

THESIS

THE NEW ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: COMMUNICATION, TECHNOLOGY,
AND RHETORIC IN THE SECONDARY CLASSROOM

Submitted by

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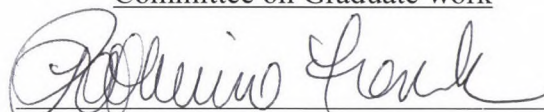
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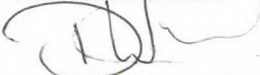
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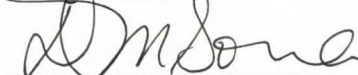
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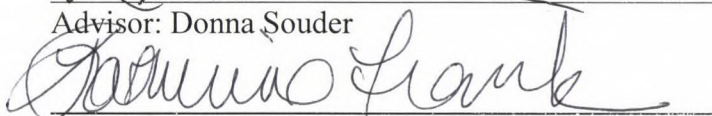
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ABSTRACT OF THESIS
THE NEW ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS: COMMUNICATION, TECHNOLOGY,
AND RHETORIC IN THE SECONDARY CLASSROOM

In this thesis, I discuss the changing nature of communication in the twenty-first century and how these changes affect English language arts education at the secondary level. I argue that emerging technologies are changing the way people process and produce information, yet the current environment of English language arts in America is stagnant and outdated. A new vision for English language arts must be adopted by teachers, administrators, and policymakers which includes innovative approaches to the goals, pedagogies, curricula, and methods of assessment used in these courses. Educators must look at communication as much more than merely print based writing; the terms “literacy” and “composition” must be expanded to include all of the multifarious ways that people communicate. I also assert that technology and rhetoric must play fundamental roles in these courses because they foster deeper critical thinking and encourage new methods of production. Greater communication between professionals at the secondary and post-secondary levels is essential for this vision to take root, as is solid professional development.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Because new technologies continue to drastically change the ways in which people communicate, learn, and think, English language arts education is at a key moment in its history. As the nature of communication changes even more fundamentally and profoundly, teachers, administrators and policymakers must re-examine the terms “composition” and “literacy.” In this thesis, I argue that a new, twenty-first century vision of English language arts should incorporate new goals, pedagogies, curricula, and assessment methods. In addition, not only should teachers and schools work to thoughtfully incorporate more technology into curriculum, but they should also employ a rhetorical approach to both the composition and interpretation of a diverse range of texts. Furthermore, I assert that high-quality professional development is essential in order for this new vision of English language arts to become a reality.

During the Chair’s Address at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in 2004, Kathleen Blake Yancey urged her colleagues to realize the great significance of the changes taking place in the field of composition. Yancey asserted that, because of the advent of new technologies, “literacy is in the midst of a tectonic change” (298). Over five years have passed since Yancey’s address; however,

the same serious consideration of technology's influence on composition that has taken place at the university level has not yet spread to the instruction of English language arts at the secondary level. The standards, curriculum, pedagogy, and methods of assessment in most secondary English language arts courses are still based on traditional definitions of composition and literacy and fail to recognize the importance of new forms of communication rooted in technology.

The rapid technological developments that have advanced over the last few decades have spawned the creation of many new forms and genres of communication.¹ New tools are developing more rapidly than ever before, and as a result, people have greater choice in how and to whom they communicate. Furthermore, these innovations in digital communication also shape the very people who use them. Yancey argues that a new movement is underway in which much of our society is writing more than ever before. Most people have no formal writing instruction with these new modes and tools; yet, these writers “have a rhetorical situation, a purpose, a potentially worldwide audience, a choice of technology and medium—and they write” (302). Because people have such diverse choices in terms of communication, and because much writing is completed electronically, the view that composition is primarily print-based is outdated and restrictive for students. In addition to traditional mediums, educators must also view digital mediums as valid and meaningful forms of communication.

¹ Text messages, emails, blogs, podcasts, screencasts, videos, “tweets,” and social networking sites are just some of the forms of communication rapidly replacing traditional modes.

New technologies are not only revolutionizing the way people communicate, but more importantly, they change the way language is used and the way people think.^{2 3} The “tectonic change” in literacy that Yancey describes is part of a larger digital revolution pervading our culture. A generation of adolescents, whose members were raised with unprecedented access to digital technologies, is now moving its way through our schools and universities.⁴ Marc Prensky calls these young people “digital natives,” and argues that “today’s students think and process information fundamentally differently from their predecessors” (1).⁵ The gap between the ways students and most teachers process and communicate information is an issue of serious magnitude, for if students’ learning needs and teachers’ pedagogies are incompatible, an entire generation of young people will be ill-equipped with the strategies and skills necessary for success as learners, professionals, and citizens. Stephanie Vie coined the phrase “Digital Divide 2.0” to refer to situations “where students are often more technologically adept than their instructors” (10). The disparity between the ways teachers and students look at digital communication is a

² In “Is Google Making Us Stupid,” Nichols Carr discusses the cognitive effects of people’s internet habits. He suggests that all of the skimming and sorting of information people do is ruining their ability to read long texts. Furthermore, consuming and producing texts which combine visual, oral, and print symbols requires a different cognitive process than that required by strictly print messages.

³ The increasing popularity of communication through Short Message Service (SMS) and tools like Twitter is changing the way people use language. For example, users are confined to a specific character limit (140 in the case of Twitter), and, as a result, people commonly give traditional print symbols new meanings with the use of abbreviations, acronyms, and emoticons.

⁴ For example, Larry Page and Sergey Brin started Google in 1996, so most incoming college freshmen do not know a world without Google.

⁵ Prensky’s idea of “digital natives and digital immigrants” has faced some criticism. Many critics make the argument that members of older generations have grown just as adept with technology as these younger students. The main difference is that for younger students, they do not know a world without these tools and technologies.

major issue that will not be resolved until more professionals at the secondary level start taking technological change seriously.

For most of today's younger generations, technology continues to assume an increasingly dominant role in their lives. According to "Writing, Technology and Teens," a 2008 report by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, "85% of teens ages 12-17 engage at least occasionally in some form of electronic personal communication, which includes text messaging, sending email or instant messages, or posting comments on social networking sites" (Lenhart ii).⁶ With millions of teens texting and communicating on sites like MySpace and Facebook, the question is not how to get students to write, but how to get students to think critically about their writing. Though teens' communication habits are significantly influenced by technology, these "digital natives" are given little to no instruction on how to prudently and effectively use digital forms of communication in their schools' English language arts classrooms. As a result, "even though teens are heavily embedded in a tech-rich world, they do not believe that communication over the internet or text messaging is writing" (Lenhart ii). Teachers must consider how digital communication influences teenagers' writing and facilitate environments in which students use and think critically about technology and writing.

⁶ This report was the result of a collaboration between the Pew Internet & American Life Project and the National Commission on Writing. The Pew Internet Project dubs itself "a non-profit 'fact-tank' that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America" (x). It is important to note that the project does not advocate any policy positions. However, funding for this project was provided by The College Board and its affiliate the National Commission on Writing, who acknowledge that they may make policy recommendations based on these results. Finally, the independent research company Princeton Survey Research Associates conducted the surveys used in this report.

The failure to acknowledge the validity of digital forms of communication by educators manifests itself in another gap articulated by Vie: “students possess technological know-how and access to computers but lack critical technological literacy skills” (10). In essence, new technologies and new forms of communication require users to develop new literacies and new ways of thinking.⁷ Cynthia Selfe defines “critical technological literacy” as “a complex set of socially and culturally situated values, practices, and skills involved in operating linguistically within the context of electronic environments, including reading, writing, and communicating” (*Technology and Literacy* 11). Moreover, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills contends that “to successfully face rigorous higher education coursework, career challenges and a globally competitive workforce, U.S. schools must align classroom environments with real world environments by infusing 21st century skills” (Partnership).⁸ This organization lays out a framework that focuses on three main skill areas that can be applied across all curricula: life and career skills; learning and innovation skills; and information, media, and technology skills. The term “twenty-first century skills” has become somewhat of a buzzword right now in the realm of elementary and secondary education (K12); however, I argue that too few schools and teachers truly grasp its meaning and fully implement

⁷ I prefer the term “literacy” over “skill” because the latter is too closely associated with a more prescriptive and quantitative line of thinking, while the former better reflects the broad range of abilities and knowledges students use when communicating.

⁸ The Partnership for 21st Century Skills was founded in 2002 by the US Department of Education, the National Education Association, and a number of businesses like Apple Computers, Cisco Systems, Microsoft Corporation, and others. This organization prides itself on bringing together “the business community, education leaders, and policymakers to define a powerful vision for twenty-first century education to ensure every child's success as citizens and workers in the twenty-first century.” The National Council of Teachers of English also works closely with this organization to develop its English/language arts standards.

these tools, skills, and literacies into their pedagogies and curricula on a regular basis.⁹ Nevertheless, an English language arts curriculum that incorporates these literacies would do much to close the growing gap between what schools currently teach students and what students truly need as citizens in the twenty-first century.

One of the major impediments preventing secondary English language arts teachers from embracing a more diverse approach to composition is a narrow view of literacy, one which only accepts traditional methods of communication. However, as many composition scholars in academe realize, technology significantly impacts the very nature of literacy. Cynthia Selfe argues that, “technology is now inextricably linked to literacy and literacy education in this country” (*Technology and Literacy* 24). Furthermore, many scholars acknowledge that, in a society where communication is so heavily influenced by technology, the term “literacy” itself must signify more than just the ability to read and write print texts. Janet Swenson claims that, “preparing students with only the same literacies that have been privileged for the past century will not prepare them for the next one” (*Extending* 366).¹⁰ English language arts educators must acknowledge the scholarship coming out of academe and begin implementing these

⁹ For example, many organizations like the National Council of Teachers of English advocate more diverse, twenty-first century skills. The NCTE supports “national standards for English language arts learners that anticipate the more sophisticated literacy skills and abilities required for full participation in a global, twenty-first century community” (NCTE). Even so, the rhetoric used here is vague, and though teachers often have good intentions when they reference guidelines like these, not enough teachers put these ideas into practice.

¹⁰ In May 2005, the NCTE Conference on English Education (CEE) held a Leadership and Policy Summit to “rethink issues related to the preparation and continuing professional development of English language arts teachers and teacher educators” (Beliefs 1). A group led by Janet Swenson formed this belief statement prompted by the question “What do we know and believe about multimodal literacies and digital technologies in English education?” (2). The following year, Swenson et al. followed up with another astute essay called “Extending the Conversation: New Technologies, New Literacies, and English Education.”

philosophies into their own pedagogies.¹¹ If teachers focus only on the printed word, students will be deprived of opportunities to express themselves and to grow as diverse communicators.

