To explore this question further, I will concentrate on the first-year composition

classroom and how multi-modal teaching that takes advantage of digital technologies may aid in

the accumulation and retention of writing skills. As part of this study, I will also examine

whether or not some aspects of writing pedagogy are better taught using more traditional modes

of instruction. In any case, instructors should not use digital technology for completely extrinsic

reasons like trying to convince his or her class that they know what they are doing with the

newest technologies, but because they truly believe they can help students in the classroom.

Weller (2011) probably said it best by stating, "Scholars shouldn't be using wikis because they

believe there is a Wikipedia generation and it will make them look relevant but rather because

they allow them to achieve certain goals in teaching" (p. 27). Based on my experiences as a

commercial aviation instructor, a graduate-teaching assistant for first-year college composition, a

consultant in a university writing center, and a former student of both types of classrooms (face-

to-face and online), I believe I can identify correlations that exist between traditional (prior to the

digital age) and digital modes of instruction, and suggest how the two modes can complement

and enhance each other.

Since it is relevant to this study and my experiences exist with St. Cloud State

University's English 191 (Introduction to Rhetorical and Analytical Writing) first-year

composition course, it will be the frame of reference when I inject my own knowledge of the

subject. Unless a student is a nontraditional or commuting student (special consideration given for strictly online courses), the majority of students must enroll in this course on the basis of a traditional-classroom setting. Each of my fellow instructors was given the opportunity to incorporate the D2L (Desire-to-Learn) system and Pearson MyCompLab (composition specific) student resources into their curricula. There are some instructors who did not use these modes of instruction and decided to maintain a strict approach of traditional instruction. The truth is that some instructors, and students alike, have yet to be influenced by the influx of technology-based mediums. Thus, one may deduce that there exists an element of traditionalism within the English (or humanities) culture, which seems to be a paradox. Selfe, Hawisher, and the National Council of Teachers of English (1999) showed this paradox by finding:

> When we began to use computers in university writing classes, instructors didn't tell students about the spell-check programs on their word processors, fearing the students would forget how to spell. Now teachers complain if their students don't run the spell check before they turn their papers in. (p. 31)

Fifteen years later, I have observed this phenomenon in my own classes as a student and admittedly, I have found myself to expect the same when I teach. Even though contemporary society has become technologically advanced, using supplementary websites such as D2L and MyCompLab is still relatively new.

Personal Experience

I was enrolled in the exclusively-online version of English 191. I was a nontraditional student who worked full-time and had responsibilities as a father. By enrolling in English 191 (and other courses) online, I was able to study full-time without negatively affecting my personal life. Nevertheless, as I reminisce, the course had little to offer as far as actual writing instruction.

There were weekly discussion postings and five essays due over the course of the semester. Any questions or comments were made via e-mail. For me, it was an easy, but empty, "A." I believe that learning experience lacked substance, and if I had not had the background as a military journalist, I may have progressed into other courses without having the knowledge necessary to formulate an effective essay. This is the point where digital technology failed me and a more traditional approach would have been deemed more suitable. O'Sullivan (as cited in Cole, 2000), identified that we have preconceived notions of what technology offers us, and not all of them are legitimate. He exclaimed the following:

> Sometimes, technology is introduced into classrooms based on the vague notion that 'students need to be prepared for careers of the future' or because of a belief that more technology is always better. This utopian vision of how technology can improve education has been rightly critiqued as overly simplistic and misdirected even as spending is reallocated from traditional school supplies to computers and Internet connections. (p. 49)

Also, without observing me during writing exercises or witnessing me develop my essays, how did the instructor know that I was the one actually doing the work? These concerns are not unfounded as evidenced by a study done by Hartman, Moskal, and Dziuban (as cited in Weller, 2011) when they found that the newest generation of online learners felt disappointed when they "perceived a lack of immediacy in their online courses and felt that the faculty response times lagged behind their expectations." With this in mind, an instructor who designs an online class must do so in a way that provides a learning environment which replicates a face-to-face class.

Multi-Modal Considerations

Writing is influenced by experiences and vice versa, just as it is in many other disciplines. In order to adequately convey messages or ideas, the students must be able to express themselves and have others do the same in kind. Through traditional means of communication, one may be able to compare or contrast diverse ways of thinking. Without those means, students are limited to their own experiences which may be minimal, depending on their ages, backgrounds, and pasts. Coates (2006) explained, "The demography of university students has changed, with students coming from increasingly diverse national, cultural, economic, employment and age backgrounds. Even those students once considered 'conventional' are bringing a different perspective to their university education" (pp. 40-41). Yet, when digital technology is coupled with traditional methodologies, students' learning may be increased by implementing new types of communication and delivery learned in a classroom environment. It may also allow them to become more effective critical thinkers by introducing multiple ways to collect, absorb, and present relevant information. In essence, exclusively traditional or online platforms may not be effective by themselves in contemporary American society. A mix of those two platforms may be the optimal approach to teaching and learning in a writing-intensive course such as English 191. In *Blended Learning: How to Integrate Online and Traditional Learning*, Thorne (2003) stated:

> It [blended learning] suggests an elegant solution to the challenges of tailoring learning
> and development to the needs of individuals. It represents an opportunity to integrate the
> innovative and technological advances offered by online learning with the interaction and
> participation offered in the best of traditional learning. (p. 16)

It is with this understanding that pedagogical gaps in traditional and contemporary mediums may be filled through combining the methods and tools of each to form new ways of teaching students to become better writers. Implementation of digital technologies in the traditional college classroom has become essential to meeting the needs of the 21st century composition student.

Chapter II: Literary Significance

"When considering the future of learning institutions in a digital age, it is important to look at the ways that digitality works to cross the boundaries within and across traditional learning institutions."~Catherine Davidson & David Goldberg (2010, p. 3)

I once considered myself a traditionalist regarding what I thought was the best process for young people to learn. This is most likely because I grew up in the 1970s and 1980s when computers had yet to make an impact on education. Pencil, paper, chalkboard, and teacher—that is all I felt was necessary to facilitate learning. The processes were simply lecture and discussion. Power relationships were established and everything was very structured. According to Banathy and Jenlink (2005), "Conversation, by its very nature, is relational. Whether it is dialogue, discussion, debate, or design discourse, it embodies relationships as a foundation of the interaction between one individual and another. In this sense, relation is the foundation of conversation" (p. 394). In my own writing classes, the relationships I maintained through discussion and collaboration helped me become the type of writer and reader I am. As mentioned earlier, I eventually became a professional journalist, and I believe that the traditional, face-to-face classroom served me quite well in order to attain that position. I was not only taught to write critically in those types of classes, but also to read critically, which ensured I possessed the capability to do proper research. "Reading critically is a complex activity that requires noticing, relating, and interrogating, all of which entail careful rereadings of various levels of the text. Theorists have traditionally assumed that this is an individual activity," stated Helmers (2003). "However, even in the most traditional class it is not, as the professor is drawing the students' attention to details and questions raised by the greater (scholarly) reading community" (Helmers, 2003, p. 156). Understanding this, I often wondered how online writing classes (the newest genre of composition) could do the same. If the students are expected to write at a college level, would

they be able to do so without face-to-face collaboration? The hypotheses are divided since a considerable amount of the information to date depends on what entity is supplying the data. I believe that a solely-online platform can only be successful if the instructor approaches the class with the same types of pedagogies used in brick-and-mortar settings. "Writing as communication demands public acknowledgment. Without a response, there is no communication. If there is no communication happening, then there is no understanding as to whether one's words make meaning or fall silent," said Penrod (2005). She added, "Consequently, the act of communication depends on writers targeting those ideas, elements, and languages that frequently run counter to academic prose" (p. 2). With Penrod's insight in mind, the focus of the best way to teach today's college student in neither traditional nor online; it is blended, or hybrid, theory. Introducing digital technology in the traditional classroom is gaining strength in all facets of education, at least to the point of reviewing contemporary literature on the subject.

