Objective: My career in writing studies was originally inspired by the convergence of my academic interests and my natural inclination to play with technology. In the 15 years since I was in school, the technology has changed, the way people communicate with technology has changed, the students' technological immersion has changed, and the scholarship had changed. My goal was to walk around in the 21st century landscape to try to reorient and re-inspire myself and make some connections between traditional and digital literacies. In particular, I was interested in reflecting on two areas that had become quite central to the scholarly discussion in those years: video games and learning and the growing movement toward more multimedia forms of composition. While I have stayed current with the disciplinary conversations, I had nagging reservations and questions that I hadn't been able to reconcile. I have never been one to be comfortable dropping new pedagogies into my teaching if they don't feel organic to and intertwined with my own teaching philosophy. I'm also wary of new teaching techniques that are hot and new simply because they are hot and new, especially if they seem more grounded in the gee whiz factor than concretely connected to the key learning objectives of my courses.

Reservations and questions:

- What does writing in new media and social media have to do with to with the long form, carefully constructed texts that are produced in college composition? Don't these forms of communication seem to be antithetical or even working in direct opposition to the goals of composition?
- Don't forays into multimedia (non-textual) forms of composition take time and attention away from the traditional work of composition courses--instilling essential rhetorical skills for creating effective texts--in terms of audience, genre, purpose and audience--in college and the workplace?
- My own background is in writing text on the page or screen. Even though my graduate work focused on using technology in composition classrooms, at the time, that was simply about writing words in different media. Words are my life. Did my background prepare me to teach and assess students working in media that includes composing with non-text media? Did I know enough about the technological tools students would use?
- Would integrating multimedia components in my course necessitate taking time in an already tightly scheduled course to train students in the use of various technological tools?
- Would multimedia based instruction necessarily privilege students with more experience and comfort working in such media, or homes where technology was more available and integrated into day-to-day life, or those with the economic resources to acquire technological tools?

Activities:

It happened unconsciously, but my sabbatical activities mirrored the evolution of my thinking as the semester progressed. It started with text. I read a lot in the beginning, orienting myself in the theory, building a schema through which to make sense of my explorations. Even my initial noodling around

started out very text based. I started with text media. I read blogs on various sites. I got interested in the genre of "long form serial tweet". I blogged myself. In the writing of others, especially social media, I started recognizing some of the traditional qualities of composition, recast and reshaped for the genre, context and audience, such as defining terms, or the repetition of key terms to create coherence. On my own blog, I wrote words, a lot of words, but was also surprised to find myself, even in the very first entry, with the instinctive impulse to add visuals because the platform allowed it, and it enhanced meaning making.

I also paid attention to my kids, ages 11 and 7, our students in seven to ten years, who have been swiping screens since they were toddlers. I watched what they did when they thought no one was looking. I paid attention to what media got their attention. I played with them and participated in activities of their own devising. For example, it happened that my younger daughter was starting to have the eye hand coordination and attention span to begin being interested in video games. In her learning to play, I recognized the concepts that people like James Paul Gee wrote about, such as learning by trial and error by making sense of symbolic cues, and learning to communicate within the game specific codes: "There's that glowie thing. That means there's extra powers there." And learning that different games had different symbolic languages (codes).

One of the most profound observational opportunities came when my kids got the idea to make their own satirical horror film over a series of weeks. Other than occasionally being the camera operator, I just watched and didn't help. And I saw all the things we want to see in composition students. They wrote a script, looking at other scripts to get a sense of how they work. They planned and storyboarded different scenes. I saw them expertly noticing and employing genre conventions to make meaning— recognizing the traditional tropes of the horror genre and evaluating when they could be used as shortcuts to meaning and when they could push back against them to create satire. I saw them teach themselves digital editing tools and "compose " their film by thinking about beginnings, middles, and ends, transitions, exposition, audience, credibility. I saw them honoring traditions of format: An opening title sequence, end credits, a blooper reel.

As the semester progressed, my playing around shifted to experimenting with different multimedia apps and social media. I remembered/relearned how I learn/have learned technology. I noticed my own engagement of rhetorical concepts, my trial and error, my orientation to new codes in the buttons, canvasses, menus. I noticed the way new media is intertextual--making something new out of something already existing and gained some insight into how students make sense of and get confused about the pretty strict standards of intellectual property in academia and beyond.