The movement in academe to broaden the concept of literacy has been underway for the past two decades. In 1996, the New London Group clearly articulated a need for an expansion of the term “literacy.” They argued that, “literacy pedagogy now must account for the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies” (9). In a world of globalization and significant cultural diversity, there is a clear need for strong and effective communication. Educators must acknowledge the expansion of multimedia technologies and the increasingly unique and diverse array of communicative choices students now have. Gary Heba takes the idea of literacy one step further to include multimedia and multimodal communication. He suggests that,

Thus, while students need to learn how to use the new technologies, they also need to learn how to compose and integrate print, video, and audio information into a usable multimedia product—that is, they need to become multimedia literate, capable of producing and reproducing information in online environments. (20)

More recently, the assumption among composition scholars that literacy refers to more than just reading and writing is a given. Swenson defines “new literacies” in this way:

[Literacy] involves, at all levels, the ability to use and communicate in a diverse range of technologies....We should now, properly, speak of “literacies”. These literacies always involve technology and the ability to use technology to negotiate the myriad of discourses that face us in the modern world. These literacies concern using information skillfully and appropriately, and are multi-faceted and involve a range of technologies

¹¹ Though many universities also have a long way to go in terms of embracing technology and its potentials, I believe that the overall integration of technology is much more apparent at the post-secondary level.

and media. . . . In sum, today's students need to cope with a complex mix of visual, oral, and interactive media as well as traditional text. (Beliefs 6) Unfortunately, the beliefs about technology and literacy expressed by these scholars rarely translate to the secondary English language arts level. I argue that a relevant, twenty-first century vision for secondary English language arts must incorporate theories of multimedia and multimodal literacy.¹²

Another major hindrance for the adoption of a broader, contemporary English language arts program at the secondary level is the dominant role of standardized testing. First of all, "research has shown, high stakes statewide assessments can narrow curricula, depending on the standards they target and the type of literacy privileged by the test design and rubrics" (Herrington and Moran 8). Most of these tests require students to fill in bubbles and manually write responses during a timed session. Not only do these tests fail to incorporate new technologies and more diverse forms of communication, they force students to respond using the most outdated and limiting technologies. Furthermore, students are given little time to revise their work, which is an important part of the writing process. In addition, these tests further deteriorate the already tenuous relationship between secondary and postsecondary writing programs. As Herrington and Moran argue, "assessments that invite and reward formulaic writing work at cross purposes with efforts to improve articulation between high school and college (10). Moreover, standardized tests use culturally biased information and questions, produce

¹² Multimodal composition is the use of multiple modes or genres of communication in a single composition. So, a project could utilize multiple genres, but they might all be in the form of a print text. This project would be multimodal, but not multimedia.

inaccurate scores, and create unnatural writing environments for students.¹³ I propose the use of portfolio-based assessments which would demonstrate students' growth over time and their abilities to effectively communicate using a variety of mediums, especially those frequently used in today's technology-driven world.

While teachers and administrators must integrate more technology into the classroom, it is not enough to just introduce these tools; educators must also think critically about this integration. Schools all across the country are introducing computer labs and other technologies; yet, students reap little benefit when their teachers cannot show students how these tools are relevant to their lives. Furthermore, technology does not automatically signify progress; without a clear vision of how tools of technology can be used to augment students' critical thinking and literacy abilities, these technologies may actually become impediments.¹⁴ Teachers who use new technologies to enforce the same outdated strategies are not making progress; they are perpetuating inefficient and domineering pedagogies. Sara Kajder agrees when she states that "knowledge does not lie within technology; technology is only a tool that helps to unlock the power and the promise of learning" (6). Technology in and of itself is not a panacea for all the woes plaguing secondary education today; however, it can be a vehicle that brings students,

¹³ For a comprehensive discussion of the perils of high stakes standardized testing, see George Hillock's *The Testing Trap: How State Writing Assessments Control Learning*.

¹⁴ When technology is introduced irresponsibly, there are certainly some major dangers for students. One of the major issues when considering the integration of technology in the classroom is the issue of access. There is a major discrepancy in the ways in which computers and other digital tools are distributed among students of different races and socio-economic backgrounds. This incongruity in access perpetuates a long cycle of inequality among students of different cultural and social backgrounds. While technology alone cannot solve this problem, and in some situations it can actually exacerbate it, this is no reason to reject technology. This just means that teachers must think critically about these issues as they integrate new technologies into their instruction.

teachers, and schools into the twenty-first century. These tools have the potential to open up new worlds of opportunity for students, so teachers should be thoughtful about their curricular objectives before employing these tools.

In this thesis, I argue that students should learn to compose effectively using both traditional and new literacies, and that students should be encouraged to think critically about their diverse communicative practices. Moreover, I believe it is essential that students are steeped in a strong rhetorical background.¹⁵ A rhetorical approach to composition enables students to reflect on the diverse forms of communication available to them, and allows them to choose the most effective and appropriate one. Additionally, rhetorical thinking requires students to think critically about their purpose, audience, and occasion in order to make a stronger argument. A firm understanding of rhetoric also informs students' reading practices by offering them tools with which to analyze contextual information, authorial intent, and political and cultural bias, and it prepares students to conduct prudent research and evaluate the quality of information and materials they use in the development of their own arguments. In both students' creation of academic texts and participation in non-academic discourse communities, they need an understanding of rhetorical ideas and strategies to be successful communicators and citizens.

¹⁵ Because the term "rhetoric" usually carries a pejorative connotation today, I want to define my use of the term straight away. I will use Wayne Booth's definition of the term in *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric*. He suggests that rhetoric is "the entire range of resources that human beings share for producing effects on one another" (xi). This is a very broad definition, but it is necessary to define the term in a way that counters the sneering view many have of "rhetoric." Not only does rhetoric entail communication, but it also includes the "ethical (including everything about character), practical (including political), emotional (including aesthetic), and intellectual (including every academic field)" (xi). So, when I use the term "rhetoric," I refer to mindfulness of effective communication strategies, but I also refer to the critical thinking that should occur in terms of academic, political, social, and cultural situations.

A major problem with incorporating rhetorical instruction into English language arts curriculum is that it would add one more set of requirements to an already overly demanding curriculum. At a time when more and more teaching time is consumed by standardized testing, it is difficult for language arts courses to educate students with the literacies, tools, and knowledges they need.¹⁶ There is far too little time to teach students writing and composition literacies in a variety of mediums, research and problem solving abilities, and reading and interpretation competencies in a single class anymore. In order to successfully educate students in these extensive tasks, the English language arts curriculum needs to be divided among more specialized courses. I argue that a freshman year, English language arts course, which focuses primarily on composition and rhetoric, rather than literature, would equip students with a strong foundation in literacy, composition, and communication. The tools and literacies developed in this course would cultivate a strong foundation for students to succeed throughout their high school careers and their future as learners, professionals, and citizens.

The permeation of digital communication throughout our culture is so widespread that the debate on whether or not to integrate technology into English language arts classrooms is now moot.¹⁷ The move towards a broader understanding of literacy and a more diverse approach to composition is definitely a step in the right direction; however,

¹⁶ In addition to state standardized tests (which take up four days of instruction in Colorado), many individual school districts are implementing even more mandatory formative and summative assessments.

¹⁷ “It is no longer possible to think about literacy in isolation from a vast array of social, technological and economic factors” (Kress, 1). Additionally, Yancey suggests that it is time to stop questioning “if” curriculum should change and to start thinking about “what” curriculum should include: “If we cannot go home again to the days when print was the sole medium, what will the new curricular home for composition look like?” (308).

there is much more work to be done in order to equip students with a new set of skills and tools that foster success in an age of digital communication. Educators, administrators, and policymakers must redefine standards, reevaluate pedagogies, revamp curricula, and rethink methods of assessment in secondary education in a way that addresses the demands of the twenty-first century. The field of English language arts is in desperate need of a new life and a new vision.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A new vision for English language arts must be founded on sound scholarly theory. Teachers and administrators of English language arts in elementary, middle and high schools (K12) should study, discuss, and incorporate the scholarship and theory that influences composition and rhetorical studies at the postsecondary level. The terms “literacy,” “composition,” “communication,” and “technology” are under constant analysis in academe, and furthermore, universities in general do a far better job of incorporating innovative theories. An analysis of how technology and rhetoric have influenced composition theory over the past couple decades offers some important insight into how to approach English language arts education at the secondary level.¹⁸

Composition and Technology

The initial movement to incorporate computers into educational settings in the 1980s was first met with a mix of optimism and fear. While many scholars believed that introducing computers into education would automatically be a democratic move, others began to challenge the notion. Rather than pedagogical or theoretical issues, the political

¹⁸ Many universities have adopted the word “rhetoric” in addition to composition or writing in the name of the department, and some scholars even advocate the use of the term “Rhetoric and Technology” instead of composition studies (Sidler, Morris, and Smith 7).

concerns regarding technology and literacy marked much of the early discussion on the topic. For example, Richard Ohmann applies a Marxist perspective to the discussion of technology and education in his 1985 essay “Literacy, Technology, and Monopoly Capital.” Ohmann begins with the suggestion that “questions of literacy and technology are inextricable from political questions of domination and equality” (675). Ohmann argues that there is a long history throughout the world of technologies being used as powerful tools to control masses of people. Furthermore, Ohmann claims that,

I see every reason to expect that the computer revolution, like other revolutions from the top down, will indeed expand the minds and the freedom of an elite, meanwhile facilitating the degradation of labor and the stratification of the workforce that have been the hallmarks of monopoly capitalism from its onset. (28)

Towards the end of the article, Ohmann focuses more on the role politics play in literacy education particularly with the introduction of computers in the classroom. Though Ohmann admits that technology has “liberatory potential,” he claims the fate of education is “not a technological question: it is a political one” (29). He suggests that computer literacy programs and computerized testing are undemocratic and, furthermore, are designed in ways that reinforce monopoly capital systems (32). Ohmann’s overarching point is that it is crucial that educators look closely and seriously at the purpose of literacy education, not just technological potentials and pedagogical issues.

In a similar vein, cultural critic Neil Postman carries the apprehension about the role of technology in education into the 1990s. In *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, Postman asserts that technology has become too powerful in American culture. He claims that America is the world’s first “technopoly,” which he defines as “the submission of all forms of cultural life to the sovereignty of technique and technology” (52). Postman, like many humanists early in the digital revolution, warns

that there are great dangers in America's blind allegiance to technology. In Postman's 1995 book, *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School*, he goes as far as to say that technology has become a deity in American society, and he claims that technology is "a demanding god, and is strictly monotheistic" (10). Postman challenges the suggestion that technology is a great equalizer. He argues that "technological change always produces winners and losers—which is to say, the benefits of new technologies are not distributed equally among the population" (47). Though Postman raises important concerns in terms of technology, access, and inequality, he fails to acknowledge any benefits that technology brings to the classroom.

Cynthia Selfe and Gail Hawisher also embrace a more cautious tone when writing about computers in the writing classroom; yet, they ultimately support the potentials that technology brings to education. In their 1991 essay "The Rhetoric of Technology and the English Writing Class," Selfe and Hawisher acknowledge that "technological change has influenced not only the ways in which we write, but also...the ways in which we teach writing" (35). The authors focus on the potential political and social dangers of technological integration into the writing classroom, and they argue that computers could possibly "support instruction that is as repressive and lockstep as any that we have seen" (41). Nevertheless, Selfe and Hawisher argue that by identifying and addressing the problems computers pose in the classroom, "electronic technology [can] help us bring about positive changes in the writing class" (36). Selfe further elaborates on her concern regarding the political and ideological boundaries that computers create in her 1994 article, coauthored with Richard Selfe, "The Politics of the Interface: Power and Its Exercise in Electronic Contact Zones." Though Selfe and Selfe are not themselves

distrustful of the integration of computers into the writing classroom, they focus on the dangers of maintaining an overly optimistic and simplistic vision of technology. While computers are often associated with democratization, Selfe and Selfe believe that computer interfaces are sites where inequities of race, gender, and class are often reinforced. The authors argue:

Our goal is to help teachers identify some of the effects of domination and colonialism associated with computer use so that they can establish a new discursive territory within which to understand the relationships between technology and education. (66)

The key to constructive technological integration is for educators to become “technology critics as well as technology users” (78).