Inclusive Diversity

One issue that I feel is lost within this topic is how digital technology impacts diversity at higher-learning institutions. Adequate and innovative use of digital technology can erase borders of preconceived biases. Anonymity behind the computer screen enables students to focus on the writing rather than the person. Inman (2004) exclaimed, "What we learn and know about meaning-making in this cyborg era is up to us, finally, if we adopt cyborg literacy as our concept because of the diversity and inclusiveness it encourages and enables" (p. 174). During a semester, a class can start out as a bunch of unknown faces, but by the end, after reading the feelings and insights of those around them through works with no names, this same class can be less critical of one another through adaptation. According to Raechele Pope, Teresa Miklitsch, and Matthew Weigand of The State University of New York at Buffalo (as cited in Feldman,

2005), "Teaching first-year students the attitudes and skills necessary to form meaningful relationships with individuals who may be culturally different from them will prepare them to enter the workforce after college and make important contributions as citizens" (p. 53). This is hopefully the end result of a successful semester, but it must be facilitated by the instructor. The students must also be allowed to take it upon themselves to find out more about their classmates. At St. Cloud State University, because of its geography in the state of Minnesota, there is an overwhelming majority of Caucasian students. They may not understand the trials and tribulations of what it takes for some minority students to attend a 4-year college. Digital technology may not have been a mainstay in their earlier educational experiences, or their parents may have had to make sacrifices in order for their children to be accustomed to the latest technological advances. As Gardner and Davis (2013) stated, "Parents of disadvantaged youth were seen as protecting their offspring from challenges and obstacles—and, at considerable sacrifice, making sure that their children had access at all times to smart devices" (p. 162). However, as new programs are instituted by the government and various colleges, these devices are quickly becoming available to all students at reduced or no cost at all. Coupled with this fact, consideration for the way student demographics are changing is becoming more viable each year, thus creating effective learning environments. Coates (2006) identified these changes by explaining:

> Effective learning is dependent on institutions providing responsive learning environments which are congruent with students' characteristics and needs. A responsive learning environment would likely involve the provision of flexible academic and administrative resources. Even more responsive environments, however, would be dynamic rather than just reactive in nature. In key ways, their organization would be

informed by student feedback, or "systematic assessment of institutional practices and

student performance," and they would develop responses which students perceive as

thoughtful and appropriate. As students from diverse backgrounds increasingly

participate in higher education, it is important that universities continue to update their

assumptions about student needs and expectations, and about the kinds of activities and

resources students need to help their learning. Institutions which are sensitive and listen

to students are likely to respond in ways that promote involvement, learning and

development. (p. 130)

Universities are understanding that, if they are to keep pace with other institutions, it is necessary

for them to consider the challenges of students who cannot afford items outside of tuition,

housing, and fees. Higher-learning institutions have become staging grounds for this type of

thought and other issues rising from a society based on digital technology.

Transformation of Norms

Instructors are also realizing that multi-modal techniques using digital technology are

necessary for them to remain relevant with these digital natives. I am sure there are older,

traditional professors who still stand firm that their ways have always worked, so why change

them? They see the newest generation as less than how they remember the last, and so on. As

evidenced by Warnick (2002):

The problem for technology critics such as Talbott (1995) and S.E. Miller (1996) who

issued dire predictions is that they are unable to project a vision of a future in which

technology improves society. Instead, they see a future in which the illiterate,

underprivileged, and undertechnologized will become ever more oppressed. (p. 122)

The truth is that the role of the student has changed, thus the pedagogies must change for them to effectively do their jobs. For those instructors 35 years old or older, they need to make a conscious effort to learn the newest technologies offered by their respective institutions or their students will realize the deficiencies and negative responses may occur. Based on the results from a 2009 undergraduate and student affairs survey, the following was recorded:

> Students, now predominantly digital natives, want a lot more. Four out of five say undergraduate education would be improved if their classes made greater use of technology (78 percent) and if their professors knew more about how to use it (78 percent). A majority (52 percent) want more blended instruction, combining online and in-person classes. Indeed, 80 percent of senior student affairs officers surveyed said their campuses were experiencing increasing demand for enhanced technology by students.
>
> (Levine & Dean, 2012, p. 47)

These results are not surprising to me at all. As a student myself, I have often ventured into classrooms expecting the instructor to know the technologies that they use. I have seen some instructors who were very capable using various devices and programs, and I have seen some who used a trial-and-error approach. The latter just took away some of the credibility of the instructor and it was difficult for me to find worth in the material after that. If I can learn how to use various technological mediums at my age, I feel my instructors should do the same, especially since most of them are my age. I do understand the fear behind not wanting to learn about them since it is not an easy endeavor, but as educators, we must consider that some of our students are going through the same emotions. As a matter of fact:

> Several students wrote in their student evaluations that although they were nervous entering a course that had such a heavy focus on technology and writing, 'the lectures and

assignments were interesting' and 'the information learned will help me in the future.'

(Penrod, 2005, p. 6)

Essentially, what we are seeing is a shift in understanding and combination of multi-modal pedagogies that feature both traditional and contemporary attributes.

Contemporary Responsibilities

Digital technology has afforded us the best freedom of all—choice. We have more access to information than ever before; we have more mediums available to answer our questions; and we have a societal fabric that supports the use of digital technologies to make our lives more convenient. All of the tools are available to us, so we must make a choice for how we are going to use those tools. Coates (2006) believes that "distributed learning" is just the type of foundation needed for the use of these tools:

At a broad theoretical level, the term [distributed learning] refers to situations in which knowledge is represented in dynamic associative networks, and in which learning occurs through ongoing dialogical interaction with these networks. The concept is now routinely being used in very loose ways to characterize learning that involves alternatives to face-to-face teaching, learning which takes place beyond campuses, marked internationalization, mediation by information and communication technologies, interaction with borderless and anarchical knowledge networks, participation in diverse knowledge communities, and changed physical and temporal dynamics. (p. 42)

I feel that if distributed learning is to occur (and it should), we must accept the responsibility of its uses and end results. This is the freedom that has been granted to us; it is each individual's choice. It has the power to combine multi-modal technologies with traditional pedagogies and as I continue to teach first-year composition, I can see its effects. I am able to adopt methods which

would have been impossible at the time I was at the age to enter college. I am able to connect with my students, regardless of our generational differences. This is similar to Inman's (2004) belief in kairos as evidenced in the following passage:

> Cyborg literacy offers scholars a broad license to study contemporary meaning-making; we can pursue whatever is interesting whenever it is interesting, as long as it features the integration of multiple systems in which individuals, technologies, and other elements in their shared contexts interact and as long as we are willing to explain our choices. (p. 164)

To me, this is one of the most important things I can do in my classroom, but it is also important to me that my students connect inside and outside of my classroom to combine what they have learned with others. Penrod (2005) explained that "In public, networked spaces, students learn that others beyond the teacher's voice can authenticate their words and imbue the students' words with meaning. For experienced or comfortable writers, this can be a liberating moment in the classroom" (p. 3). Instructors must lower their walls of power and invite students to join them in the writing process instead of managing them. As new technologies are discovered, it will be expected by the "outside" world that college graduates in the humanities and social sciences will understand these mediums and will be able to use them proficiently. Writing has recently become a subgenre of something more prominent in the contemporary English classroom. "Both key terms in computers and writing have finite life cycles—computers being the most obvious, as surely newer technologies or classifications of technologies will become prominent," wrote Inman (2004). He added, "Writing, too, has a limited future; already scholars discuss composition and rhetoric as terms that have stood the test of time and thus will replace writing in due time" (p. 261). Although this has already come to be in SCSU's first-year composition

classrooms, some authors believe that some caution must be taken integrating digital technology into the course curriculum. Instructors train for years to become experts in their fields, and they should possess the abilities expected of them not only by the institution that employs them, but also the students who have placed their trust in them. Ultimately, the instructor must coordinate and facilitate a usable curriculum which includes the use of multi-modal pedagogies involving digital technology. Cole (2000) warned that "Uncritical adoption of various technologies means that, too often, the tail wags the dog: pedagogical goals, curricula, and lesson plans are made subservient to technologies that were adopted to implement educational goals" (p. 49). A failure to take charge of a lesson plan and its attributes means that the instructor is doing a disservice to the students, thus failing to accomplish the goals set forth by the course objectives.

Chapter III: Digital Justification

"In the past two centuries, authors have attempted to make sense of the blurring of machine and garden, the growing role of technology in everyday life. Some, like H.G. Wells, proposed optimistic accounts of the potential for technology to resolve human problems and eliminate human weaknesses." ~ Andrew F. Wood & Michael James Smith (2005, p. 196)

It has become commonplace for young academics (including myself) to question whether or not the traditional modes of educational practice are fulfilling the needs of our students, and potentially becoming an irrelevant part of their collegiate careers. These concerns are often voiced in order to maintain the integrity and well-being of higher education. Prensky (as cited in Weller, 2011) specified that digital natives, who are also college graduates, "have spent less than five thousand of their lives reading, but over ten thousand hours playing video games (not to mention twenty thousand hours watching TV)" (p. 15). It is obvious that these young people are not novices regarding the uses of digital technology as entertainment, but it should be equally obvious that these individuals have used computers, the Internet, and associated software to access data and complete educational tasks with normality. Czerniewicz and Brown (as cited in Weller, 2011) conducted a study where 72% of students were "extremely positive about the role of computers in learning and have a high opinion of their own abilities/self efficacy" (p. 16). These same students also reported that they often found themselves using computers for learning even when they were not asked to do so. Overall, 75% of the students stated that they had used "communicative media" on a regular basis to learn. Whether this meant that they were socializing about assignments or researching possible source material is not evident, but what this shows me is that digital natives have a tendency to rely on the tools they have grown accustomed to in order to fulfill assignment expectations.

