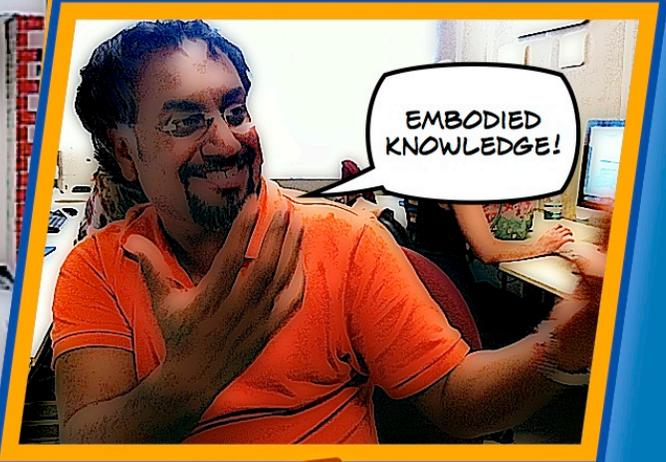
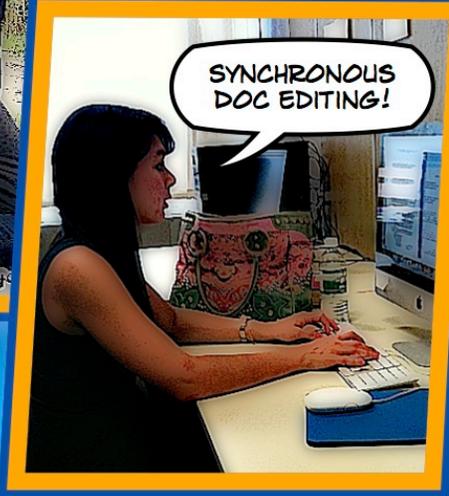
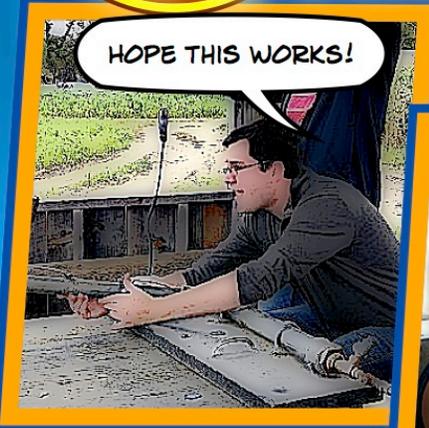




SOMEWHERE IN BARTLETT...



TECHNOLOGY FELLOWS THE BOON



UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST
WRITING PROGRAM
2011 - 2012

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Introduction

This book is a collaborative effort on the part of the Technology Fellows at the University of Massachusetts Amherst to share our year-long experiments in teaching with technology. Our goal is to leave a record of our experiences for future Writing Program instructors, as well as for writing teachers more generally. The book you hold in your hands, then, wants you to see technology as a critical component of writing. After all, writing itself is a technology!

But remember that the projects in these pages are *experiments*. Like all teaching, ours is very much in process. Should you choose to borrow from these activities, we encourage you to adapt them to fit your own teaching styles, students, and classroom spaces.

That said, enjoy the book! We hope that these records of our exploits are useful to you.

Meet the Tech Fellows

The Technology Fellows are a group of graduate student instructors selected to explore how technology can enhance the writing classroom. Participants explore a wide range of both technological and pedagogical issues through academic reading, discussion, and hands-on play with technologies.

The 2011-2012 Technology Fellows



(From left to right: David Bartone, Gina Ocasion, Hari Stephen Kumar, Christina Jones, Travis Grandy and John Gallagher)

Gina

I am a second year PhD candidate in American Studies, concentrating on 19th century children's literature and culture. My Tech Fellows project incorporates a virtual meeting space into the 112 writing community by centering assignments and communication within Google Docs. I'm interested in ways that this program can allow the class as a collective to extend beyond the twice a week, in-person meeting.