Richard Lanham assumes an even more optimistic attitude about technology and education in his 1993 book *The Electronic Word*. In the opening to this collection of ten essays that analyze issues of technology, rhetoric, and composition, Lanham claims “Unlike most humanists discussing technology, I argue an optimistic thesis. I think electronic expression has come not to destroy the Western arts and letters, but to fulfill them” (xiii). Lanham considers how technological changes affect the culture of academe and concludes that technology can in fact be a democratizing force. Even more so, he suggests that technology offers a platform that will universalize the arts, which means that the boundaries between disciplines will not be as rigid.¹⁹ In addition, Lanham makes an important claim that rhetoric is the key to understanding the impact of electronic technology on literacy. He sees philosophy and rhetoric as two distinct forces in the

¹⁹ For example, people often search the Internet beginning with a query regarding one specific topic, and go on to use a series of hyperlinks to access many other subjects in a single session. When compared to reading a book on one specific topic, the freedom of the Internet becomes clear. Wikipedia is a great example of a site where people—through a random series of hyperlinks—access information that transcends any single discipline.

realm of education, arguing that the former has dominated education for the last several hundred years. Though Lanham claims there should be a balance of philosophy and rhetoric, he is clearly partial to the latter. “To explain reading and writing on computers, we need to go back to the original Western thinking about reading and writing—the rhetorical *paideia* that provided the backbone of Western education for 2,000 years” (51).

By the mid 1990s, the push to furnish schools with computers rapidly accelerated as did the belief among many politicians and policymakers that technology would somehow eliminate illiteracy. For example, in Bill Clinton’s 1996 *State of the Union Address* he introduced “America’s Technological Literacy Challenge,” in which he claimed, “In our schools, every classroom in America must be connected to the information superhighway with computers and good software and well-trained teachers.” As digital technologies evolved and the Internet grew in popularity, computer use became second nature to many people, yet few users thought critically about its integration.²⁰ Though some scholars and critics continued to express anxiety about the role of technology in education, a major push to incorporate technological literacy into K12 and postsecondary curriculum was underway.²¹

²⁰ Dennis Baron wrote a fascinating article in 1999 called “From Pencils to Pixels: The Stages of Literacy Technologies” in which he addresses the growing “invisibility” of technology and argues that “the computer is simply the latest step in a long line of writing technologies” (17). Baron traces the history of many important innovations to writing throughout history including the pencil, the printing press, and the telephone on his way to suggesting that the computer, like these other technologies, will inevitably revolutionize the way we communicate.

²¹ Two notable authors who argue against technology in the classroom are Todd Oppenheimer and Larry Cuban. In “The Computer Delusion,” Todd Oppenheimer compares the computer to other tools that failed to revolutionize education like the television and radio. Furthermore, the author claims that computers are “just a glamorous tool” and that they should not take priority in the classroom (61). In his 2007 book, *The Flickering Mind: The False Promise of Technology in the Classroom and How Learning Can be Saved*, Oppenheimer further analyzes the political maneuvering behind the technology push. He argues that

As an epigraph for her 1999 essay “Technology and Literacy: A Story about the Perils of Not Paying Attention,” Cynthia Selfe uses the following quotation from a 1996 U.S. Department of Education report:

Technological literacy—meaning computer skills and the ability to use computers and other technology to improve learning, productivity and performance—has become as fundamental to a person’s ability to navigate through society as traditional skills like reading, writing and arithmetic.
(5)²²

Though Selfe forges new ground in her call for a more prudent look at the relationship between technology and literacy, she maintains a focus on the political agenda of the technological shift as well. Selfe calls on educators and humanists to think critically about how they incorporate technology into the classroom, lest they contribute to a system where issues of inequality continue to persist. Furthermore, Selfe explains that the push for technological literacy has done nothing to reduce illiteracy; it has only changed the criteria for literacy and illiteracy while the ratio in both groups remains roughly the same (103). In closing, the author promotes a new term: “critical technological literacy,” arguing that,

We need to recognize that we can no longer simply educate students to become technology users—and consumers—without also helping them

technology is an educational quick fix, and that the implementation of technology into the classroom is nothing more than a waste of time and money. Oppenheimer uses an excessive number of case studies to support his claims, and ultimately refuses to acknowledge that technology has any benefits in education at all. Larry Cuban, education professor at Stanford, also argues in his book, *Oversold and Underused: Computers in the Classroom*, that academic opportunities via technology are being wasted. Like Oppenheimer, Cuban claims that schools made the quick decision to throw computers into classrooms without fully considering how to effectively utilize these machines.

²² “Getting America’s Students Ready for the twenty-first century: Meeting the Technology Literacy Challenge: A Report to the Nation on Technology and Education” was a 1996 report introduced by then Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, Richard Riley. The report outlines the goals of the government, school communities, and the private sector in terms of how to introduce computers and other new technologies into education.

learn how to become critical thinkers about technology and the social issues surrounding its use. (111)

Also in 1999, Cynthia Selfe published the book, *Technology and Literacy in the Twenty-First Century: The Importance of Paying Attention*, which looks at the Technology Literacy Challenge, “a federal literacy project begun in 1996 that has redefined literacy and the practices recognized as constituting literate behavior in America” (xix). Selfe argues that this initiative has: failed to account for the multiple literacies in our culture, exacerbated the inequities in the American educational system, and fallen short of acknowledging the complexities of technological literacy. Moreover, Selfe argues that teachers have a responsibility to think critically about how our educational system approaches and values literacy.

When the impact of the Internet on education was still unclear in the late 1990s, Lester Faigley raised some important questions in his essay, “Beyond Imagination: The Internet and Global Digital Literacy.” Though he acknowledges many of the concerns of technology critics like issues of access, Faigley speculates on the potential of the Internet to be a positive learning tool in the classroom.²³ Furthermore, Faigley employs the critical technological literacy approach advocated by Cynthia Selfe. He suggests that,

We have to keep the focus on learning and not on technology, and to do that we have to ask: What do we want students to learn?... We want students to recognize and value the breadth of information available and to evaluate, analyze, and synthesize that information. We want students to construct new meaning and knowledge with technology. We want students to be able to communicate in a variety of media for different audiences and purposes. And we want students to become responsible citizens and community members. We want them to understand the ethical, cultural, environmental and societal implications of technology and

²³ Charles Moran also provides an excellent essay on access entitled “Access: The ‘A’ Word in Technology Studies.” Moran argues that “the study of technology needs to be grounded in the material as well as in the pedagogical, cultural, and the cognitive if it is to be intellectually and ethically respectable” (206).

telecommunications, and develop a sense of stewardship and responsibility regarding the use of technology. (137)

Moreover, technology offers a learning environment that is collaborative, motivating, student-centered, and supportive. Finally, Faigley counters critics who claim new technologies might make the role of teacher obsolete when he states, “I see teachers needed more than ever before because the demands of digital literacy are greater cognitively and socially than those of print literacy” (139).

Another major shift that took place in the late 1990s was that scholars began to take a more theoretical approach to literacy and technology. Not only did scholars look at digital literacy or technological literacy, but they also began to acknowledge the importance of audio, visual, and other components of communication in addition to linguistic features. In his essay “‘English’ at the Crossroads: Rethinking Curricula of Communication in the Context of the Turn to the Visual,” Gunther Kress makes the crucial argument that “Curriculum now needs to be focused on the future: its task is to provide young people with dispositions, knowledges, and skills which they will need in their future social lives” (66). Furthermore, Kress wrestles with the question of whether English curriculum should focus on the communication aspect or cultural aspect of reading and writing. He suggests that the landscape of communication has changed significantly, especially due to the importance of the visual nature of digital communication. Moreover, Kress insists that English curricula must change to incorporate this visual feature. A new theory of semiosis, based on innovation as well as an emphasis on the quality of design, is emphasized by Kress as he explains his vision for a new curriculum. Kress argues that,

It would be an unforgiveable dereliction of the responsibilities of intellectuals if the potentials of representation and communication—of

literacy in a very broad and metaphoric sense—offered by current developments were not fully explored. (88)

In 1996 the New London Group produced a seminal document titled “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures,” in which the authors introduce the term “multiliteracy” to describe the growing number of skills and knowledges students need to be effective communicators.²⁴ They argue that in the face of evolving cultural and social changes, teachers must adopt a new literacy pedagogy which addresses not just print-based communication, but all of the diverse forms and mediums used to communicate. The authors argue “that literacy pedagogy now must account for the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies” (9). More specifically, the authors argue that schools should teach students linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, and spatial designs, which will do far more to prepare students for success after school than strictly print literacies (26).

Gary Heba was another early advocate of a multiliteracies approach to literacy pedagogy, which can be seen in his 1997 article “HyperRhetoric: Multimedia, Literacy, and the Future of Composition.” Heba argues that, “In addition to new technologies and new literacies for communication, multimedia provides new forms and genres for communication” (19). The author also asserts that,

while students need to learn how to use new technologies, they also need to learn how to compose and integrate print, video, and audio information into a usable multimedia product—that is, they need to become multimedia literate, capable of producing and reproducing information in online environments. (20)

In addition, Heba claims that “literacy cannot be thought of as centered in any one medium. Each medium has its own literacy, and when existing media are combined in

²⁴ The New London Group consists of scholars and professors from the U.K., Australia, and the U.S.

new ways, this creates something else entirely” (22). Heba’s claim that each medium represents a new form of literacy is entirely compatible with what the New London Group would refer to as “multiliteracies.” Additionally, this document is significant because of its discussion of the rhetorical implications of digital writing, hypertext, and html authoring. Heba seems to agree with Lanham that rhetoric should be the lens through which electronic communication is viewed. He asserts that,

traditional models and approaches to written communication are inadequate for explaining the rhetorical phenomenon of multimedia and for preparing students to become multimedia literate because the models do not adequately describe the rhetorical space for electronic documents. (21)

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the focus of literacy scholarship continued to move in the direction of rhetoric and pedagogy. For example, Mary Hocks takes a close look at the visual component of electronic communication in her 2003 essay “Understanding Visual Rhetoric in Digital Writing Environments.” Hocks argues that the importance of visual rhetoric has amplified with the growth of hypertext and multimedia writing.²⁵ Hocks asserts that “all writing is hybrid—it is at once verbal, spatial, and visual” (630-31). She also suggests that,

Recognizing the hybrid literacies our students now bring to our classrooms, we need a better understanding of the increasingly visual and interactive rhetorical features of digital documents. As writing technologies change, they require changes in our understanding of writing and rhetoric and, ultimately, in our writing pedagogy. (631)

²⁵ Diana George also writes about visual literacy in her 2002 article “From Analysis to Design: Visual Communication in the Teaching of Writing.” George argues that “current discussion of visual communication and writing instruction have only tapped the surface of possibilities for the role of visual communication in the composition classroom” (12). Furthermore, George claims that the terms of debate typical in our discussions of visual literacy and the teaching of writing have limited the kinds of assignments we might imagine for composition” (14-15).