Generational Writing Perspectives

At this point, I have grown accustomed to emailing instead of writing letters, texting instead of calling someone, and composing everything on Microsoft Word documents instead of putting a pen to paper. These are things I felt that I had to learn in order to keep up with my peers, not only socially, but also educationally. Essentially, I am writing more than I ever have before, even as a professional journalist before there was such a thing as a word processor. This does not necessarily mean that I am convinced that traditional means are now outdated and digital technology is absolutely necessary to complete academic tasks. Actually, Clark and Bamberg (2003) seemed to hold the same philosophy as I do when they say, "Composition can be taught well with traditional technologies. In fact, almost any class activity that requires a computer could take place with a blackboard, pen, and paper, face-to-face conversation, or a bound and typeset book" (p. 481), but on the same note, Clark emphasized that she has found that "electronic technology can enrich a course in ways that traditional technologies cannot" (p. 482). This may seem contradictory, but it is this philosophy on which my thesis is based— traditional and technological means, when combined effectively, can enrich the experiences of the students. So, if someone like me, who grew up in the 70s and 80s, comes to the self-realization that I write more now than I did then, does that mean I am a better, prolific writer now? Also, does that mean that student writers are better now than previous generations? At this point, I do not believe so.

The reason I doubt better results with more writing in contemporary society is because traditional guidelines are no longer being adhered to, research is done with the value of immediacy, and a new digital language has emerged. As a matter of fact, Brown (as cited in Weller, 2011) explained, "Teens poor performance is caused by three factors: insufficient

reading skills, less sophisticated research strategies, and a dramatically lower patience level" (p. 18). For example, when a student emails me, it is rare to see a properly formatted sentence free of errors. The sentences sometimes start with lower-case letters and punctuation is absent, much like most of the texts I receive on my smartphone. These virtual documents are meant to only convey a message and they are considered to be adequate forms of communication by their authors. Couple this with the ever-changing acronyms "Net Gen" students use to communicate and there is a new set of problems that composition instructors have to deal with on a daily basis, since some students have a tendency to bring their "outside" voices into the classroom. For instance, some of the more popular acronyms are as follows: LOL means "laugh out loud;" SMH means "shaking my head;" BTW means "by the way;" BRB means "be right back;" and so on. Then there are the avatars people use to express their emotions. One no longer has to state their mood or sense of being. They just have to use symbols of these things. Besides lacking in traditional reading and writing skills, Net Gen students have become accustomed to researching source material solely online. The days of the Dewey Decimal System and physically reading published items in order to find adequate information seem to be coming to an end. Now, it is just a matter of doing a Google or Bing database search for a particular word or phrase. I did a Bing search for the phrase "digital natives" to see how many results appeared; it showed 24,800,000. Why would students ever have the need to step into a library to research topics? Anything students want to include in an academic works is available at their desks. However, it should be considered that although these digital learners are accustomed to using internet search engines, they may not be cognizant of other, more sophisticated, research strategies and tools, including digital ones. All of these things have become parts of the communication and research skills exhibited by digital learners. Immediacy of information is the main focus, not the way it is

received. Halavais (2009) believes that we must be cautious when approaching the belief that students today know how to acquire information. He suggested:

> It is commonly believed that searching requires no skill at all, and too easy to assume that 'digital natives,' those who grew up with web access throughout their childhood, have had enough exposure to search engines to have natural expertise. (p. 35)

However, as he continued with this thought, he also asserted another variable regarding the other side of the scholar/student relationship by stating the following:

> There are really two dangers here. The first is assuming that, because these 'digital natives' are members of a generation that has been immersed in digital networking, they represent the cutting edge of its use. The other mistake, perhaps unsurprisingly the one made by experienced librarians and scholars, is to assume that the web and search engines are always less appropriate tools for finding reliable information. (p. 35)

Until recently, I supported the latter, but over the course of this last semester, I found that academic search engines like EBSCO (Elton B. Stephens Company) and JSTOR (Journal Storage) offer comprehensive amounts of information that I now use for my own works. It is not necessarily an attempt to continue with traditional methods of research, but a fear of missing out on pertinent information because I may not be searching with the correct key words. Inevitably, all literature will be offered through electronic search engines. Therefore, we must embrace this change or fall behind the learning/research curve. Also, as instructors, we must learn these modern research methods and how to teach these methods by using traditional standards of rigor in critiquing information sources.

It may seem that I have morphed this section into one of pessimism and discussing the pitfalls of digital technology, but I have included this information in order to caution that

although we may be doing our students a disservice by strictly adhering to traditional methods of instruction, we must identify how students approach writing outside of the classroom and understand it before we decide to incorporate digital technologies that we may not fully understand. This is especially true of those instructors who started teaching prior to the Internet or the use of social media. It is my assumption that if we are to become multimodal instructors in the composition classroom, it is our responsibility to become students of the newest technologies. According to Coates (2006), "Ever more powerful and persuasive information and communications technologies are supplementing or replacing whiteboards, overhead projectors and printed materials" (p. 41). Since this seems to be the case, a myriad of new terms has been introduced to signify campus-based learning, like "hybrid, placeless, open, flexible, resource-based, networked, asynchronous, distributed, and borderless" (Coates, 2006, p. 42). These terms describe today's college model—what it has becoming and what it is become. To remain relevant and competitive, higher-learning institutions must keep with the times by providing instructors with access to the latest technologies. In turn, instructors must accept these digital technologies, learn how to use them, and integrate them into their curricula. The outcomes, hopefully, will be that the students understand the material better than they would if these technologies were not used.

Implementation of New Pedagogies

Even though I am only a graduate assistant, I strive to be the best instructor that I can be. I do this because I know that my performance and results reflect the quality of education provided by St. Cloud State University, at least as perceived by my students. If a student enrolls in English 191, they have a preconceived notion of what it will be like, whether through conversing with their family and friends or through word of mouth from previous students.

Those who do not have a strong ability to write dread having to take the class. As a student myself, I understand how they feel and want to provide a fun, safe, and stress-free environment. At the same time, I want to compel my students to venture outside of their comfort zones and attempt to be the best writers that they can be. When I initially began teaching, I constantly pondered how I would get the results that I wanted. Admittedly, it has been through trial and error that my current pedagogies have arisen. I just asked myself what type of class I would want to be a part of and implemented those attributes. I believe this is a positive approach that enables me to consider how students will react in this type of environment. According to Helmers (2003):

> To help us at the college level begin to think about productive interventions we might make into writing research, to explore how our certain types of pedagogies might enable students to develop complex writing skills, we need to think critically about some of the ways in which our students have been situated as subjects within our culture—well before we meet them in college. (p. 29)

Along with the traditional methods under which I was taught, digital technology has become a mainstay in the course curriculum. Viewings of movies and videos, use of PowerPoint and Prezi, student-produced public service announcements, guest speakers via Skype, interactive visual-rhetoric assignments, videoed debates, and writing center collaborations during peer review sessions are now the norm. During classes that require research or examples, I allow my students to use their laptops, tablets, and smartphones. According to previous students' responses to end-of-the-semester surveys that are available in the appendices of this thesis, all of these things make the lectures, readings, discussion postings, in-class writings, quizzes, and major writing assignments much more accessible. This does not necessarily mean that my classes are perfect in

any way. After all, I am still a student myself and I realize that I have much to learn, but by doing all of these things, I am able to critique my overall performance, bond with my students, and see if their writing improves through these processes. In any case, I do not have to worry about finishing a 10- or 15-minute lecture and then sitting back and staring at the ceiling while students are revising their papers (Clark & Bamberg, 2003, p. 484). My highest priority is to earn the students' trust so that when I ask them to do something they do the best that they can. I believe that by using technological means to convey certain messages, the students not only learn to trust the information that I give them, but they also retain that information in order to become better writers.

The "Net Gen" students have grown up with digital technology. They have had access to more information than any previous generation. Therefore, it is in the students' best interest to teach them how to effectively gather and use that information to support their works. This is not just an individual effort on the part of instructors. The institutions themselves must possess the academic infrastructure to allow this to occur. Morrison of the University of Saskatchewan, Canada, (as cited in Bullen & James, 2007) exclaimed the following:

> To take full advantage of the potential of e-learning, institutions of higher education not only have to radically change how they are organized to support technology-enhanced learning (infrastructures and organizational models), but also face the challenge of creating a more appropriate pedagogical foundation upon which to build revitalized educational systems necessary to meet the demands of current and future knowledge users and creators. Put another way, I argue that the entire system of tertiary education needs revamping from the bottom-up. Current approaches to teaching and learning are an

awkward fit with the new information and communications technology (ICT) tools

currently used for teaching and learning. (p. 105)

I believe that if the respective college administrative leaders facilitate technology-rich learning

environments, and if the instructors utilize all of the technological means made available to them

in effective ways, students will be able to learn, comprehend, and retain the information given in

profound ways never seen by previous generations.

Chapter IV: Digital Methodology

"The increasing mobility of students and knowledge has enhanced the need to understand the emerging borderless forms of university education." ~ Hamish Coates (2006, p. 40)

This chapter will illustrate the various ways that I have implemented and utilized digital technology in my own classroom in order to facilitate the growth of my young students. These methods have been changed in various ways over the course of four semesters, but the end results show that my methods work. I will show that the use of movies, videos, PowerPoint presentations, interactive-video discussions, and digital peer reviews have enabled me to produce better, college-level writers.