I had planned to attend three conferences, requesting $1000 in travel money in my original sabbatical proposal. Those plans changed for a couple of reasons. One of the conferences, which had previously been held annually in May, was moved to late August, making it complicated to attend. But the college's budget concerns and the request that faculty use travel money with extra discretion also factored in the change of plans. I was able to get grant funding for the one conference attended, and chose to let the college keep the thousand I had requested. But, the conference I attended, The Conference on College Composition and Communication, a subdivision of the National Council of Teachers of English, was perfectly timed in early April, nearly the end of the semester, just as the seeds of theory, fertilized by play, began to germinate.

The CCCC is, I think, the second largest English conference in the country, and offers approximately 500 sessions in the course of three days. Because of the vast menu of topics, I was able to fill pretty much every hour with sessions on the theory and practice of multi-modal composition. Like any conference they weren't all gems, but I really got some great ideas, saw concrete examples of how the ideas I had been formulating were being put into practice, and was able to zero in on information about what kinds of things to do next, since I now had a decent idea of where I was headed. I went to Houston with a lot of ideas, experiences and observations ricocheting around my head, and the conference activities gave me hooks on which to hang it all and gave shape to the cloud of ideas. It also gave me practical models that answered a lot of my lingering questions. I returned with a concrete idea of where I wanted to go with the work I had done.

Questions answered and other key insights gained:

- I came to understand that multimedia composition has everything to do with the traditional, centuries-old concepts of rhetoric. Composing in mixed media engages all of the sorts of contextual analysis necessary for successful communication. Moreover, it takes those concepts out of a genre where their application can be practiced formulaically—the three-point thesis statement and five paragraph argument-- rather from a place of deep understanding and moves them to a less comfortable place where students have to engage with them much more meaningfully in order to produce something successful. So, not only was I satisfied that mixed-mode composition achieved the course objectives, I became convinced that they will achieve them better, addressing a long standing frustration with trying to get students to think rhetorically about the unique qualities of a communication situation rather than plugging information and ideas into a limited but comfortable formula—as if all positions and analysis fits neatly into three supporting ideas.

- New media and social media demonstrate many of the best qualities of more traditional writing and they also have their own, new genre conventions, codes and commonplaces. Bringing that into the classroom as an object of analysis only adds to and creates deeper understanding of them.

- While I never did find a relevant, direct use of video games in the composition classroom that was a good fit for me, I certainly used what I read and saw about how we learn in video games to think about how to fit technology, many different technologies, even those with which I have limited experience and expertise, into the composition classroom without having to turn the classroom hours of ENG 101 into Media Technology 101. I have come to believe that if I provide some models, an enriching sense of purpose which generates student buy-in, give them enough options, and point students in the direction of some tools to play around with, they will be able to engage a lifetime of prior knowledge and experimentation to find a way to do what they want. I also realized that crowdsourcing is a real and legitimate way of curating and disseminating knowledge in an increasingly complex world. I don't need to be an expert in 200 different technologies. My students each bring with them expertise in a few media, based on their personal interests and could come together to help us build a community toolbox in very little time. And in that way, I can decenter the classroom and share my authority, democratizing

the act of communication in a way that I think also underscores the lessons of English class. The English 101 or 102 student is at the end of their English education. Most won't take another communication course again. So if they leave us in a place where they can only make meaning with a teacher standing by with a very prescriptive slate of methods, that bodes poorly for the success of future, high stakes, independent communication. Empowering them, making room for students to highlight and make connections to the expertise they already have, does a lot to accomplish that goal.

- Most of my concerns about equity and privilege were allayed. Within the first couple of weeks of sabbatical, I attended a Center for Excellence session that presented the results of a thorough student technology survey, which reassured me that virtually all Parkland students have or use a device that can be used in the kind of work I'm thinking about, and there are enough devices available in campus technology centers or available for loan from the library to cover those that don't. As to the question of whether non-textual composition privileges certain students, the big epiphany is that traditional first-year comp already did that, I was just blind to my own privilege. It's not like all students come to college with the same quality of prior English instruction, lived in homes with the same number of books and families with equally vibrant vocabularies, or that all students grew up speaking a version of English that lives in close proximity to the Standard Written English that is expected in academic and professional writing. Multimedia composition, rather than narrowing student access to the goals and objectives on ENG 101, expands it by giving students who aren't verbal learners new ways to apply those concepts. I also learned from talking to others who practice these kinds of methods already that there are ways of assessing that deemphasize the role of access to fancy equipment, code writing experience or expensive software.