Hocks proposes three criteria with which to analyze the visual rhetoric of electronic design: audience stance, transparency, and hybridity. Not only should students be engaged in the “analytic process of critique,” but they should also practice the “transformative process of design” (644-45). Though there has been a very strong interest in visual literacy in recent years, some scholars are beginning to discuss the audio component of communication as well.²⁶

Scholarship regarding how and why to incorporate multimodalities and multiliteracies into composition instruction has continued to flourish in the past five years. Some essential articles that reflect critical thinking on pedagogies of multimodal composition, multiliteracies, and digital technologies include Jeffrey Grabill and Troy Hicks’s “Multiliteracies Meet Methods: The Case for Digital Writing in English Education,” Aaron Doering, Richard Beach, and David O’Brien’s “Infusing Multimodal Tools and Digital Literacies into an English Education Program,” Jody Shipka’s “A Multimodal Task-Based Framework,” Carl Young and Jonathon Bush’s “Teaching the English Language Arts With Technology: A Critical Approach and Pedagogical Framework,” and two articles from Janet Swenson et al: “Beliefs About Technology and the Preparation of English Teachers: Beginning the Conversation” and “Extending the Conversation: New Technologies, New Literacies, and English Education.” These articles all embrace Selfe’s call for teachers to employ “critical technological literacy” as the

²⁶ In “The Movement of Air, the Breath of Meaning: Aurality and Multimodal Composing,” Cynthia Selfe argues that “the relationship between aurality and writing has limited our understanding of composing as a multimodal rhetorical activity and has thus, deprived students of valuable semiotic resources for making meaning” (616).

authors discuss the social, political, technological, and pedagogical implications of introducing technology into the composition classroom.

Towards the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, pedagogy remains central to the discussion of technology and writing. Academics continue to look closely at how emerging technologies like Web 2.0 tools impact literacy, communication, and rhetoric. For example, Melanie Shoffner considers the use of blogs in the composition class and Rebecca Lundin discusses the potential of wikis in writing instruction.²⁷ Additionally, Bryan Alexander provides a strong analysis of pedagogies that embrace the potentials of Web 2.0 tools in his 2008 essay “Web 2.0 and Emergent Multiliteracies.” Alexander argues that “educators inhabiting the world of the new net.generation must revamp and extend their prior technology skills to address new literacies requisite of a Web 2.0 world” (159). Though his overall thesis has been argued before, Alexander provides a fresh perspective on literacy as it relates to gaming, course management systems, social networking sites, and other new technologies.

Further discussion is taking place regarding the rhetorical implications of writing in the digital sphere. In “Teaching Digital Rhetoric: Community, Critical Engagement, and Application,” published in 2006, the authors, using the moniker DigiRhet.org, attempt to answer two main questions: “What is digital rhetoric? How do reading and writing practices change in digital environments?” (231).²⁸ The authors argue that,

²⁷ Shoffner’s “Preservice English Teachers and Technology: A Consideration of Weblogs for the English Classroom” was published in 2007 and Lundin’s “Teaching with Wikis: Toward a Networked Pedagogy” was published in 2007.

²⁸ DigiRhet.org is a group of professors and students at Michigan State University led by Danielle DeVoss.

Becoming an effective user of digital technologies is more complicated than simply being able to operate them; students need to understand the capabilities and underlying principles of each technology, the interactions of different technologies, the operation of one program vis-à-vis another, and the employment of multiple technologies to create one cohesive text. (248)

In other words, “students need to understand the pros and cons of choosing one technology over another” (246).

Furthermore, in “Why Teach Digital Writing?” published by the WIDE Research Center, the authors claim that,

Writing instruction must equip students with the tools, skills, and strategies not just to produce traditional texts using computer technology, but also to produce documents appropriate to the global and dispersed reach of the web. This change requires a large-scale shift in the rhetorical situations that we ask students to write within, the audiences we ask them to write for, the products that they produce, and the purposes of their writing.²⁹

Though issues of audience, authorship, situation, and purpose are all important rhetorical aspects of composition, especially in digital environments, the authors also acknowledge that rhetoric plays an important role in political, social, and cultural concerns.

Composition and Rhetoric

Erika Lindemann’s book *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers* is a valuable resource when discussing writing, rhetoric, and pedagogy. In her chapter on rhetorical theory and practice, Lindemann discusses the meaning of the term “rhetoric” and the pejorative connotation it has garnered over the years. The word “rhetoric” can often be a difficult one to pin down; as Lindemann asserts, “it denotes both a practice and a body of knowledge describing the practice” (59). Lindemann looks at the ways in which rhetoric

²⁹ The WIDE Research Center (Writing in Digital Environments) is a group at Michigan State University led by Bill Hart-Davidson, Ellen Cushman, Jeffrey Grabill, Danielle DeVoss and James Porter.

can influence communication, and she suggests that teachers challenge students to consider their purpose, audience, and occasion in order to improve as communicators. Additionally, she suggests that “much of what we say, hear, read, and do involves someone’s influencing someone else to make choices. Rhetoric enables us to understand those choices and the processes whereby we make them” (38). In other words, students who are equipped with a strong background in rhetoric and who are trained to think critically about the communication process will make better decisions as communicators.

Lindemann also traces the history of rhetorical studies from classical times to medieval times, from the Renaissance through the twentieth century, and up to the contemporary resurgence of rhetorical theory. A background in the long history of rhetorical studies is important for teachers and students, because, though technologies change, certain trends of effective communication persist in all mediums and forms. Good students of rhetoric will develop a pool of knowledge regarding the most effective means of communication in a variety of situations. In *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*, Lindemann not only discusses the term “rhetoric” itself, but she writes about the writing process, linguistics, cognition, pedagogy and the way in which rhetoric impacts all of these areas. Additionally, Lindemann claims that “if we understand...the varied and changing purposes people have for using language, we will be better equipped to teach effectively the arts of rhetoric our culture now practices” (60). As language and communication continue to change shape due to new technologies, rhetoric clearly offers an important lens through which to view communication.

Wayne Booth’s 2004 text *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric* offers a very strong argument as to the role rhetoric should play in modern culture. Booth acknowledges in the preface

that the term “rhetoric” is often viewed pejoratively today, though it need not be. Even though the production of misinformation, or “rhetrickery” as Booth calls it, is a part of rhetoric, rhetoric can also be used for positive purposes. The bottom line is that rhetoric is everywhere. “Rhetoric is employed at every moment when one human being intends to produce, through the use of signs or symbols, some effect on another—by words, or facial expressions, or gestures, or any symbolic skill of any kind” (xi). The extreme importance of rhetoric can be seen in Booth’s claim that “the quality of our lives, especially the ethical and communal quality, depends to an astonishing degree on the quality of our rhetoric” (xii). After a brief summary of the history of rhetoric, the author introduces what he calls “listening-rhetoric.” He explains “listening-rhetoric” as an instance when “opponents in any controversy listen to each other not only to persuade better but also to find the common ground behind the conflict” (10). Listening rhetoric is not often used in American culture because too often people attempt to “win” a debate by simply yelling the loudest. American culture would greatly benefit from a generation of students trained in a well-rounded awareness of rhetoric. Rather than perpetuating the divisive nature in society today, students with a well-rounded background in rhetoric would be better equipped to create a thoughtful, open-minded, and fruitful society.

In addition, Booth spends an entire chapter on “The Fate of Rhetoric in Education” as he calls it. He suggests that,

Any nation is in trouble if its citizens are not trained for critical response to the flood of misinformation poured over them daily. A citizenry not habituated to thoughtful argument about public affairs, but rather trained to ‘believe everything supporting my side’ and ‘disbelieve everything supporting the bad side’ is no longer a citizenry but a house of gullibles. (89)

Booth laments the current culture of competition in America because it fails to produce authentic dialogue or pursuit of true knowledge. Students are typically taught to debate and write persuasively or argumentatively; yet, there is little instruction in good listening. Rather than conducting debates where students argue and compete with each other, teachers should foster environments where “students can embrace the highest virtue of all: respect for others, producing trustful exchange” (99). After discussing the rhetoric of politics and the media, Booth concludes with the reminder that “our children’s future depends on how they are taught rhetoric” (171). Not only does a background in rhetoric help students become better communicators and critical thinkers, but it fosters superior citizens.

Though technology and rhetoric have been significant influences on composition, there were other areas weighing heavily on the field of composition during the mid and late twentieth century. In “Composition at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century,” Robert Fulkerson expertly summarizes the major changes in composition theory over the last few decades and discusses how these theories have shaped the current state of composition studies in America. Fulkerson begins with a look at the “social turn,” and the growth of “critical/cultural studies” (CCS) in universities. One major problem with a CCS approach to composition, he suggests, is that there is too strong an emphasis on political and cultural issues and not enough emphasis on writing instruction. Fulkerson then discusses the impact of the “expressivism” approach to composition, which focuses more on the individual author than on the audience or method of communication. After summarizing the “process” and “post-process” movements, he looks at a few different rhetorical

approaches to composition.³⁰ Fulkerson claims that the field of composition is becoming increasingly fragmented and that there is “genuine controversy...over the goal of teaching writing in college” (679). The overall purpose of the article is to show that composition has become more and more complex with these battling theories, and that “there is no ultimate ground, no empirical, dialectical, or Platonic basis, for proving that one approach is proper” (680).

Technology and rhetoric in particular have had significant influences on composition in the last twenty years. The theoretical background provided in this review supplies a solid framework for my argument that secondary English language arts should embrace a new vision. Technology, literacy, pedagogy, rhetoric, composition, and communication all have a complex and changing relationship, but critical thinking about how to implement these elements into the English language arts classroom is essential. Educators, administrators, and policymakers must look closely at the scholarship regarding technology and literacy as they make important decisions about how to approach English language arts in the twenty-first century.

³⁰ Paul Kei Matsuda provides a wonderful history of process and post-process theories, deconstructing the later. In his conclusion, Matsuda summarizes his argument by stating that his goal was “to caution against defining post-process as the complete rejection of all tenets of process pedagogy or theories,” and to offer the alternative definition for post-process as “the ejection of the dominance of process at the expense of other aspects of writing and writing instruction” (78-79).

CHAPTER THREE

THE ARGUMENT

Technology continues to change the way people communicate, the way people think, and the way people live. Because the very students who pass through America's public schools are also changing, I argue that it is imperative for educators, administrators, and policymakers to reevaluate the field of English language arts in terms of what is taught, why it is taught, how it is taught, and how it is assessed.³¹ The terms "communication" and "literacy" must be broadened in order to incorporate changes made by new technologies. Anne Herrington and Charles Moran offer the reminder that technology and multimedia are "altering the way young people interact with our traditional spheres of literacy, and educators are just now beginning to consider the impact of these developments on their classrooms" (6). If English language arts courses fail to accommodate these changes, these courses run the risk of becoming antiquated and extraneous in students' educations. In order to address the changing literacies and emerging methods of communication influencing students' lives, educators,

³¹ As Swenson and her fellow authors argue in "Extending the Conversation," "newer technologies are reshaping our lives and our communities in complex ways," and thus, "an examination of literacy practices involving technologies deserves special attention...because they are central to effective English education in a rapidly changing world" (353).

administrators, and policymakers must redefine English language arts in American secondary schools in a way that reflects the realities of twenty-first century society. More specifically, contemporary English language arts courses must incorporate four core elements: goals that reflect twenty-first century skills and digital literacies in addition to traditional literacies, pedagogies that incorporate best practices and contemporary tools, a curriculum that exhibits thorough instruction in communication and rhetoric, and assessment that honors creativity and critical thinking.