Cinematic Writing Prompts

One of the ways I attempt to connect with my composition students is to introduce movies and videos into the curriculum. We are visually-stimulated beings, and most of my students have majors outside of the humanities, therefore, it is essential that I try to convey some of my teachings through methods outside of the realm of the written word. As Weller (2011) stated, "The challenge for universities is to remain relevant to these learners. This means developing an appropriate curriculum, having flexible course options, using technology effectively and generating interest" (p. 181). There is no way to get around lecturing, assigned readings, and in-class coursework, but by integrating video technology into the classroom, I have been able to successfully associate that material with entertainment, thus making the delivery more compelling. Unfortunately, not all of my colleagues have agreed with my methods, but there is no denying that my students have benefitted from these experiences; the feedback from students who have taken my class has been completely positive and shows potential for growth. Weller (2011) explained, "Digital scholarship is more than just using information and communication technologies to research, teach and collaborate; it also includes embracing the

open values, ideology and potential of technologies" (p. 50). Each semester, I show four videos (varying in length) and four full-length movies. For each showing, the students must write responses which include the ethos, logos, pathos, and kairos of a specific instance or the overall work. Additionally, since these videos and movies have been selected for their pertinent content, the students must compare them to experiences in their own lives. It may seem that these works do not apply to all of the students since they are attending St. Cloud State University from other states and countries, but the topics are quite applicable, regardless of background or geography.

For the videos, the first one I show is a Showtime Exclusive named Penn and Teller's *Bullshit*. This is a show that was produced in 2010 and focuses on political correctness on college campuses in America, and one of the featured colleges is St. Cloud State University. It introduces many of my young students to the issues of diversity, different cultures, and collegiate attitude towards these issues for the first time in their lives, but the main topic asks the question: Is political correctness so rampant on our campuses that it silences and censors students from expressing themselves, thus preventing critical thinking? According to Dr. Alan Kors, a history professor at the University of Pennsylvania and co-founder of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), it is, especially on SCSU's campus. "This is a campus where myth rules reality, and where political correctness is *so* out of control," exclaimed Kors. By the end of the show, he stated, "What universities are saying by these codes, special protections, and double standards to women, to Blacks, to Hispanics, to gay and lesbian students is 'You are too *weak* to live with freedom. You are too *weak* to live with the First Amendment.' If someone has told you that you are too weak to live with freedom, they have turned you into a child." It is noticeable that the four elements of rhetoric can be associated with such a topic. For the related discussion questions that I post on D2L, the first focuses on the video's subject matter. "What do you find

relevant about the video and why?" The second question is more personal. "Since you have been at SCSU, have you encountered instances of extreme, or lack of, political correctness? Discuss." Each student's responses must be 500 words or more. Not only does this help the students to identify the rhetorical elements, but it also allows me to get to know the students and understand their current writing levels.

The second video tells the story of Amanda Todd through her eyes. This was a teenage girl who would have been the same age as most of my students, but she committed suicide because of bullying, both physically and on social networks. She tells her story through a YouTube video she posted just weeks before ending her life. In the video, she has written statements on notecards telling how she was bullied and that she felt there was no way out. Although she never speaks and her face is never entirely shown, her message is very deep and dark. Other aesthetics include the use of black and white imagery and emotionally-based music. I also show a supplementary video from a popular YouTube channel called *Teens React*. Various teens watched the same video and then voiced their opinions. Most of them had not heard of Amanda Todd and, after they found out that she had committed suicide, a couple of them were brought to tears and others proclaimed their anger about the bullying. The most memorable reaction is by 15-year-old Lia pertaining to derogatory Facebook messages still being written about Todd. In tears, she challenges these individuals by stating, "When is she going to see this, you know? Like, are you just doing it for your own pleasure?" By witnessing these raw emotions of teens approximately the same age as them, my students tend to be more open and honest about their own feelings. This video is actually a staple in my own pedagogy of utilizing media in the traditional composition classroom. As a class project, my students are divided into groups and

write, direct, and shoot their own bullying public service announcements. This not only keeps the topic alive in their minds, but it has also shown to strengthen students' bonds with each other.

The third video, *The College Conspiracy*, speaks about student loans and the financial system that supports them, and interviews real students about what they have encountered after graduation regarding the repayment of those loans. This topic has always had the tendency to make the students question whether they really need the loans when they are already provided for through employment, grants, and scholarships. It also elaborates on what value a college degree actually has in the current job market. Overall, this video seems to highlight the negatives of the current academic infrastructure, but at the same time, I am not trying to promote the system to my students. I am giving them all sides to an issue so that they may make their own conclusions, thus encouraging critical thinking. For example, one of the main contributors to this documentary, Gerald Celente of the Trends Research Institute and editor of the *Trends Journal*, offered his opinion regarding corporations and business entities requiring college degrees for employment. He professed:

> I don't care if you have a degree. It makes absolutely no difference. I want you to have a mind, think for yourself, and think on your feet. Be energetic, and love what you're doing, and have a passion in so many different ways. Not to just be able to regurgitate what you're being told.

This is just one case of offering an alternative viewpoint when it comes to a college education, but ultimately, my students do not immediately consider dropping out of college. Instead, they consider what path they are on and what they need to do to succeed in the contemporary job market, except now, they have more options after seeing this video, discussing it, and then writing about it.

The final video is always a particular political figure's campaign video, depending what elections are, or will be, taking place. The students analyze the rhetorical attributes of his or her message and how it is conveyed. Historically, this has made the students interested in public discourse and how it is used to persuade constituents to vote one way or another. The most recent campaign video shown in my classroom was Ron Paul's 2012 *Restore America Now* ad in his bid for the presidency. This is the common type of ad I show since it does not support either of the major parties. Instead, Paul's strategies transcend the traditional platforms and offer variances across all topics. At one point, the narrator suggests, "We know where they (Republicans and Democrats) stand, but will our country's leaders repeat the mistakes of the past? Will they choose compromise or conviction? Ron Paul . . . no deals." He is unwavering and is continuously fighting against "the Washington machine." I personally grew up in the era when there were two things we were encouraged never to discuss at the dinner table: politics and religion. However, I believe that is exactly what we should do in order to not limit ourselves, either through thought or expression. The first time I showed a video of this sort, I was interested, but hesitant, in observing how the class would react and what they would write. After all, I did not want to feed their political biases. I wanted them to see different sides to the issues that may have been common in their pre-college surroundings. I was relieved to read an extraordinary amount of critical observations, opinions, and possibilities. Since then, my classes have become more civic-minded and interested in politics after these campaign ads are shown.

For the movies, the first is *Answer This* (2010), set on the campus of the University of Michigan. It is a story about a graduate student's journey from academia to a fulfilling life doing something else. The moral is that even if one's life is predestined by outside forces (in this case, parents), critically-thinking college students have the opportunities to follow their hearts and find

something that they want to do in their lives, not just what society tells them is the correct path.

To accompany this, *Answer This* has the conflict/resolution schema that many feature films

possess: Paul, the main character and teaching assistant, is expected in following his father's

footsteps into a tenured professorship at UM; Paul has a "frowned upon" relationship with a

freshman student; Paul would rather play bar trivia with his friends than finish his dissertation;

and at his dissertation defense, Paul exclaims that he is not interested in staying in Ann Arbor.

Thus, his future is now undetermined. For the D2L discussion of this movie, the students are

asked to identify one of the relationships and compare it to one in their own lives. The responses

are often very revealing as to how the student ended up at St. Cloud State University, what major

they had wanted to study prior to attending, and what major they have decided upon since

arriving and why. The most prominent relationship to be considered is the relationship between

Paul and his father. Many of my students proclaim that the decisions they have made pertaining

to their post-secondary education has been a result of their parents' requests. Admittedly, I could

have seen these same responses from a written work, but I do believe that the movie may have

evoked more emotional responses instead of just being expository.

The second movie explores diversity on a prep-school campus in the 1950s. *School Ties*

(1992) shows the effects of bigotry and lack of acceptance through stereotypes. I usually have a

number of minority and international students in my class, and this type of movie allows the rest

of the class to understand how words and actions can make someone feel unworthy of attending

a 4-year university such as SCSU. In *School Ties*, a Jewish student is accepted to a prominent

boarding school via a football scholarship. He keeps his religion secret until an inebriated board

member reveals the fact at an after-game banquet. At this point, all of his friends abandon him

and make his life very difficult. As a matter of fact, throughout the entire movie, statements and

acts of bigotry are prevalent, so the importance of secrecy is elevated in the minds of the viewers. This happens to be the most controversial and illuminating movie that I show. Many of my students are usually from somewhere in Minnesota, so they may have not grown up around diversity. Yet, some of those same students are able to negotiate their beliefs regarding stereotypes. In essence, *School Ties* is able to show my students the effects of words and actions involving people of their own age group. Through comparison and contrast, they often discuss what they have encountered, either positive or negative. This has a noticeable effect on the other students in their groups since it provides a foundation for understanding and acceptance. It must be noted that by the time this movie is shown, the class has been together for a majority of the semester. They have grown to know about their classmates on a very personal level.