- I realized that I have become too comfortable in my own position as "authority" on the qualities of effective writing, based on my own training and personal strengths. I'm a word person. I think in words, create in words, obsess over words and still ultimately only know what I know when I put it into words. I was afraid of the degree to which I had not done much thinking about other forms of meaning-making and that I wouldn't be able to confidently evaluate other types of composition. But my newly developed sense of how the things I know still apply, coupled with the recommitment to sharing authority, helped me realize that evaluation could be heavily metacognitive and formative rather than summative. That is, if I require students to create mixed-mode compositions, I can ask them to *write* about them, describing the ways they brainstormed, planned, drafted, revised and edited with consideration for their stated purpose, target audience, and identified genre. In that way, students engage both the traditional skills of written argument and the new media rhetorical skills and essentially create the rubric by which they are evaluated.

The practical results:

While I didn't spend any time on curriculum revision during the sabbatical itself, I came back to Parkland this Fall with a lot of energy and inspiration and put it right to work, by literally throwing out 75% of my ENG 101 syllabus and rebuilding it. It's still packed with good old fashioned essay writing, but those

assignments were retooled to use new media in the brainstorming and research phases. I added traditional rhetorical instruction that draws more on the communications media they use for fun. I've also added options that allow for appropriate incursions of other media in more traditional essay formats, such as using visual evidence to support warrants. But I have also added a mixed-mode project, that makes use of some of the media they created in the process of writing the previous essays, as well as new content. And finally, I have added an end-of-semester web-based digital portfolio where they re-present both the traditional writing and the multimedia work in a different context for a different audience.

I also return to Parkland with the confidence to be a leader in my department, and possibly the college, with regard to news ways of connecting the curriculum to students' technologic literacies. I have already been approached by one of the new faculty engagement coordinators to participate in planned programming in the Center for Excellence with regard to integrating technology and media into course design. I was able to draw on my sabbatical insights in a recent departmental conversation that emerged from discussions at IAI about evolving goals and targets for first year composition.

**Thank you, Board of Trustees, PCA and Parkland administration**

I can honestly say that my sabbatical experience was the most profoundly inspirational and energizing period of my career since graduate school. It was just the beginning of a trajectory that will propel me through the second half of my career. It is easy for rank-and-file composition faculty to get overwhelmed by the sheer number of student-written words, that must be read, reread, responded to and evaluated, to get discouraged by the tsunami of comma-splices, half-formed thoughts, and students who give up and submit 600 words when asked for 1500, and become exhausted by the many hours of coaching, handholding, cajoling, nurturing and nagging students so that they don't just give up. I'm certain the same is true for faculty of all disciplines. Even though the specific trees may differ by discipline, we all have few opportunities to reflect on the forest. I extremely grateful for this opportunity and deeply saddened that the opportunity for other faculty has been, temporarily, put on hold. I hope that I can use the gift that I was given to inspire other faculty, but also hope that the college finds a way to reinstate this essential program.

Accidents Happen: Playing my way to a new pedagogy

Questions and reservations:

· What does writing in new media and social media have to do with to with the long form, carefully constructed texts that are produced in college composition?

· Do forays into multimedia (non-textual) forms of composition take time and attention away from the traditional work of composition courses?

· Do my background, expertise and personal strengths prepare me to teach and assess students working in media that includes composing with non-text media?

· Would integrating multimedia components take away time in an already tightly scheduled course?

· Would multimedia based instruction necessarily privilege some students?