Goals

For secondary schools to re-establish a vision for English language arts programs, it is necessary to identify essential goals in order to provide direction. The overall goal of English language arts programs should be to help students develop the literacies they need to be successful communicators. These literacies are still rooted in the traditional language arts of speaking, listening, reading, writing, and thinking; however, the terms “literacy” and “composition” must be redefined to reflect the drastic changes taking place in communication. The literacy needs of modern students exceed traditional notions of reading and writing; students now read and compose texts that combine print, visual, and oral messages. In addition to teaching students strong reading and writing skills, the goals of English language arts must include information and communication technologies (ICT), rhetoric, and critical thinking skills.

The current writing goals in many English language arts programs are too narrow; they focus primarily on print-based writing, when, in reality, there are many methods and mediums of communication which students should master.³² As Carl Nagin and the

³² Many states’ standards in English language arts (including Illinois, New York, and California) focus primarily on reading, writing, speaking, listening. Even the standards that do manage to acknowledge

National Writing Project point out in *Because Writing Matters*, “Helping writers develop the fluency and competence to use a variety of technologies needs to be a key part of teaching writing” (29). With the proliferation of electronic communication, students should display the ability to communicate orally, visually, digitally, and with the printed word.

Not only should students be fluent, competent, and versatile in composition and communication, they should think critically about the writing they complete. Because people are communicating digitally in massive quantities and in very diverse ways without any formal training in schools, the goal of English language arts programs should not be just to keep students writing, but to teach them to think critically about what and how they write. Nagin and the NWP assert that teachers

must do more with writing than simply teach its form and model its process. They need to help students develop the basic inquiry strategies common to most disciplines and incorporate them in their writing. Such strategies lie at the core of the critical thinking that students must do in academia, in a profession, and as adult citizens in the real world beyond school. (54)

In other words, teachers have the responsibility to teach students more than how to summarize an article or respond to a piece of literature; as postsecondary students, professionals, and citizens in a complex world, students must demonstrate analysis, interpretation, and synthesis skills as well.

technology and new literacies usually only give it lip service. For example, Colorado’s new “Reading, Writing, and Communication” standards adopted in 2010 include four main categories dealing with oral expression, reading, writing, and research. Even though the overview for these standards clearly state the importance of twenty-first century skills, the actual writing standards maintain a very narrow view of writing, valuing only print-based composition.

Furthermore, an additional goal of English language arts should be to teach students a foundation in rhetoric. The rhetorical situation of digital writing is different from print-based writing, and “successful writers grasp the occasion, purpose, and audience for their work” (Nagin 10). A foundation in rhetoric and critical thinking helps students decide the best tools to use in a variety of situations. In addition to competencies in rhetoric, reading and research skills are also important literacies for students to acquire. As citizens growing up in the proverbial “information age,” students must be able to navigate massive quantities of information and determine bias, fact and opinion, and authorial intent. Moreover, students should be able to differentiate between credible and unreliable sources. Finally, the goals of English language arts should promote growth in student innovation, collaboration, flexibility, initiative, and leadership—all necessary faculties in twenty-first century communication. Students have a broad new set of literacies necessary to master before completing high school, and the goals of English language arts must reflect these skills.

The purpose of establishing goals and standards is to give a course or program direction, but one major concern when re-examining these goals is the danger of allowing goals and standards to become oppressive. The prevailing trend of accountability in public education often turns our schools into utilitarian institutions obsessed with data. Moreover, this fixation with standards, goals, and mission statements frequently chokes out the creativity, individuality, and imagination of our teachers and students. It is true that teachers, schools, and school districts are responsible for creating an environment conducive to the academic and social growth of the individual, and, furthermore, it is important that goals and standards are established to ensure equality and growth among

students. However, the standards put in place in English language arts education, and the testing used to measure the achievement of these standards, often distract teachers and administrators from what is truly valuable and necessary in students' educations. Current standards in language arts do not do enough to reflect the literacies and abilities students need. Therefore, English language arts standards should address all forms of writing, reading, rhetoric, research, information and communication technologies, critical thinking skills, and twenty-first century skills like innovation, collaboration, and leadership.

Pedagogy

A renewed vision of English language arts would benefit significantly from a bold new pedagogy—a pedagogy that demonstrates best practices through the utilization of technology. When educators and schools provide students with the ability to compose and communicate digitally, an entirely new writing experience unfolds in the classroom. Traditional, prescriptive writing pedagogies focus only on print-based composition and create environments in which students often compose in isolation, for an audience of one, and with little room for creativity.³³ The integration of new technologies like Web 2.0 tools, and even emerging Web 3.0 technologies, provide students with more diverse and practical situations in which to communicate.³⁴ In addition, these tools make collaboration with peers much easier and offer a vastly larger and more relevant audience

³³ Many schools and districts continue to use color-coding patterns and cookie-cutter templates like “Step Up to Writing” as the primary means of writing instruction. Though a program like “Step Up” may be beneficial in teaching students—particularly ELL or learning disabled students—how to organize their writing, a writing pedagogy focused mainly on a tool like “Step Up” trains students to write blandly and homogenously.

³⁴ Also known as the Semantic Web, Web 3.0 refers to the growth of content and services on the Internet which provide the web with the ability to interpret and predict the desires of its users with increasing accuracy.

for students. Because emerging technologies will continue to shape the world of the future, teachers must take advantage of these tools in bold new ways now.

Naturally, the incorporation of technology into the classroom is not a flawless progression; many issues persist in terms of technology and literacy. One of the most significant issues is that not all students or schools have the same access to technology tools. Cynthia Selfe argues that,

It is a fact, for instance, that schools primarily serving students of color and poor students continue to have less access to computers, and access to less sophisticated computer equipment than do schools primarily serving more affluent and white students. (Technology and Literacy 101)

The digital divide perpetuates a troublesome cycle for minority and underprivileged students. Because these students do not have equal access, it is difficult for them to catch up. Selfe goes on to assert that,

The poorer you are and the less educated you are in this country—both of which issues are correlated with race—the less likely you are to have access to computers and to high-paying, high-tech jobs in the American workplace (Technology and Literacy 101).

Though Selfe raised these concerns over a decade ago, equal access is still a major issue for many students and schools across the country. Technology alone cannot solve this problem, and at times, when technology is used inadequately, it can actually exacerbate the problem. Teachers must be aware of these dangers, and they must think critically about the social, cultural and political implications of technology and literacy in the classroom. Additionally, though issues of access and equality continue to persist, this is no reason to eschew technology. There are many benefits that result from prudently integrating computers and other digital tools in the classroom.

I argue that teachers have a shifting responsibility in the twenty-first century English language arts classroom. Sarah Kajder bluntly claims that “technology

integration absolutely requires change in the role of the English teacher” (7). Instead of being on center stage all the time, Kajder suggests that teachers should take on the role of “instructional designer” or “resource manager” (7). This means teachers must put greater responsibility into students’ hands; however, at the same time, educators must provide competent instruction, valuable resources, and clear expectations. In other words, teachers must create a model framework for students to work within—a framework that not only offers clear guidelines and helpful resources, but also significant opportunities for creativity, self-direction, and critical thinking. Carol Pope and Jeffrey Golub agree, arguing that “the English language arts classroom will necessarily become learning-centered and learner-centered, with both teacher and student functioning in both roles” (92). In addition to teachers stepping into the role of learner, Carl Nagin suggests that within the contemporary English language arts classroom, “there is more emphasis on student-student relationships” (29). When students communicate in online environments, they are doing so in a much more diverse and egalitarian setting than that of a traditional English classroom. A larger and more diverse audience and greater opportunities for collaboration are just two of the benefits of digital composition. When teachers step out of center stage and give students greater independence, they provide more room for students to flourish as strong communicators in a multitude of settings.

Not only is the role of the educator changing in the classroom, but writing pedagogies must also change to reflect technology’s influence on communication and literacy. I assert that pedagogies like Punya Mishra’s and Matthew Koehler’s technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPCK) should play a central role in the English language arts. Mishra and Koehler claim:

TPCK is the basis of good teaching with technology, and requires an understanding of the representation of concepts using technologies; pedagogical techniques that utilize technologies in constructive ways to teach content; knowledge of what makes concepts difficult or easy to learn and how technology can help redress some of the problems students face; knowledge of students' prior knowledge and theories of epistemology; and how technologies can be utilized to build on existing knowledge and to develop new or strengthen old epistemologies. (1029)

In other words, TPCK signifies the combination of technology and best practices in the English language arts classroom. TPCK would work particularly well in the high school classroom because it offers students technologies which are familiar and engaging to them, but at the same time, this approach challenges them to use problem solving, critical thinking, and interpersonal skills.

In addition to changes in the role of teachers and the pedagogies employed in writing instruction, a shift must also take place in the actual learning environments where students interact.³⁵ Technology provides the opportunity to create supplemental learning environments that are more ubiquitous, accessible, and resourceful than a traditional classroom alone. A practical way many teachers employ TPCK is through the use of virtual learning environments (VLEs).³⁶ VLEs, simply put, are “learning environments mediated by computers and digital technologies,” and more specifically, refer to sites like Blackboard, WebCT, and Moodle which incorporate web 2.0 tools into an educational setting (Weiss 2). With VLEs students can find homework and announcements, access links to additional resources, post projects and assignments, receive feedback on these assignments, collaborate on wikis, write blogs, and participate in class or small group

³⁵ “Traditionally, a learning environment has been a physical space, but the idea of what constitutes a learning environment is changing” (Johnson 6).

³⁶ For an example of a Virtual Learning Environment see Appendix 1.

forum discussions. Not only do VLEs offer a convenient environment for communication and collaboration, they also provide a structure conducive to the integration of reading and writing instruction. Research shows that the acts of reading and writing employ the same skills and similar processes, so the fact that digital technologies so readily foster the reading and writing connection is of great advantage (Nagin 32).

The implementation of technological pedagogical content knowledge strategies into the English language arts classroom has many benefits in and of itself, yet Jody Shipka takes Mishra's and Koehler's TPACK idea one step further with her "multimodal task-based framework." While TPACK challenges students to compose in new environments using diverse tools, Shipka argues that students should also be given the chance to shape their own goals and situations within writing assignments. Because prescriptive writing assignments are too limiting, Shipka calls for an alternative—a "goal-directed multimodal task-based framework for composing," which "is geared toward increasing students' rhetorical material, and methodological flexibility by requiring them to determine the purposes and contexts of the work they produce" (285-86).³⁷ In other words, teachers create projects and assignments in which the students themselves decide their goals, purposes, materials, processes, even their audiences and occasions. This framework advances essential interpersonal skills like flexibility, leadership, self-direction, and innovation that may often be neglected otherwise.