The third movie examines spirituality, regardless of someone's belief system or religious orientation. *The Fifth Quarter* (2011) is based on a true story involving a college football player at Wake Forest University and the premature death of his younger brother who died in an automobile accident. This movie pushes the boundaries of self-realization and there is rarely a dry eye in the room during certain scenes. I must point out that there is only one scene that takes place in a church—the funeral. The family only prays at the hospital bedside of Luke, the younger brother of Jon Abbate. This movie is shown for its spiritual connotations, not for religious value. For example, Jon and his mother go through periods when they have to fight for their sobriety while coping with Luke's death. Through a wide variety of support, they are able to find solace at Jon's football games. When the Wake Forest Demon Deacons are fighting to win in the fourth quarter, Jon, his family, the team, and the crowd all hold up five fingers to represent the "fifth quarter" (Luke's quarter). Their inspiration is found in the way Luke lived his life, and without regret. The discussions derived from this movie are often dramatic and

emotional. My students tend to express what things inspire them in life and are enthusiastic to share those details with their peers. This prompts them to invest more feeling and time into their responses, and at times, this movie has generated writing assignment topics which are related to spirituality.

The final movie is *With Honors* (1994) and it challenges the conceived class system on Harvard University's campus, and in contemporary American society. A student majoring in government ultimately changes his stance on what his degree can provide to those less fortunate. Since most of my students are freshmen, some of them do not have a major. This movie allows them to consider what degree best suits their state of being (values, morals, integrity, loyalty, honor, etc.), and not just what degree will make them the most money. At first, Monty approaches his senior thesis with a conservative view of how the government can benefit those in financial need, and he is expected to graduate with honors. By chance, he meets a self-proclaimed "bum," Simon. Eventually, the two become friends, and as the relationship matures, Monty is no longer sure of his original thoughts pertaining to government. Later, Simon reveals that he is dying from asbestosis and wants to see his son, whom he has never met, one time before he passes. In order for him to do this, Monty must turn in his senior thesis late, thus ensuring that he will not graduate with honors. Monty and his friends take Simon to see his son, who rejects him. Simon dies that night while Monty and the others read him Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. At the funeral, Monty reads the obituary that Simon wrote for himself. At the end, it says, "Montgomery Kessler, who will graduate life with honors." In the category of visual stimulation, this is easily the most emotional movie that I show, and it is usually in the last couple weeks of the semester. The responses, discussions, and writings are not much different

than any other mentioned, but this movie basically encapsulates what I have tried to teach my young students throughout the course of the semester.

Through all of the productions I have mentioned, my students are introduced to critical thinking. I teach Dissoi Logoi (double argument) and ensure my students that maintaining bias and only looking at one side of a situation or argument can hinder their academic growth. This has shown to be very effective when considering the caliber of their works and the interactions they have while in the classroom. Could I have achieved these same outcomes without the videos and movies? Personal experience says "no." I have taught without using these tools of visual stimulation, and the results have never been as positive as they are regarding my first-year composition students.

Contemporary Presentation

In my earlier days as a student, lecture tools included chalkboards and handouts. The only visual stimulation afforded was looking out of the classroom windows or the standard clipart used within the respective handout. If the teacher did not possess the ability to engage students through words, much of the material was lost in a sea of dialectic tone. Since then, slideware has been produced to function as an electronic medium where both the teachers and students can benefit from its digital attributes. Although there is a growing number of software programs able to do this, PowerPoint is the most prominent. I use it in my classroom, as well as most of my peers.

As an instructor, I always want to keep my students interested in the material, so I spend a lot of time producing presentations. It not only serves as a catalyst for instruction, but it also ensures that I am covering all of the material that I want to by serving as a virtual outline. I always feel as though I was "cheating" by doing this, but Brad Eastman of the University of

British Columbia and Adnan Qayyum of Concordia (Canada) University (as cited in Bullen &
Janes, 2007) said:

> For many faculty members, the practice of using slideware has spilled over into teaching
> because it affords many advantages. Slideware has rich graphics and video and audio
> capabilities. During class lectures, slides act as an outline, reminding the instructor what
> needs to be discussed. (p. 338)

Additionally, I worry that overuse of PowerPoint in my classroom is counterproductive since the
students may be learning more from the presentation slides rather from my own knowledge. In
order to combat this, I have generated less new presentations and have just built on and revised
older presentations, as not to get complacent. If I am constantly trying to build new lesson
pedagogies, I may be compelled to cut corners for the sake of efficiency. Eastman and Qayyum
(as cited in Bullen & Janes, 2007) supported this logic by stating:

> Individuals are forced to rush the design process. As a survival technique, instructors or
> designers resort to using familiar, if less effective, methods. They teach as they have been
> taught, and, in the case of slideware, use it as they have seen it used. (p. 341)

Another issue that must be considered while using PowerPoint presentations during
lectures is that the students are being introduced to the course material through fragmented
means. If I were to quote all of the material necessary to fulfill assignment requirements, the
presentation would be extremely long, and I would seem to be just reading what can already be
read by the students. Personally, I cannot stand to be read to when the information is right in
front of me. Therefore, "PowerPoint easily affords organizing information hierarchically on
slides as headings, bullet points, more subheading-like bullet points, and sentences or sentence-
fragments," but this comes at a cost if the instructor does not fill in the blanks with his or her

own understanding of the material. Eastman and Qayyum (as cited in Bullen & Janes, 2007) further stated, "This is problematic because presenters assume there is continuity from point to point. Many audiences also accept this assumption of continuity. In fact, using bullet points creates fragmented narrative with choppy continuity where critical relationships are often left vague" (p. 339). This is the exact instance where the optimal form of lecturing combines digital technology with traditional means. The Powerpoint presentation/lecture has the ability to do four things:

1. Serve as an outline for the instructor, so that he or she will not forget about any of the material they want the class to be subjected to.

2. Keep the students interested in the lecture by providing a tool of visual stimulation.

3. Give just enough information on the slides to provoke interest, but it cannot be fully understood unless the instructor fills in the blanks.

4. Can be downloaded on a site like D2L, so that the students can revisit the presentation for any forgotten information.

Although I see PowerPoint as a valuable tool in the classroom, all instructors who use this software must be aware that students see the use of this medium in different ways, and not all of them are good. Based on a study by Levine and Dean (2012), "The staples in college courses are PowerPoint and clickers. Student reactions vary widely" (p. 48). Some of the reactions they received consisted of the following:

- They all use PowerPoint when they lecture and then they will usually e-mail you the PowerPoint.

- People don't know how to use PowerPoint the right way . . . A teacher will summarize everything you read the night before and just read it.

- It lets me listen to lectures rather than getting distracted taking notes.

- They use it as their whole presentation rather than a visual part of the presentation.

- There are so many awful PowerPoint slides that the professors just do for no reason. (p. 48)

As I stated before, students will see the use of slideware very differently from one another, depending on their backgrounds and other attributes. Some like the more traditional approach to instruction, while others depend on their roots in digital technology. The instructor must make a conscious effort to maintain a balance of both. If this is not the case, students may be alienated from the very material the instructor feels they need to know.

> The message from students is that if a faculty member is going to use technology in the classroom, professors need 'to have a good handle on what they are doing.' If they're 'not good at it, teach what you know so I can get the most out of this class. (Levine & Dean, 2012, p. 49)

One student put it this way: "The bottom line is technology is not going to make up for a bad teacher."

To sum up the use of slideware in my own classroom, I believe that it provides me with the tools to ensure that I am teaching everything that I expect a first-year composition student to learn in order to use it in their own works. It would be unfair of me to expect anything different. If I were to assume that my students listen to everything I say without this type of visual stimulus, I would be forgetting how I listened as a student at their age, which is sporadic at best. If anything, my credibility as an instructor is strengthened by the use of PowerPoint. Eastman and Qayyum (as cited in Bullen & Janes, 2007) seemed to understand this by investigating the results of a study done at Arizona State University. They explained:

Researchers presented the same information to three groups in three formats: on paper, as bar graphs, and in PowerPoint with animated graphs. The group shown the PowerPoint presentation rated the information as substantially more credible than the other two presentations. (p. 340)

Through interaction, I have noticed that most of my students have continually been subjected to this type of instruction and this is what they are used to. Humans are creatures of habit and we learn best through the ways we have always been taught. This does not mean that we cannot expand on those modes of instruction. This just means that instructors should use the technologies that digital natives have come to know for lectures. I, for one, get more out of a lecture when the instructor is not the sole focus of presentation. PowerPoint and other slideware provide a vast array of resources, whether it is textual, photographic, or video presentation. These programs provide an enriched atmosphere where students can learn through inclusion and example, rather than exclusion and imposition.

On the next several pages, Figures 1 through 10 are selected slides from one of the PowerPoint presentations for my first-year composition class. The backgrounds and pictures are unique, and the text is fragmented to serve as a catalyst for discussion. Most of the presentations I produce are derivatives of these designs. They cover the origins of rhetoric (including ancient Greek and Roman philosophers), the rhetorical triangle and the elements, the five canons of rhetoric, Toulmin's Argument Model, Rogerian Argumentation Theory, debate principles, visual rhetoric, among others.