Hari

I am a second year PhD candidate in Composition and Rhetoric, and I navigate between writing, performing, teaching, and decolonizing the imagined and material spaces where I live and labor. For my Technology Fellows project, I re-vision the act of teacher feedback as a complex embodied writing situation in which our focus ought to shift from writing "about" a student text to a more relational/conversational interaction "with" a fellow writer. I explore a variety of technologies that enable teachers to draw upon their own range of embodied languages and resources for composing their feedback -- such as audio recording for channeling voice and tone, and video screencasting to engage both spoken and visual gestures.

Christina

I'm a fifth-year MA/PhD student in Composition and Rhetoric. I specialize in a number of things, including digital writing, collaboration, multimedia, and planning for all contingencies up to and including the zombie apocalypse. As the leader of the Technology Fellows, my semester project is to coordinate our group's meteoric rise to glory and immortal fame. Failing that, my goal is for everyone to emerge (relatively) unscathed.

Travis

I am a MA/PhD student in Composition and Rhetoric interested in collaborative pedagogy, Internet culture, testing out different applications of instructional technologies, and effective teacher practice with technology. My Tech Fellows project revolves around using digital media to help students gain awareness of the publishing and circulating of texts. Using EPUB, PDF, and other formats, I will be creating eBook anthologies of student writing.

John

I am a PhD candidate in Composition and Rhetoric, focusing on audience in digital spaces and the Internet. I see writing as a social practice, so for my Tech Fellows project I'm currently using explorations of the discourse conventions of text messaging as a way to examine audience(s). I've also developed a class wiki in order to stimulate discussions about peer review. I read *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* and graphic novels for fun and can be found in coffee shops throughout the Amherst area. I prefer to see tattooing as a form of writing. ;)

Teaching with Technology Projects

In addition to their work together in bi-monthly meetings, each Technology Fellow also develops a semester-long project incorporating technology into some aspect of his or her teaching. Here you'll find descriptions of those projects, resources to help you try something similar, and a "behind-the-scenes" look at the ups and downs of classroom technology experiments.

The Art of eBook Publishing

Travis Grandy

Project Overview

A frequent challenge for composition teachers is to make the publishing and circulation of student work meaningful. A print publication has a material meaning (writers can hold and touch their work), but it can be limited in how far it can circulate (a limited number of copies). Digital publishing risks a different kind of pitfall: its perceived lack of materiality (one cannot hold a blog in his or her own hands, for instance). My Tech Fellows project examines avenues for publishing student work that can provide some additional potential for broader circulation while also being tactile – and, hopefully, meaningful. Specifically, this project looks at various options for eBook publishing.

Context

The first eBook was created in 1971 by Michael S. Hart and marked the beginning of *Project Gutenberg*. However, it has not been until fairly recently that eBooks have been achieving the same kind of reading experience as their print counterparts. As of this year, more than 1.3 million books are available in digital formats on Amazon.com alone (not to mention other retailers), and the marketplace is saturated with ever more affordable eReaders, tablets, and smartphones – making these books less tethered to desktop computers.

Another significant change has been the increase in the number of authors publishing and circulating their work. Many retailers have capitalized on this trend and encouraged authors to self-publish. Now, aspiring novelists are no longer required to navigate the complicated industry of literary agents and publishing houses. Authors can self-publish their work and, more importantly, find an audience for that work.

In the Composition Classroom

As with any class activity, publishing should be well contextualized and purposeful. A benefit of using digital publishing is that students can draw upon existing literacies to circulate texts and hopefully find an audience. eReaders like the iPad, Kindle, or Nook also provide potential for a more tactile experience. Writers can literally hold their work – and, depending on the device, touch and manipulate their text.

One possible way to implement this technology in a writing classroom is to have students create their own eBook. Instructors can set up groups to manage various parts of preparing the book and ask students to decide where and when it will be published. Students can actively participate in the process of finding an audience for their texts by

researching various online locations where they can publish their work. They can also discuss what kind of reading experience they want their audience to have (for instance, some formats are limited to black and white text and images), and they can plan a strategy to get their book circulating among readers. Not only could students plan a strategy to publicize their book using their social networks, they could also do so with the legitimacy of an online bookseller like Amazon or iTunes.