Admittedly, this type of academic structure brings up some potential concerns. A project that adheres to Shipka's multimodal task-based framework can be disorganized, time-consuming, and difficult to evaluate. Additionally, many students initially have a

³⁷ For an example of a multimodal task-based project see Appendix 2.

difficult time with the loose framework because they have come to expect assignments where guidelines are spelt out for them. However, these assignments are still valuable for many reasons. Shipka argues that,

a multimodal task-based framework—precisely because it demands that students both think and act more flexibly as they assume responsibility for determining *what* needs to be done along with *how* it might possibly be achieved—positions them in the thick of things, and in so doing, foregrounds these complex issues in ways that more prescriptive prompts may not. (292)

When educators create frameworks where students are more active in deciding on the situation, purpose, and goals of an assignment, it challenges these students to think critically about the process and product. Students not only learn important academic content in these situations, but they also improve higher level thinking skills, develop stronger interpersonal skills, and exhibit greater engagement in their work.

As digital communication takes on a more central role in the English language arts classroom, it offers significant opportunities for teachers to instruct students in the practice of process writing. Nagin suggests that “one of the great advantages of using technology in the classroom is that it facilitates [an] inquiry-based writing experience” (29). Inquiry-based writing aids in the development of higher-order thinking skills like “analyzing, synthesizing, evaluating, and interpreting” (22). Furthermore, the reason inquiry-based writing strategies are more advantageous in digital environments is because working in digital environments gives students a greater variety of tools and resources. The revision process is also easier digitally because tools like Google Docs make responding to student work—whether by a teacher or a peer—far easier. Nagin continues, “technology makes response, revision and editing eminently more agreeable...the whole process encourages revision” (29). Ultimately, the digital environment provides a very

conducive home for approaching writing as a process. Shipka suggests that “what students come to understand about potentials for process, processing, and revision is far richer and more complex when practiced within this kind of goal-directed multimodal task-based framework” (302). In other words, composing in digital environments still requires planning, drafting, and revision, but the process in these environments is more engaging.

There have been many critics who have questioned the growing support of technology in the classroom. To some degree, I agree with critics like Larry Cuban and Todd Oppenheimer, who posit that technologies are pushed into classrooms without proper consideration of how these tools should best be utilized. In too many schools, opportunities to use technology in a meaningful way are squandered because teachers are either afraid or oblivious. I ardently agree with scholars like Sara Kajder that it is important that teachers do not simply use technology for technology’s sake. As Kajder asserts,

Technology integration isn’t about replacing high-stakes experiences that enrich our curricula pre-technology. It’s about tapping into the powerful tools at hand and empowering student reading, writing, and thinking.

(Tech-Savvy 7)

Teachers need not become technology experts, however. What is really needed from teachers in terms of incorporating technology is serious consideration and critical thinking in terms of how the technology can be included in a way that actually enhances students’ thinking and communicative abilities.

Curriculum

In addition to changing goals and pedagogies, English language arts educators, administrators, and policymakers across the country must also revamp curricula if

students are to acquire literacies and abilities that directly apply to their lives in the twenty-first century. Goals provide the direction for a course, and pedagogies entail the approaches teachers use to accomplish these goals, while curricula signify the content used to reach those goals. Students should learn a number of skills, a variety of literacies, and a pool of knowledge throughout their English language arts education. While I concede that literary analysis education should be presented at some point in the English language arts curriculum, I argue that the literacies most important for the majority of students graduating high school today pertain to composition and rhetoric. Therefore, a stronger emphasis should be placed on composition and rhetoric in English language arts programs, especially early in students' high school careers.

Currently, many of the curricula established by high school English language arts programs are strongly driven by literature.³⁸ A high school English language arts curriculum centered primarily on literature is problematic because only a small percentage of high school students will go on to become literature majors in college.³⁹ Therefore, an English language arts curriculum that is too heavily steeped in literature proves extraneous for most students. Granted, students should be exposed to beautiful art, great thinkers, and critical theories at some point; however, most students demonstrate

³⁸ School districts spend millions purchasing massive quantities of text books from major companies. These text books are usually separated into categories such as American literature, British literature, and world literature, and offer a narrow selection of texts that has changed little in the last fifty years. (Sewell 92; Yagelski 270). Furthermore, many teachers use these textbooks to guide their entire curriculum.

³⁹ In 2007, 39% of 18-24 year olds were enrolled in college according to the National Center for Education Statistics. If fewer than half of these young people attend college, even fewer will go on to become English majors. A branch of the U.S. Department of Education and the Institute of Education Sciences, NCES is responsible for collecting, analyzing, and providing data about the status of education in America and internationally.

the more pressing need of learning to compose efficaciously. Indeed, it is time to abandon the idea that English language arts instruction must be based in literature.

I argue that freshman and sophomore year English courses should focus primarily on “writing.”⁴⁰ Students must learn to compose using traditional, digital, and multimodal methods. Curricula in English language arts courses should start with traditional mediums of literature and gradually expand to more complex mediums as the course progresses.⁴¹ For example, Lynde Tan and Libo Guo suggest a three stage process of integrating multimedia literacies into the language arts curriculum: the first stage starts by having students compose linguistic and linguistic/visual products; the next stage introduces audio in addition to linguistic and visual composition; the final stage incorporates linguistic, visual, audio, spatial, and gestural elements into a single text (318). A gradual process like this allows teachers to introduce foundational concepts of communication and rhetoric early on and then move on to more complicated products and theories when incorporating digital methods. A strong, scaffolded curriculum in composition should allow students to first sharpen their abilities with traditional literacies like print and then assimilate rhetorical concepts like the role of author, audience, purpose, and occasion. Additionally, the new English language arts curriculum I propose will incorporate both

⁴⁰ I prefer the comprehensive definition provided by Swenson et al. who define “writing” as “the composition of an attempt at meaning-making.” It does not matter “whether that composition is a print text, a digital slideshow, a film, or a multimedia flash poem” or any other method of communication (Extending 358).

⁴¹ Traditional writing is not completely absent from new literacies, for new and old technologies typically feed off each other rather than replace each other. Again, Swenson et al. assert “It is clear, then, that new digital technologies require both old and new sets of literacies and social practices, including both print-based and multimodal literacies and their accompanying social practices...new literacies are in a synergistic, reciprocal, and constantly evolving relationship with older literacies” (Extending 357).

traditional and emerging forms of composition and will prepare students to write in a variety of settings.

Communication in online environments requires a very complex set of abilities and literacies. Because students perform most of their reading and writing in online environments, they should be trained to read and compose in these digital environments more effectively and attentively.⁴² Aaron Doering, Richard Beach and David O'Brien argue that students' ardent use of Web 2.0 tools—which include social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook, video and picture sharing sites like YouTube and Flickr, and blog and wiki sites like Blogger and Wikispaces—requires English language arts courses to broaden their curricula.⁴³ The use of Web 2.0 tools should be included in English language arts curriculum because the development of digital literacies is both relevant and indispensable for students today.

English language arts curricula should also include rhetorical education that engages students in thinking critically about current events, social issues, and controversial ideas. While the social turn has had a major influence on composition at the university level, this same school of thought has not quite trickled down to high school curriculum. I believe that writing at the secondary level should also reflect critical thinking on relevant social issues. Though Gerald Graff's well-known mandate to "teach the conflicts" was primarily directed at the university, I argue that it also be included at

⁴² According to the 2008 report, "Writing, Technology and Teens," "85% of teens ages 12-17 engage at least occasionally in some form of electronic personal communication" (Lenhart ii).

⁴³ "The shift to active use of multimodal, interactive Web 2.0 tools suggests the need to redefine notions of reading, composing, and performing processes to infuse digital literacies that students use daily into English language arts curriculum" (Doering 42).

the high school level. Graff argues that “acknowledging that culture is a debate rather than a monologue does not prevent us from energetically fighting for the truth of our own convictions. On the contrary, when truth is disputed, we can seek it only by entering the debate (15). While I do not advocate competitive, close-minded debates about already entrenched ideas, I do agree with Graff that teachers should engage students in discussions of controversial and challenging issues. Students must think critically about difficult issues and engage in dialogue regarding these issues if they are to grow as strong citizens.

An additional area which should be included in English language arts curricula is research and information literacy. In a world where students must sort through immeasurable masses of fact and opinion to get information, students must learn to make informed decisions. Janet Swenson et al. suggest that “as digital information resources grow incomprehensibly vast, readers must know how to locate, evaluate, synthesize, cite, and use information with discernment and integrity” (Extending 356). English language arts curriculum must include a focus on analytical skills. Without the ability to evaluate, synthesize, analyze, and interpret complex ideas and information, communication and rhetoric skills are rendered impotent. Students will certainly need to be strong researchers at the postsecondary level, but they will also need these abilities in order to make prudent decisions as citizens and professionals.

Though I have focused entirely on a curriculum of communication, rhetoric, and research thus far, I contend that reading should still play a significant role in English language arts curriculum. The focus of freshman and sophomore year English language arts classes at the secondary level should be based on non-fiction texts instead of

literature. Non-fiction texts provide examples for students of solid writing, and also provide teachers with opportunities to teach students about important methods of communication and rhetoric. Teachers should employ various texts that introduce controversial topics to students in order to challenge their critical thinking. Furthermore, I argue that courses should be designed around pre-established themes rather than on the texts themselves.

A new curriculum in English language arts, which focuses on composition, rhetoric, reading, and research, is essential for students' growth and achievement. An early focus in the high school curriculum on composition and rhetoric will provide students with a solid foundation necessary to engage in more difficult texts and communicative acts later in their careers. A broader curriculum in English language arts is also necessary to reflect the changing literacies and skills students must develop to be proficient communicators today.

Assessment

Educators, administrators, and policymakers have a substantially difficult task in modifying the goals, curricula, and pedagogies of English language arts; however, I suggest that a change in the current culture of assessment in American schools is even more imperative. Evaluation should play a meaningful role in any English language arts course, but a misguided approach to assessment could prove harmful to students.

According to Ed White, the “two general purposes for evaluation” are:

- (1) evaluation as an administrative device, to make institutions more efficient, more accountable, and more clear about their standards; and (2) evaluation as a personalized teaching device, to help students learn more effectively. (iii)

While both of these purposes of evaluation are needed to some degree, there is too great a focus on the former and not enough on the latter in English language arts classrooms today. Despite the objections of many teachers, high stakes standardized writing tests continue to dominate schools across America. If a contemporary vision of English language arts is truly going to take root, assessment methods must be redefined.⁴⁴ I believe the methods of assessment in the English language arts classroom should reflect students' true abilities as twenty-first century communicators, not their ability to take a test. More specifically, I argue that portfolios, especially digital portfolios, should be used to evaluate student writing instead of high stakes standardized tests.

Standardized testing has damaged the very culture in American schools, and assessment methods are in urgent need of transformation.⁴⁵ The theory behind the No Child Left Behind Act, enacted in 2002, was that if states, districts, and schools set high educational standards and measured student achievement of these standards, individual outcomes in education could be improved. While the initial goal of NCLB was laudable, the reality of its implications is that NCLB has done more bad for the school environment than good. The trend towards high stakes achievement tests creates an environment where too much time and effort is given to the evaluation of teachers and schools rather

⁴⁴ Tan and Guo address this issue in the conclusion of "From Print to Critical Multimedia Literacy." High stakes testing is an impeding factor that discourages teachers from integrating technology and multimedia literacy because these tests promote the view that new technology based literacies are secondary to traditional literacies (322-23).