Figure 1. *Establishing Relationship with Students*. The use of the YouTube background immediately instills a sense of digital technology in the traditional classroom at the beginning of the lecture.
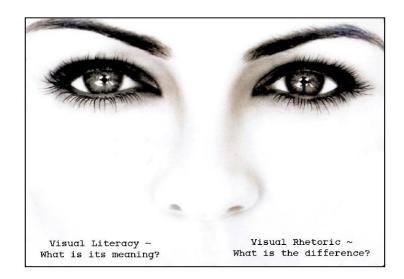

Figure 2. *Focus on Backgrounds*. The background draws the student into the main point of the presentation.
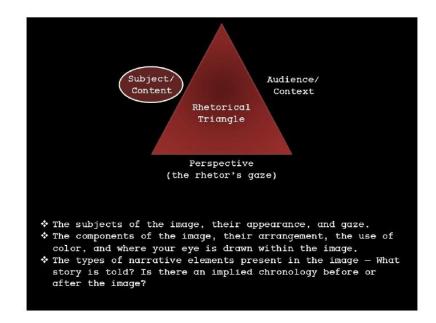
Figure 3. *Template Set for Additional Slides*. Now that the students have become interested, the gist of the information can be introduced through text and discussion.
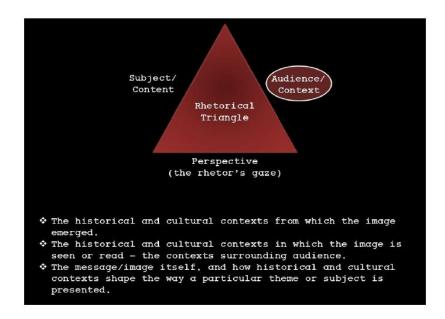

Figure 4. *Keeping the Students' Interest through Animation*. A template for information has now been established making it convenient for the instructor. The animation allows the students to remain focused.
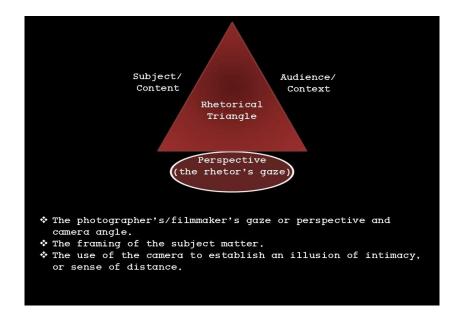
Figure 5. *Completing the Lesson Process.* All sides of the rhetorical triangle have been discussed through transition.
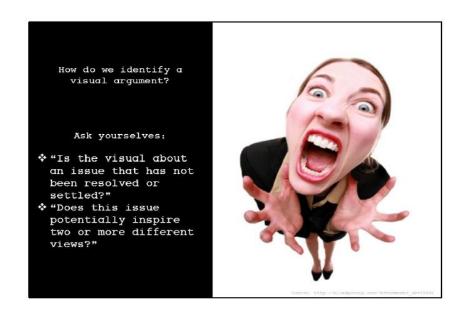

Figure 6. *Engaging in Open Discussion.* Since the main information has been presented, the instructor may now engage the class with open discussions.

Figure 7. *Presenting Supporting Information.* Supporting information is ready to be added.

Figure 8. *Revisiting Previous Lessons.* The addition of the elements already discussed in class are now associated with the new material.

Figure 9. *Considering Additional Information*. An element that has not previously been introduced is now considered.

Figure 10. *Putting the Knowledge to the Test*. Now that the student has been taught all of the necessary tools for a rhetorical analysis of a photograph, the instructor can hear how the students interpret it through practical responses.

Interactive, Distance Lecturing

Last semester, I decided to try something that I had not previously considered. I wanted to inspire my students to write, so I contacted a friend (name withheld for security reasons), who was then deployed in Afghanistan as a combat photojournalist, the same job I had when I was in the United States Navy in the late 80s, early 90s. I asked if he would be interested in spe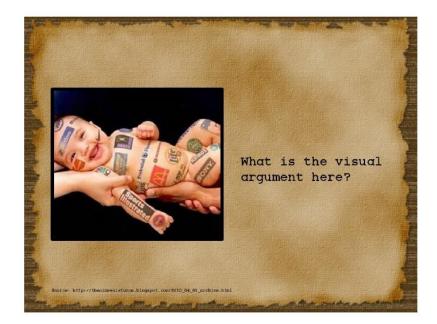aking to my students via Skype about what his job entails and how he has become a better writer over the years. As a friend, he immediately said "yes." Through some modifications to his schedule, he was able to solidify a time to speak that would be congruent with the time of the class.

After talking about his job, how long he has been in, and where he had been, he started discussing his experiences as a military journalist and photographer. His stories were riveting and the students seemed to respond positively. After about 20 minutes, he started to answer questions from my students. At first, their questions were only about the military and what was going on in Afghanistan, but I quickly brought the focus back to writing. What followed could not have been expected.

As the discussion began to focus on writing, the students started asking about the best ways to write about specific instances. My friend is a great orator and his answers are always to the point, but with a touch of inspirational pathos. Most of the students started taking notes even though I had said that this was just a fun way to learn about writing in another type of genre. To this day, I do not know why they initially took notes, but a number of papers were written later about the military, patriotism, and why the understanding of various genres is so important.

If I continue teaching composition, this is one technology I will definitely use again. The fact that the students get to discuss writing with a professional thousands of miles away is one thing, but to have students so intrigued by the practice of writing in a nonacademic setting is

something that cannot be overstated. I would say that the use of Skype in my classroom was a part of the constant evolution of my instruction practices. "Maintenance learning involves the acquisition of fixed outlooks, methods, and rules of dealing with known events and recurring situations. On the other hand, evolutionary learning empowers us to anticipate and face unexpected situations," according to Banathy and Jenlink (2005): "It will help us to progress from unconscious adaptation to our environment to conscious innovation, coevolution, and cocreation with the environment and the development of the ability to direct and manage change" (pp. 291-292). I am sure many of them will remember the experience for years, and through this experience, they have grown to appreciate writing and communication more.

Digital Peer Reviews

In recent years, even in my own English classes, peer review sessions have become commonplace. Not all of my peers facilitate this process, but I feel it is an integral part of the learning process in composition. Particularly, I stand behind Rebecca Rickly's (as cited in Inman, Reed, & Sands, 2004) summation of collaboration:

> During the mid- to late 1980s, theorists such as Kenneth Bruffee, Andrea Lunsford, and Lisa Ede began to challenge the efficacy of stand-alone composing, arguing instead for a theory of collaborative thinking, learning, and writing in which knowledge is socially constructed by members of a group. (p. 39)

This theory has the ability to create better writers through critical thinking which is sometimes absent from the first few weeks of learning. DeLuca (2002) feels that, "People who take part in a collaborative enterprise such as this exceed, with a little help from their friends, what any of them alone could have learned, accomplished, or endured" (p. 69). The students are not only given the opportunity to critique and give ideas to others in the class, but they are also the

recipients of outside knowledge and different ways to look at their own work. There may also be times when students fail to grasp the concepts of the assignments and/or information given by the instructor, and these sessions can alleviate those concerns. According to Thorne (2003):

> They crave feedback, they need time to reflect, they want very specific coaching to help them develop what they know and what they need to know. Unlike many others they often have a purpose to their learning and they get incredibly frustrated with what they may perceive as trivia, or irrelevant information. (p. 20)

Peer reviews are the gateway to personal growth and expansions of individual thought.

You may be wondering why I am including peer reviews in a thesis about digital technology in the classroom since they are generally considered traditional. The reason is that I allow everyone to use electronic devices (laptops, tablets, and smartphones) during these sessions for commenting, editing, and research. "'Educational technologies' can refer to a wide range of techniques and practices in the classroom such as introducing group work strategies to facilitate collaboration and peer learning, sequencing of topics, and procedures to reinforce key ideas across content areas," according to Cole (2000). He added, "Any one of these may—or may not—incorporate tangible artifacts. In essence, this view would argue that the broad group of activities that we call 'education' itself is a technology for developing individuals and evolving society" (p. 51). Also, the collaboration that takes place in a digital setting is much different from the usual face-to-face collaborations, especially at the beginning of the semester. After all, digital natives are used to online collaboration through social networking, whether they realize it or not. Davidson and Goldberg (2010) explained:

> This model of peer-to-peer information-sharing happens routinely, if casually, on social networking sites such as Facebook and YouTube and is being adopted and developed

into a method by an increasing number of innovative educators, on all educational

levels and in all institutional environments. (p. 25)

I believe my approach to composition peer review sessions is innovative and the students seem

to enjoy them.

In the first few weeks of the semester, students still do not know each other, whether by

name or writing style. Like any other first-year composition class at St. Cloud State University, I

usually have four or five students of color, three or four international students, two or three

PSEO (postsecondary enrollment options) students, one or two nontraditional students, and the

rest are young, white students. Since most of these students are young and lack life experience,

this type of spectrum needs to be managed delicately in order to remove, or at least minimalize,

bias. Feldman (2005) probably put it best by saying:

As universities continue to search for programs and services that increase retention and

create diverse communities, students and the campus-wide community can only benefit

from a growing awareness of the unique first-year experience for students of color as well

as understanding the impact that multiculturalism has on all first-year students. (p. 56)

I ask that the students bring in their works without their names and on a laptop or tablet. I have

yet to have a student who does not have one of these devices, but if I did, I have two extra

laptops that I bring if they would need to use one. The reason I ask them to not put their names

on their works is to eliminate any preconceived notions of what a reader would hold against the

author through ignorance. I believe that nothing can set a negative tone for a class more than

biases. I also want my students to know that there is more than one voice for instruction in my

class, since some of them may also believe that I possess preconceived biases. Therefore, during

peer review sessions, I bring in two consultants (tutors) from SCSU's writing center, The Write Place.