Resources for Making an eBook

Devices

At the 2012 Conference on College Composition and Communication, Richard Miller said that last time the publishing industry went through a major shift, people weren't talking about paper, ink, and glue. While I do not want to get too sidetracked in discussing the specifics of eReaders, these devices do create material limitations for publishing and circulation (not to mention access). Below is a table that highlights some of the options for reading eBooks:

Reader	Starting Cost	Native eBook Formats
Amazon Kindle	\$80, color version starting at \$200	AZW, PDF, TXT, non-DRM MOBI, PRC
Nook	\$100, color version starting at \$200	EPUB, PDF
Apple iPad	\$400 for the iPad 2	EPUB, PDF, iBooks
Sony Reader	\$85	EPUB, PDF, TXT, RTF, DOC, BBeB

File Formats

Given that there are a few competing devices in the eBooks market, manufacturers have developed proprietary formats for their respective devices (notably the Amazon Kindle). However, book files can easily be converted and most devices support the open EPUB standard format. The most flexible formats are PDF and EPUB.

Software for Self-Publishing

Sigil: A WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) eBook editor, this software allows users to create and edit books in EPUB format.

Operating System: Windows, Mac, Linux

Cost: Free

Link: <http://code.google.com/p/sigil/>

Calibre: While it is advertised as a "library manager," Calibre is most useful as a file converter and can convert most major file formats -- for instance, PDF to EPUB. It also allows users to read eBooks on a desktop computer (useful for previewing an eBook.)

Operating System: Windows, Mac
Cost: Free
Link: <http://calibre-eBook.com/>

Comic Life: A comic book editor that allows users to convert pictures into stylized images and arrange them in comic-style layouts. (See the cover of this book for an example!) These comics can then be published to PDF format.

Operating System: Windows, Mac
Cost: \$20 Education license (free 30 day trial)
Link: <http://plasq.com/products/comiclife>

dotEPUB: A browser plug-in compatible with Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox, and Safari that allows users to turn a webpage into an EPUB file with the click of a button.

Operating System: Windows, Mac
Cost: Free
Link: <http://dotepub.com/>

iBooks Author: A WYSIWYG editor that allows users to publish textbooks to the Apple iBookstore. Textbooks can incorporate images, videos, custom HTML widgets, and review questions. Note: Textbooks are only compatible with an iPad.

Operating System: Mac
Cost: Free
Link: <http://www.apple.com/ibooks-author/>

Suggested Further Reading

“Publishing Freshman Themes”

Albert Morton Turner

The English Journal, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Mar., 1929), pp. 242-243

“Teaching about Writing, Righting Misconceptions: (Re)envisioning ‘First-Year Composition’ as ‘Introduction to Writing Studies’”

Douglas Downs and Elizabeth Wardle

College Composition and Communication, Vol. 58, No. 4 (Jun., 2007), pp. 552-584

“Embracing the Squishiness of Digital Literacy”

Zac Chase and Diana Laufenberg

Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, Vol. 54, No. 7 (April 2011), pp. 535-537

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Writing and Sharing with Google Docs

Gina Ocasion

Project Overview and Context

I started working with Google Docs because I use the sharing feature in my own academic work. The ability to write and share documents without downloading or the associated compatibility issues was appealing – especially since in my first semester of teaching College Writing I would have students email me drafts, and there were always a few attached documents that couldn't be opened in Microsoft Word. Expanded access to material was also a potentially great benefit to working in Google Docs, since Google Docs files are accessible to any reader the writer allows and from any computer with an Internet connection.

The potential for sharing and ease of access were the reasons I *started* thinking about Google Docs, but over the past year my class use of this space has extended into most of my curriculum. And, since I've been teaching in a computer lab classroom, I have been able to see how students are working both individually and collectively in this online space. (Note: I'm teaching College Writing over the summer and part of my work with the Technology Fellows has been to discover how a writing course can look when it takes place outside of a physical classroom space.)