Books, books, and more books

(and a lot of articles with dull titles too...)
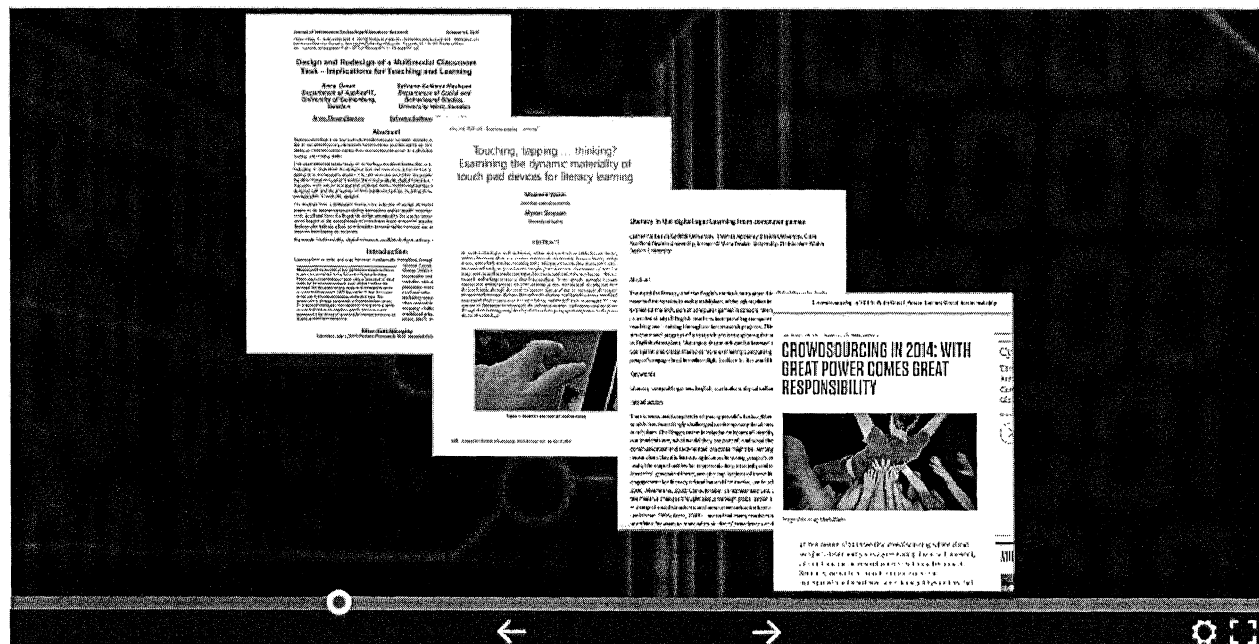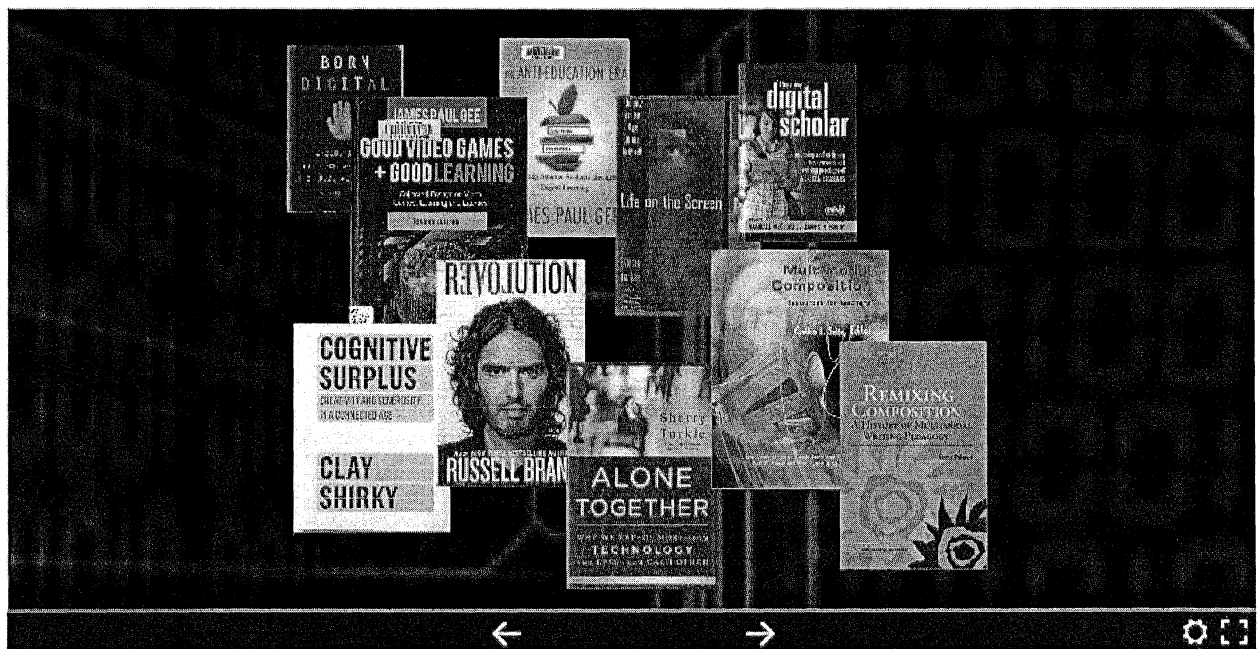
But I also spent a lot of time exploring online; searching for the ways people communicate and what it has to do with traditional composition

Sarah Gailey
@gaileyfrey

So my mom lent us her Star Wars dvds. She did that because she learned my biggest secret.