Before I started as a teaching assistant in the first-year composition program, I was a consultant at The Write Place for 2 years (6 semesters, including summers). Over time, I became good friends with the director, Dr. Carol Mohrbacher. Through many mentoring sessions with her and the experiences I had in the center, I felt that it would benefit students if they had us in the classroom for peer reviews. A program had already been put into place by Carol, so I asked her if I could be a part of it. As I went to various departments such as nursing, law enforcement, and the social sciences, I was able to observe the impact that consultants could have during the peer review sessions. I can say that the results were immediate and the information was absorbed thoroughly by the respective classes. This set the stage for what I would ultimately implement in my own composition classroom.

Before my first semester of teaching, I had read about a 1998 study by Julie Aipperspach-Anderson of Baylor University and Susan Wolff-Murphy of Texas A&M University. They had collaborated with a writing center in order to bring tutors into multiple classrooms. As an avid supporter of The Write Place and its mission, I not only wanted to allow more perspectives from the two designated consultants, but I also wanted my students to realize (and utilize) the writing support that was available to them. The premise of the study may sound familiar since I used this study as a catalyst for my own pedagogical approach to peer reviews:

> When we began working on a writing group outreach project in the spring of 1998, our
> initial desire was to address the writing concerns of students in an introduction to
> literature course. What we realized as we implemented the writing groups program in
> other writing classes is that our program meets the needs of students even as it increases

the visibility of the writing center's mission. (Aipperspach-Anderon & Wolff-Murphy as

cited in Moss, Nicolas, & Highberg, 2004, p. 47)

Aipperspach-Anderson and Wolff-Murphy approached their project with the understanding that

in order for it to be successful, tutors and instructors alike would have to collaborate. If all

parties were not given the information necessary to perform the recommended tasks, the program

would run the risk of failure. As for the case of the consultants, "Using writing center tutors in

the classroom can emphasize process as long as the tutors are trained to work with writers and

their skills rather than on the finished product" (Aipperspach-Anderson & Wolff-Murphy as

cited in Moss et al., 2004, p. 49). This is what I was taught while I trained to be a consultant, and

I expected any tutor coming into my classroom to be trained the same way, especially since

Carol emphasized this point. However, the gist of the responsibility for these sessions must lie

with the instructor. They cannot expect positive results unless they are proactive in their own

efforts to collaborate with a writing center. The final summation of the study by Aipperspach-

Anderson and Wolff-Murphy explained: "One of the five teachers who held the most successful

workshops during the fall of 1998 came to a writing center staff meeting in advance to speak

directly to the tutors who would be visiting her class." They added, "We believe that the

agreement between instructor and tutor feedback after the workshop was guaranteed to occur

because the instructor provided the tutors with specific goals" (as cited in Moss et al., 2004, p.

53).

Throughout my years as a first-year composition instructor, I have maintained constant

contact with the staff of The Write Place. As each semester begins, I bring my students in for a

tour of the writing center. After my class period concludes, I go back to The Write Place and

speak to the consultants who facilitated the tour. One, to congratulate them on a job well done.

Two, to speak to them on a personal level of what I expect. Many of them I already know from previous semesters, but this type of interaction allows me to get to know the new consultants and allows them to get to know me. This is a more important aspect than one may think since I not only want the collaboration in my classroom, but I also want it when my students go into the writing center for mentoring sessions. Throughout the semester, and at least twice before each major writing assignment, I require my students to schedule and attend these sessions. If they do not, they lose points. I do get resistance at first from some students who feel it is a nuisance to go to these meetings outside of class times. Many of these feelings change once the students realize that The Write Place has an online system in place for tutorials. I require all of my students to register during the writing center tour, so when they want to schedule and attend an online tutorial, they just need to sign in and upload their works from the comforts of their own settings. By the time the semester ends, the overwhelming majority indicates that these sessions did help in their overall understanding of what it takes to become adequate, effective, college-level writers.

One thing I must point out about my peer review sessions is that all of my students are already assigned to specific groups and they remain with those groups throughout the semester. Each group consists of four or five students, each with his or her own strengths and weaknesses. This means that they are assigned in order to complement others' weaknesses. If one student excels at writing but lacks at research, there will be another student who excels at research and lacks at writing. I feel this is an integral part of the learning process. My students are not only learning from me, but also from each other; their peers who are considered at the same levels as they are. An instructor only has insight into the students as much as those individuals allow, whereas students tend to be more comfortable and forthcoming to each other. While they are in

these groups, students are able to pick major writing assignment topics that they choose instead

of me telling them what they have to do, but this is not my invention. As explained by Bawarshi

(2003):

> After students have had a chance to analyze a genre of their choosing, I have then
>
> instructed students to form semester-long groups, each adopting a specific academic
>
> discipline (for example, an economics group, a chemistry group, a psychology group, and
>
> so on) . . . Working in groups, students study the discipline through its genres. They
>
> interview faculty and students in the discipline to find out what sorts of texts they write
>
> and what function writing serves. (p. 134)

If I give my students the choice to choose their own topics for their own reasons, I am giving

them some of the power, thus enabling them to remain individuals in a collective setting. I feel

that by doing this, they will take pride in their work and will give extra effort to their completed

projects.

In summary, to me, peer reviews are essential to the writing process. They provide

insight from both instructor and peers, change student perspectives on how to approach the

writing process, and introduce new pedagogies and methods to students who may never have

encountered such a process before. As far as using technological devices in a traditional

classroom, it seems to offer a sense of anonymity to a rather diverse collection of students.

Biases are countered by allowing students to critique rather than praise for the sake of avoiding

controversy. In other words, "Word processing makes it easy for students to respond to one

another's writing" (Clark & Bamberg, 2003, p. 485). Utilizing digital technology during peer

reviews also allows students to discover, search, and utilize information that historically could

have only been found by visiting the university library by introducing them to academic search engines like EBSCO and JSTOR as evidenced in the following:

> If peer review is deemed essential, then scholars can construct methods of achieving this which utilize the technology to the improvement of the process. An insistence on maintaining the current model, with the current journals, and denigrating the new models runs the risk that research is out of date and hidden away. Or worse, it allows others to control the process because scholars deem it too complex or not their domain. (Weller, 2011, p. 171)

By allowing laptops, tablets, and smartphones in my classroom, it may seem to many that I am instilling taboos into the peer review process, but I can assure you that I maintain a sense of traditionalism myself. I am only attempting to ensure that although the functions of such a process have already been set in place for decades, the peer reviews that I facilitate will be considered contemporary by my students. Weller (2011) echoed this philosophy by stating:

> Peer review is a method of ensuring quality, objectivity and reliability. But it may not be the only way of realizing this, or at least its current incarnation may be subject to change. A resilience perspective would seek to ensure these core functions were protected and not just resist at the level of the method. (p. 179)

I use digital technology as a catalyst, not a crutch. The most important job I have during these sessions is to make sure that students are staying on task and not using their devices for social networking or browsing out-of-class material. If my students learn how to become better writers through this process, I can rest assured that what I have implemented is not in vain.

Learning for a Cause

The last bit of technology-driven pedagogy that I think is substantial enough to mention is considered the most fun by my students. In my first semester of teaching, I facilitated videoed debates. The class would vote for five topics of their choosing and then vote for one of those as the debate topic. Two students would video the debate between two of the groups I mentioned earlier, and then after all of the groups had finished, we would watch the video and they would critique each other in their use of the elements and identify fallacies used by each team. At the end of the assignment, most of the students felt that the process was long and tedious, even though they felt that they had learned a great deal about oratory rhetoric. Hence, I decided to try something new and my classes have been doing it ever since—video public service announcements (PSAs).

First, I had to find a topic that everyone could identify with and where exclusion would be difficult. Through many hours of deliberation within myself, I came up with bullying. I do not know anyone who has never been a bully or been bullied themselves, so I have always asked my classes to raise their hands if neither instance has involved them. I have never seen a hand go up and so the topic has been a staple for this assignment. Each group scripts, produces, acts, edits, and presents a video public service announcement on anti-bullying. I have very few rules other than parameters and I do not censor. This has created some of the best, insightful PSAs that I have ever seen. I had read about this pedagogical approach before. Elizabeth Murphy of Memorial University of Newfoundland (Canada) and Therese Laferriere of Laval University (Canada) (as cited in Bullen & Janes, 2007) summarized that:

> Instructors referred to opportunities for 'making the people come alive,' for 'hearing the
>
> voices,' and for creating a 'more meaningful, purposeful experience for my students.' They

observed a 'greater sense of intimacy,' a 'greater sense of knowing,' and of feeling 'more

connected to' students. (p. 322)

Basically, I give my students the opportunity to show me their visions through their lenses. Since

this assignment starts late in the semester, students already understand how to use ethos, pathos,

logos, kairos, mythos, and nomos in their works. They also know that they must adhere to the

five canons of rhetoric (invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery) in order to produce

a quality product. Knowledge of visual rhetoric is key for this assignment, and I also feel it is one

of the most important lessons that I teach.