⁴⁵ In 2002, George Hillocks published a critical book on the assessment culture in American schools called *The Testing Trap*. In the book, Hillocks closely examines the tests used in five states—Illinois, Oregon, New York, Texas, and Kentucky—and essentially argues that, because writing instruction is often shaped by assessment, most of these standardized tests actually detract from student writing rather than improve it.

than to individual students. Many critics argue that the widespread influence of these tests tempt educators to teach to the tests and cause schools, districts, and states to lower their standards.⁴⁶ Additionally, the usefulness of the data resulting from these tests has also been called into question. For example, in 2007 Jack Jennings, President of the Center for Educational Policy, reported before the U.S. House of Representatives that:

The No Child Left Behind Act requires states to report a massive amount of test data and attaches serious consequences to these data for districts, schools, and educators. But the data on which so much rests are not easy to access in some states and are sometimes inconsistent, outdated, or incomplete.⁴⁷

The fact that the fate of so many important issues—school closures, courses offered, and even teacher salaries—rests on the data of these tests is alarming. If teachers and administrators allow assessments to dictate the curricula and pedagogies used in English language arts classrooms, then the future of English education is in peril.

In addition to the substandard culture created by standardized writing assessments, there are many flaws with the tests themselves. In the preface to his book *Assigning, Responding, Evaluating*, Ed White argues that,

Many writing tests are imposed from outside the classroom by administrators or commercial testing firms unfamiliar with the teaching situation and are scored in more or less mysterious and reductive ways; in recent years the scoring of writing by computers instead of people adds to the mystery and suspicion, since the algorithms for scoring are closely

⁴⁶ In the introduction to *Many Children Left Behind*, George Wood claims that “with a focus on testing curriculum is narrowed, leading to the most ineffective teaching practices becoming the norm” (xii).

⁴⁷ According to its website, “The Center on Education Policy is a national, independent advocate for public education and for more effective public schools.” Based in Washington, D.C., and founded in January 1995, the Center has received nearly all of its funding from charitable foundations such as The Gates Foundation and The Ford Foundation.

guarded trade secrets. The widespread use of multiple-choice mechanics and usage tests as if they were writing assessments distorts the teaching of writing from earliest schooling through many university programs. (iii) Moreover, these tests are culturally biased, for a single, uniform test cannot address the diversity of a wide range of students who represent different cultural, social, and economic backgrounds. Also, FairTest argues that varying testing conditions from site to site skew the test results.⁴⁸ Finally, standardized tests fail to authentically reflect the way students best learn. These tests base their analyses of students' abilities to communicate on a few menial writing prompts given in a narrow window with limited and dated tools and little opportunity for revision.⁴⁹ These tests clearly do not represent best practice, nor do they accurately assess students' abilities and growth. The desire to quantify, to assess, to grow students' skills and levels of literacy is a valid and crucial concern; however, the current trend in standardized testing attempts to do this at the expense of teaching students the true potentials of communication. Teachers, administrators, and school districts must step out from the overbearing shadow of standardized testing and embrace a modernized view of communication in the twenty-first century.

So, what does valid assessment look like in the contemporary English language arts course? And, how can classrooms introduce evaluation as a “personalized teaching

⁴⁸ The National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest) is an educational organization based in Boston concerned with issues of standardized testing. Its staff and board consist of educators, scholars, and researchers from across the country. FairTest is funded by grants from the Bay and Paul Foundation, Ford Foundation, Polk Brothers Foundation, Schott Foundation, United Church of Christ, Wiener Educational Foundation, Woods Fund of Chicago, and many individual donors.

⁴⁹ Students in Colorado, for example, are required to write their responses with pencil in a booklet and are given little opportunity for revision or creativity. These tests offer no options for composing digitally or including visual or oral components to their compositions.

device, to help students learn more effectively?” (White iii). A growing number of institutions across the country have found the answer to these questions in the implementation of portfolios. A portfolio is essentially a collection of student work that demonstrates their abilities as writers. Evaluation in English language arts courses should be portfolio-based because this assessment method demonstrates: (1) students’ ability to communicate in a variety of modes, using diverse methods and tools, (2) students’ growth in comprehension and application of rhetorical strategies, and (3) students’ capacity to choose certain tools and strategies over others because of their effectiveness in particular situations.⁵⁰ Portfolios also demonstrate interpersonal skills, or what Yancey calls “noncognitive traits,” such as prudent decision making, critical thinking, self-direction, and innovation (Electronic 28). Moreover, portfolios are more engaging for students because they offer students more authority and, therefore, initiate greater motivation.

The implementation of portfolios has continued to spread at the university level for the past two decades and is now “the assessment methodology of choice in the twenty-first century” (White 190). As more and more composition instructors today are switching to electronic portfolios, English language arts teachers at the secondary level must follow this example and adopt portfolio-based assessment.⁵¹ One of the major benefits of electronic portfolios is that they capture multifarious forms of communication—verbal, visual, oral, digital, and multimodal— rather than strictly print

⁵⁰ White posits “the great advantage of portfolios for writing assessment is that they can include numerous examples of student writing produced over time and under a variety of conditions” (163).

⁵¹ Yancey provides a thorough analysis and comparison of print and electronic portfolios in “Postmodernism, Palimpsest, and Portfolios: Theoretical Issues in the Representation of Student Work.”

texts. Additionally, the arrangement of electronic portfolios provides exciting new opportunities for students as well. Yancey uses the analogy of a gallery when describing electronic portfolios:

Like a gallery, a digital portfolio has a central entry point, which for portfolios is typically called a portal. . . . Like a gallery, the digital portfolio makes multiple contexts a part of the display, which in the case of portfolios means linking internally to the students' own work, linking externally to multiple worlds outside the students' own purview to show multiple and complex relationships. (Postmodernism 750)

The creation of hyperlinks creates a large network of meaning and requires critical thinking on the students' part. A further advantage of electronic portfolios is that they offer a longer and broader continuum of utility, whereas print-based portfolios are typically turned in once, graded, and returned. Yancey explains that digital portfolios have the potential to span all of students' courses and can even be used as a bridge into the professional world (751). Why shouldn't secondary schools start this continuum one phase earlier? If high school English language arts classrooms truly embraced a twenty-first century vision and pedagogy, by the end of four years, students could develop a comprehensive portfolio ready to take to the university or professional world.

Nevertheless, Ed White identifies one of the potential issues with portfolios. He admits that scoring these pieces can prove difficult, particularly when there is an entire class or multiple classes' worth of portfolios to evaluate. White's solution is the use of Phase 2 scoring which focuses on "a set of goals by faculty" and "a reflective letter to readers composed by the student arguing that those goals have been met, using the

portfolio contents as evidence” (169). The reflective piece prompts students to take responsibility for their work and to think metacognitively about their writing process.⁵²

I argue that a stronger bond must develop among assessment, curriculum, pedagogy, and standards in the English language arts classroom. Though evaluation will always play an important role in K12 schools, assessment must not dictate the pedagogies, curricula, or goals used in English language arts classes. I also assert that a new vision in English language arts is contingent upon a widespread revolution in the assessment methods used in the twenty-first century classroom. This means teachers, administrators, and policymakers must abandon their commitment to standardized tests and, instead, infuse digital portfolios into the secondary English language arts classroom.

⁵² The portfolio process is metacognitive in that students are required to reflect on the decision making processes they undergo when deciding what to include and how to present these various pieces.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

The field of English language arts is at a very pivotal place in its history. New technologies continue to emerge, perpetually changing the way people communicate and altering the very notions of “composition” and “literacy.” Furthermore, technology plays an increasingly dominant role in students’ lives while many teachers and schools persistently struggle to authentically integrate new technologies and literacies in the classroom.⁵³ The “2009 K12 Horizon Report” offers a reminder that even today,

educational practice and the material that supports it is changing only slowly. Schools are still using materials developed to teach the students of decades ago, but today’s students are actually very different in the way they think and work. Schools need to adapt to current student needs and identify new learning models that are engaging to younger generations.
(7)⁵⁴

⁵³ Young and Bush argued in 2004 that “For now, in the majority of American schools there is little evidence of a technological revolution in instruction, and teachers continue to be infrequent and limited users of new technology applications for teaching and learning” (3). Unfortunately, this digital divide between teachers and students persists and in many cases continues to grow.

⁵⁴ The New Media Consortium publishes the Horizon Report each year which offers a look at the emerging technologies most likely to affect educational instruction in the preceding five years. Funding is provided by the Microsoft Corporation, while the New Media Consortium also collaborates with the Consortium for School Networking (CoSN) and EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative (ELI).

While more teachers gradually implement emerging technologies into their classes, many teachers remain reluctant to make significant changes to their instruction. New technologies continue to develop at a rapid pace and will further revolutionize the way students learn and communicate, which perpetuates a widening gap between tech-savvy students and static schools and teachers.⁵⁵ Schools must make bold changes if they are to engage and empower students with the skills and competencies they need to be successful in the twenty-first century.

I argue that a new vision for English language arts must be embraced in secondary schools in America; teachers, administrators, and policymakers must reevaluate standards, pedagogies, curricula, and methods of assessment. First, many states districts, and schools have adopted new standards that are gradually beginning to reflect the new literacies and skills necessary for students to develop in an age of technology, yet more must be done. Standards that reflect twenty-first century skills are particularly important at this point in time because the adoption of national standards in English language arts appears to be close at hand. The National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers unveiled some of the proposed standards in early March 2010. President Obama backs the movement in addition to policymakers in 48 states (Neuman and Abramson). In addition, teachers must adopt bold new pedagogies that embrace technology and instigate a shift in the role of teachers, students, and the classroom environment itself. The incorporation of technology also provides a

⁵⁵ The “2009 Horizon Report” identified collaborative environments and online communication tools as emerging technologies that are beginning to shape the educational landscape today, particularly at the postsecondary level. Additionally, cloud computing, smart objects, and the personal web are also technologies that promise to significantly influence learning and communication (5).

constructive platform with which to employ best practices. Moreover, a new curriculum must be established in the English language arts classroom that moves away from a focus on literature and towards a concentration on rhetoric. Not only does rhetoric play an essential role in analyzing the new methods of communication taking place in terms of audience, purpose, and occasion, but a firm rhetorical education empowers students to engage in greater civic involvement and critical thinking.⁵⁶ Finally, the current state of assessment in English language arts is in desperate need of revitalization. Portfolio-based writing assessment offers a much better method of evaluation because it allows students to compose using a variety of methods and mediums and for a variety of purposes and occasions. Accordingly, standards, pedagogies, curricula, and methods of assessment must not be looked at as isolated branches; there is great overlap among all these elements. I ardently argue that all of these pieces must be incorporated into the English language arts classroom if a true transformation is to take place.

My argument for the implementation of a new vision for English language arts brings up an important question: if these suggestions will truly benefit the English classroom, how can widespread reform be implemented across classes, schools, and districts? Simply put, the solution lies in authentic professional development. The first thing that must be acknowledged, in terms of professional development, is that it will cost time and resources if it is going to be effective.⁵⁷ If administrators desire to improve the

⁵⁶ In “Why Teach Digital Writing?,” the Writing in Digital Environments (WIDE) Research Center Collective argue that rhetoric—“a rhetoric that is technological, social, and cultural”—must play an essential role in teaching digital writing.