I've never seen Star Wars.

7:53 PM · 25 Dec 2015

Sarah Gailey
@gaileyfrey

I just never got around to it. And I caught snippets of Phantom Menace when it came out, and I was like, "not for me". So never caught up.

7:52 PM · 25 Dec 2015

Sarah Gailey
@gaileyfrey

So tonight, as my Christmas gift to y'all, I am going to watch a Star War for the very first time, &I'm a gonna livetweet it.

starwars
7:52 PM · 25 Dec 2015

Finni Yoebel
@phoenixkingclaw

GUYS SARAH HAS NEVER SEEN STAR WARS BEFORE SHE'S WATCHING STAR WARS. twitter.com/gaileyfrey/sta...

blogging....

I Suck At Titles

Playing with technology: A Sabbatical blog

POSTS · LIKES

P.Bo meets PC

Video games continued to dominate my life through adolescence. Middle school trips to the mall meant bargaining with my girlfriend posse about spending time at the arcade (during the heyday of the coin operated video arcade days) although they didn't mind too much because that's also where all the boys were.

I had a paper route and saved up a good chunk of money to buy Colecovision. It's an intersting side note that I was often one step behind the cutting edge because my family wasn't made of money. Head-to-head football was second wave handheld electronic sports game. Many other kids got Atari

---

which spurred multimedia impulses...

were called, which generally consisted of sports games, or at least those are the ones that attracted me. There was electronic baseball, electronic football. I remember getting Coleco head-to-head football for my ninth or 10th birthday and I couldn't play it enough. A few years ago, I bought "retro" versions of these games and marveled at the lack of sophistication. A football game consisted of a formation of red dashes that resembled football formations in only the vaguest sense. And one would press buttons to move his or her red dash around all of the other dashes to the end zone.
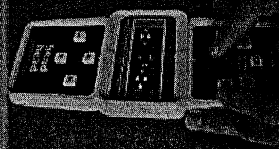
But I loved that game so much.

Ethnograhic research: I observed digital
natives (my two children) in the wild...

- the media they use and the media they
  notice.

- using non-textual social media

- making a film

- learning video games and apps.

← →

# My own noodling around took on
a multimedia focus

traveling and learning

-First-Year and Advanced Composition

D.09 Scare Tactics: Working Theory into Action through Multimodal Praxis

We will discuss how we have individually made use of multimodal horror texts within the FYC classroom as sociocultural artifacts.

Hilton Room 329, Level Three

Chair: Bri Lafond, Riverside City College
Speakers: Kristen Schellhous, University of La Verne, "We ARE the Walking Dead: Critically Engaging The Walking Dead with FYC Students"
Manar Gneim, California State University, San Bernardino
Bri Lafond, Riverside City College, "Ontology in the House: Mark Z. Danielewski's House of Leaves in the FYC Classroom"

The product
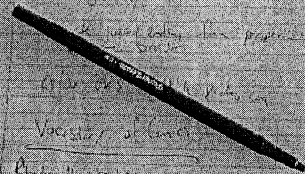
I found myself thinking rhetorically with words, images, video, audio

I found myself learning through doing and playing

I found my children learning and thinking rhetorically much more readily, intuitivley and enthusiastically with multimedia technology tools

I remembered that classroom authority can be shared and, in fact, that can be more powerful.

I realized that I don't always have to be the biggest expert in the room.

I resolved all of my reservations about new media in the composition classroom and became convinced that they were not only useful but essential in students bulding bridges to those concepts

←   →   ⚙ []

I returned to Parkland this Fall renergized: physically, intellectually, pegadogically and technologically

And so the first thing I did was look at my ENG 101 class and I

BURNED IT DOWN

Thank you, Parkland Board of Trustees, administration and PCA!