I really cannot put into words how well my students have done for this assignment. The

creativity and thoroughness would be difficult to find in an upper-level class, let alone a

traditional college classroom. The scripting is layered, the video shooting is replicated from

feature films that have impacted those students who enjoy them, the acting is practiced and

clean, and the video editing is comprehensive. After writing the script as a collective, each group

decides what types of cameras (available through the university library) to use based on the types

of editing systems they plan to use. Each group member is given a part to act out in the video

based on their strengths. After shooting has been completed, all members give their input to the

editing process. The editing process is considered the most difficult, but is also considered the

most fun. Students get to collaborate while also seeing the building of their work prior. Most

groups have chosen iMovie since it has the most features and gives them more freedom to

experiment. This freedom is essential for creating their visions since "Media are technologies

used for information sharing. Software is specifically encoded digital information that can,

among other things, allow for creating media. Thus, software can be less restrictive than

conventional media" (Bullen & Janes, 2007, p. 340). The final product is given to me via flash drive for prescreening. However, the assignment is not yet complete.

By a predetermined date, each group will have produced their PSA and posted it on a private YouTube account. They also create a PowerPoint or Prezi presentation to show the class and discuss their stages of development. This semester, I invited other first-year composition classes and their instructors to the screenings of all the PSAs. Some of the instructors allowed extra-credit points if students attended. It was a success for all and my students found the assignment to not only be enriching, but also a valuable tool to realize how visual rhetoric works within society.

Chapter V: Conclusion

When it comes to digital technology in the classroom, I will be the first to admit that I am still learning about what mediums are available to me. After all, I am not a digital native; I am a digital immigrant. I believe that although we do possess the latest technological advances in higher-learning institutions, traditional approaches are still applicable and it is unnecessary to discard them. With an ever-increasing amount of digital tools in the collegiate setting, we should consider traditional and digital couplings as pedagogical complements. "Many of our approaches to teaching and learning were developed in a different age, and this basic shift from moderate scarcity [of digital technologies] to excessive abundance constitutes a challenge to higher education and to individual information processing abilities," stated Weller (2011). However, he did recognize that "It may well be that the existing theories are sufficient; they just need recasting or reimagining for a world of abundance" (Weller, 2011, p. 95). This "recasting" would build on the way my generation taught and learned by allowing traditional methods to serve as foundations for course curricula. As far as the use of digital technology in the classroom, any addition of these mediums and devices would enhance the material so that digital natives could learn the way they have always learned instead of replacing it with methods difficult for them to understand. In turn, multi-modal pedagogies can be invented and put to the test in the contemporary, first-year composition classroom. By doing this, as long as the instructor understands his or her duty to perform as a new era mentor, I believe it is possible to solidify the claim that this blended, or hybrid, learning system will produce better college-level writers. However, as Cole (2000) warned in Chapter II of this thesis, if instructors do not accept the responsibilities of understanding the types of technologies they plan to use in their classrooms, their "pedagogical goals, curricula, and lesson plans are made subservient to technologies that

were adopted to implement educational goals" (p. 49). To understand digital natives and the tools that help them learn is to become a digital immigrant.

There will always be those who feel that digital technology has become a burden to the American educational system. As a matter of fact, there have always been critics of any form of educational reform dating back to ancient Greece and Aristotle. The main issue today is that this technology costs a significant amount of money; funds that some feel could be allocated to more traditional teaching mediums. Yet, this is unrealistic as the global population continues to rise at a high rate and competition has grown dramatically in kind. Holding on to what once was is not feasible, economically or pedagogically. Weller (2011) exclaimed:

> Higher education is facing challenges beyond technological ones as funding models and
> the role of education in society comes under scrutiny. Technology should not be seen as a
> panacea for all of these issues, but also we should not romanticize some scholarly
> Camelot of yesteryear either. (p. 183)

Advancement in contemporary society must be met with advancement in educational goals, whether they are institutional, instructional, or individual. It is common knowledge that other countries are excelling in academics and America is beginning to lag behind. This is true of the sciences, engineering, and mathematics, but what about the humanities, especially English? We cannot afford to lose ourselves in order to live the American Dream. Our potential thrives on acquisition of skills and overcoming barriers of unoriginality, but we negate that potential if we do not allow for innovative change by integrating the latest technologies into our course curricula. Digital technology should be considered a staple in the education of college students, and if composition classes are preordained to remain in traditional roles, young writers will fail to communicate effectively and present their ideas. Being able to write and read well is the basis

of critical thought, thus enhancing students' abilities to display their knowledge. Composition and rhetorical theory must be taught in a way that induces college graduates to excel within society, and the use of modern technologies during the writing process is the key. Weller (2011) found that:

> The reason educational technology seems more prevalent, and indeed urgent, now is that we live in an age when the quantity of tools that can be put to a pedagogic use is at an unprecedented level and the rate of release of these is increasing. (p. 28)

In essence, the importance of writing cannot be taken for granted at such a pivotal era as now. We have the tools, and we should use those tools to create better writers. In my own classroom, my use of digital technologies has enhanced my students' abilities to learn and become better college-level writers. Many of my fellow instructors have done the same. Consequently, regardless of a college student's major, they will be able to act on the opportunities put in front of them because they were taught how to think critically in a digital environment, and they can convey their thoughts and ideas in a manner crucial to their marketability. Therefore, as educators, we will have fulfilled our obligations set forth by the respective institutions and prepared the next generation to meet societal expectations.

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Appendix A: End-of-the-Semester Student Survey Comments

Fall Semester, 2013

What activities did you find most valuable in this course? Why?

"Peer reviews helped a lot and so did the mandatory visits to the Write Place to help revise our papers."

"I found the peer reviews very helpful. Besides my own eyes on a paper I can get a second opinion on what should be done differently."

"Peer review days because we were able to get feedback from several different people to help improve our writing."

"I thought that having us write down ten things that we all thought was interesting or would like to know more about in the beginning of the semester was a great idea. Because of that I found it easier to find topics that I want to write about."

"The movies the instructor showed with the following discussion helped with bringing out thoughts and expanding our writing. It gives the outcome needed without being boring or uninteresting."

"The activities that I thought were the most valuable were the peer reviews, the movie and video discussions, debates, and going to the write place two times before each paper."

"I found the movie days quite useful, to help me understand how one has to critically think about what they are actually writing down. They were also great movies that I have often told others to watch and have rewatched outside of class!"

"Group work; easier to talk with each other and get more ideas down."

"Being in a group. It made things easier to do."

"Working in the group; it allowed us to think together and feed off each other's ideas."

Please add any other comments regarding this course/instructor.

"He is a really cool teacher and the course taught me great life lessons instead of little useless facts like I was expecting."

"Very knowledgeable. If I could I would take every English class with him mainly because he knows what he is talking about and made me open my mind up and helped me critical think."

"Corey Fitzgerald was a great intro English teacher. He graded fairly and gave a decent amount of chances to improve your grade or writing. I would recommend him to anyone."

"Overall, this course was better than I had expected. I thought that all we were going to do was write all day every day. But this was not the case in this class. My instructor made the class fun and enjoyable while teaching us communication skills, critical thinking skills, and writing skills. At the beginning of this course my writing was okay. It was not bad but it was not great. At the end, and looking back, I can see how my skills as a writer has improved substantially."

"Great instructor, very informative, and will always have your attention. Never dreaded going to class; was always exciting to see what he would have planned for the day as well as it was a very gripping and accepting environment which was very different from the other classes this semester that I have had."

"Corey was a great instructor. He was willing to work with students and kept the class interesting."

Spring Semester, 2014

What activities did you find most valuable in this course? Why?

"I feel that all of the writing assignments were the most valuable to my learning experience. They gave me the tools I need to become a better writer."

"The most valuable activity in this course for me was the peer reviews before the final submissions. It helped me improve me paper through the comments other classmates made on it. It was helpful."

"Going to the Write Place. I think that it made me start my papers earlier and therefore I did a lot better in this course."

"Honestly I felt like the peer reviews were the most valuable activities. It allowed me to see the different techniques that other people use which made me think about which strategies were the most effective. Also, when I saw flaws in other people's papers and corrected them I was able to look at my paper more objectively and fix the same errors in my paper too. I've never done something like the peer reviews in another class, but I honestly wish that I had. They really helped."

"Writing papers was very valuable for me because this is my first semester in college and I was very afraid of writing college papers because I had issues with writing in high school, so I had no confidence in my writing. Despite this, the writing in English 191 was not about the smaller things like grammar or punctuation, it was about the content, it was about what the individual student had to say about the specific topic they choose for the specific paper that was assigned. Now, I feel more confident in my writing and this has not only made my semester much easier but also the years to come."

"Peer review. It allows me to start my work earlier without procrastinating my work and also allows me to have opinions from others about my work before submitting my final work."

Appendix B: Sources of Additional Concepts Utilized

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