⁵⁷ The National Staff Development Council (NSDC) asserts that 25% of teachers’ time should be devoted to improving professionally and collaborating with colleagues (NAESP 42).

quality of education in their schools, they must be willing to invest in their teachers.⁵⁸

Furthermore, greater access to technology for teachers and students is essential.⁵⁹ While

administrators have a critical responsibility to help their teachers and improve their

schools, I strongly believe that true school reform begins with teachers (Nagin 57).

Teachers have a responsibility to take professional development seriously. More

specifically, I assert that secondary teachers should continually research scholarship in

their field, attend conferences and workshops, collaborate with colleagues, reflect on their

own practices, and integrate more technology into their instruction.⁶⁰

Teachers must stay up to date on current theories and best practices in their field. I

have seen far too many teachers grow complacent in the classroom, rehashing the same

tired lesson plans and activities year after year. Teachers must research and read scholarly

literature and attend professional conferences in order to refine their craft. Yet, it is not

enough to simply attend a workshop or read a journal article and move on; there must be

implementation and sustainability. Intermittent and isolated training throws knowledge

⁵⁸ “Professional development, intellectual interactions with peers, adequate training, and preparation time — all scarce resources for teachers — are necessary in abundance for such a shift to take place” (Horizon Report 7).

⁵⁹ In “Beliefs About Technology and the Preparation of English Teachers,” Swenson argues that “Ubiquitous access to sufficient and up-to-date technology—including high-speed Internet access—for all students must become a priority for policy makers, schools, districts, businesses, and the community at large. Ideally, resources should be appropriate for being located in classrooms since technological integration works best in the context of actual learning environments, not in computer labs. Thus, one-to-one computing integration is the ideal option for technology integration” (19).

⁶⁰ In the report titled “No Dream Denied: A Pledge to America’s Children” sponsored by the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, the authors argue, “In order to prepare each child for successful employment and productive citizenship in the twenty-first century, teachers must know their subject areas deeply, understand how children learn, be able to use that knowledge to teach well, use modern learning technologies effectively, and work closely with their colleagues to create rich learning environments” (7).

and skills at teachers that fail to translate into classroom practice.⁶¹ So, not only does professional development mean that teachers are informed, but authentic professional development demands that teachers engage in a strong professional community. As Milbrey McLaughlin and Joan Talbert suggest,

The path to change in the classroom core lies within and through teachers' professional communities; learning communities which generate knowledge, craft new norms of practice, and sustain participants in their efforts to reflect, examine, experiment and change. (18)

In addition, authentic professional communities foster environments where teachers discuss professional materials, observe one another teaching, brainstorm new techniques and strategies, share data and findings from their own classroom experiences, analyze student work collaboratively, visit other schools and host other teachers and educational experts, and collaborate on project and course plans. A prevailing culture exists in many schools where teachers work in isolation; however, the school environment must change to bring greater communication and collegiality within departments and interdepartmentally.

Fortunately, organizations like the National Writing Project cultivate healthy professional communities and provide exemplary opportunities for collaboration among all levels of writing instruction. The National Writing Project (NWP) is a network of more than 200 sites anchored at colleges and universities across the country whose goal it is to train educators at all levels across all disciplines to become better writing teachers and better writers themselves. The NWP works to close the gap between K12 and postsecondary writing by fostering professional communities. As Lieberman and Wood

⁶¹ Herrington, Hodgson, and Moran argue that “The usual kind of staff development—the one-shot training workshop mandated by the principal or superintendent—will not produce the desired effect at all” (203).

explain, these communities are “networks that organize and sustain relationships...[that] produce new and revitalizing forms of support, commitment, and leadership” (40).⁶² One of the core mantras of the NWP is “teachers teaching teachers.” This simple phrase captures the true heart of professional communities working together to improve as educators. Another mantra is “the best teachers of writers are writers themselves,” which demonstrates the emphasis that teachers learn how to help their students by practicing strategies themselves first. Jim Gray, the founder of the NWP, claims that,

school reform can’t happen just by passing laws and publishing mandates. But real school reform can happen when teachers come together regularly throughout their careers to explore practices that effective teachers have already proven are successful in their classrooms (103).

Like few other organizations of its kind, the NWP has created a massive network of teachers, administrators, and scholars who truly have the potential to effect positive reform in America’s schools.

High-functioning professional communities also foster a strong environment for the integration of technology. The development of new technology-based skills and tools is essential for English language arts educators today. Carl Nagin offers the reminder that, “In recent years, a new set of skills has been added to those that teachers need to acquire: the ability to use technology for advancing literacy and learning.” Nagin elaborates:

To unlock the potential of these new tools, teachers need opportunities and professional development in using technology first for their own purposes: writing and communicating, planning lessons, evaluating student work,

⁶² “A distinctive feature of the NWP’s approach to instructional improvement has been to address the issue of aligning the K-12 and postsecondary worlds of education. To date, its summer institutes are one of the few places where teachers, administrators, and university academics join as peers to develop themselves as writers and writing teachers” (Nagin 64).

and researching and developing curricula. Teachers' success with technology in their arenas will help them understand how to approach students and how to make extensive use of technology in their classrooms. (69)

Most schools and districts today have some teachers who are on the forefront of technology integration in the classroom, which means that valuable resources are present in the very schools where training is needed. Greater work should be done to pool these resources and foster more collaboration. Moreover, schools should establish twenty-first century teams to cultivate technology integration. These twenty-first century teams should include teachers, administrators, library technology educators (LTEs), literacy resource teachers (LRTs), parents, and even students and should focus on establishing fundamental policies of technology use in their schools. Digital means of communication like screencasts, podcasts, blogs, discussion forums, and listservs should also be offered to teachers as platforms to share ideas, collaborate on plans, and receive training.

Greater collaboration among teachers and between teachers and administrators is important, but there is another significant gap that could be closed through felicitous professional development: the gap between K12 and postsecondary educators' beliefs about writing.⁶³ College writing instructors often lament the formulaic writing instruction used by many high school teachers, and many of these secondary teachers blame the need to prepare students for standardized writing assessments. The bottom line is that more collaboration should be taking place between these two levels. Professional development is the key to the transformation that must take place in secondary English language arts.

⁶³ This fissure between high school and college writing is an oft discussed topic on the WPA listserv entitled which can be seen in recent threads such as February 2010's "Why our Jobs are Hard" and March 2010's discussion of the K12 ELA Core Standards which are supposed to ensure college readiness.

Just as Yancey exhorted her colleagues in academe to embrace technology's influence on composition and communication, it is time for educators at the secondary level to heed a similar call. A new day is dawning on English language arts, and policymakers, administrators, but most importantly, teachers, must endorse a new twenty-first century vision for the secondary English language arts classroom.

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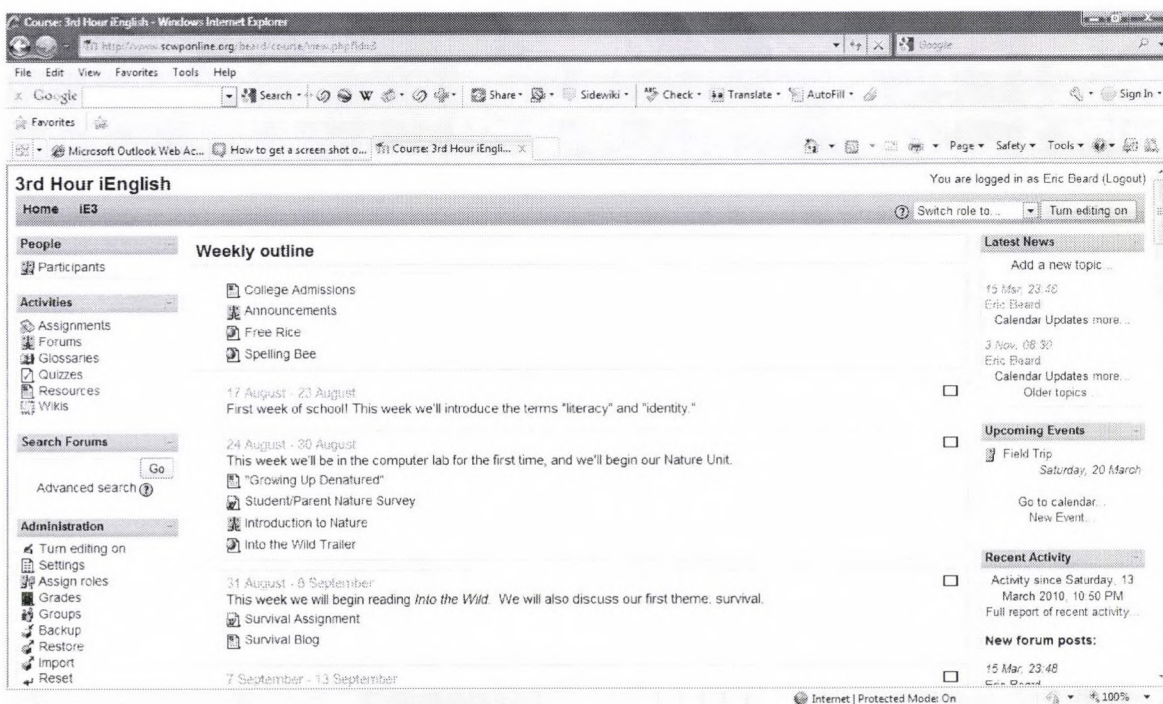
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT: MOODLE



This screen shot shows the basic layout of Moodle. This particular VLE allows teachers to include internal and external links, open class discussion forums, and create quizzes and assignments. For students, Moodle offers access to blogs, wikis, course calendars, grades, and more.

This environment is conducive to the instruction of reading and writing in tandem which can be seen in the links to articles and discussion forums. This environment also provides great support for incorporating digital tools and multimedia.

APPENDIX II

MULTIMODA TASK-BASED FRAMEWORK: SERVICE LEARNING PROJECT: PROPOSAL ASSIGNMENT

ENG 4

Service Learning Project: Proposal

Introduction: We have spent a significant amount of time in class this semester discussing social issues at the school, local, national, and global level, and we are now preparing for a major service learning project where we attempt to address one of these issues.

Assignment: Your task is to create and present a proposal arguing for the acceptance of a service learning project of your design. Here are some guidelines to consider: (1) decide which social issue you would like to address first and (2) create a clear proposal in which you (a) define the problem, (b) suggest a plan that addresses the problem, and (c) convince your classmates to choose your proposal as our class's service learning project. You may use any tools, materials, or technologies you feel would help you with your proposal. You will have five days in the computer lab to develop ideas, collect data, perform research, plan your project, and create proposal. You may work individually, with a partner, or in a small group of three.

Evaluation: I will evaluate your proposals according to these five categories:

- Content and Ideas

- Research and Data
- Organization and Design
- Presentation and Delivery
- Professionalism and Initiative

This assignment provides a very complex framework for students to work within.

Students are asked to complete a number of high level thinking tasks like analyzing, synthesizing, evaluating, and interpreting. Furthermore, students are given a plethora of tools with which to work and a great deal of freedom. I believe this multimodal task-based assignment also fosters student-direction, problem solving skills, writing as a process, and metacognition.