The overall goals for my project were to improve:

- my own and the classroom community's access to writing
- our ability to respond to writing
- the organization of class materials
- communication inside and outside the classroom

Ultimately, I really needed something to help organize myself in responding to drafts and final portfolios, and I could see that my students often needed the same tools (as indicated by last minute printing, missing items in portfolios, etc.). I worked in SPARK my first semester but found the interface challenging, and the space didn't seem to encourage the kind of activity I find valuable. (SPARK's threaded discussions and blogs can be done well, but were visually unappealing to me and to my students.) I'm unfamiliar with Moodle and I'm assuming that many of my students are as well since this is a new space for UMass, so I decided to go with Google Docs because of its seemingly pervasive place in collective writing.

Over the course of the semester my students have really appreciated the efficiency of Google Docs since it is accessible from any computer, paperless, and organized. Because Google Docs is fairly simple to use, and many students and teachers are already familiar with Google products, I will be focusing on explaining some how-to basics of this space and how I set it up for use in College Writing.

A Day in a Google Docs Classroom

By working in Google Docs both inside and outside the classroom, I've been able to extend the class community beyond the in-person meetings. As an example, below is a brief outline of a class in the midst of the drafting process:

1. As soon as students come in, they log into their Gmail accounts.
2. I assign a 10-minute writing prompt that they complete in a Google Doc and organize in their Writer's Notebook Folder (during the revision process, this prompt is designed to generate goals, questions, and thought surrounding the progression of the draft).
3. I share a document with peer review questions and goals with the class.
4. We talk a bit about our goals for this specific peer review then they share their draft with their peer review group (usually pairs at the beginning of the semester and groups of three toward the end).
5. Peer reviewers open the author's document, and usually the guidelines for the peer review as well. Then they respond to the writing directly within the Google document by using in-text comments.
6. We finish peer review with a conversation about the in-text comments – clarifying/explaining notes and suggestions and generally expanding the feedback that is on the page.
7. I remind students to share this draft with me through Google Docs.

This set-up is paperless (which my students really appreciate), automatically distributed, and accessible to peer groups, author, and instructor – all working out of the same single document. When I go home to look through these drafts, I can see 1.) what the author's goals/concerns were going into peer review, 2.) the author's draft, and 3.) the peer reviewer's comments. Then I am able to add my comments in the same way as the peer reviewer. Not only can I comment directly in the margins of the student's draft without altering the text, the author is also able to see these notes immediately. No printing or emailing necessary! Another great benefit is that I am able to review and comment on student work without having to physically transport Writer's Notebooks and hard copy drafts.

One thing to note: When I write my comments on a draft that has been peer reviewed, that peer reviewer also has access to my comments. I've mentioned this to my students and suggested that they can copy their draft into a separate Google Doc that only I would have access to if they are concerned about peer access. Another option that would cut down on copies: After peer review, students can remove their peer(s) from the list of people who have access to the document. Then any feedback added to the document will be private between the writer and the teacher.

Organizing Your Google Docs

Note: When teaching two classes I don't separate student work by class. I attempted this in the beginning of the semester, but it was a total waste of time since both of my classes are on the same schedule of assignments.

- Setting up my own Google Docs before the first class of the semester, I created four collections (folders) and labeled one for each unit: Unit 1, Unit 2, etc. There will eventually be sub-collections (folders within folders) in each, but I add these as needed.
- On the first day of class, as homework, I asked my students to create a Google account they don't mind sharing with everyone in the class. (Most students just use their personal accounts.)
- One thing I didn't do, but should have done, is share a Google Doc with everyone's Google email address, including my own. Well into the semester, email address spelling mishaps still affected the submission of assignments. If students had a Google Doc with everyone's contact information, they could easily copy and paste the addresses (and have no excuse for missing work).
- On our second class meeting, we walked through the different capabilities of Google Docs: how to create a collection, how to create a document, how to label, how to share, etc. I had students create a collection for each unit and an additional collection for Writer's Notebook entries. They shared each collection with me so I could access everything they organized in these folders.

One suggestion to make your life easier:

Have students add their name to the label of each of their files and collections in a standardized way (Ex: Unit 1 – Gina Ocasion). This will allow you to find a specific student's work very quickly.

To the right is a screenshot of my Google Docs page *before* I had students add their names to their own collections. With no names in the collection title, I had to actually open each one to find the student I was looking for!

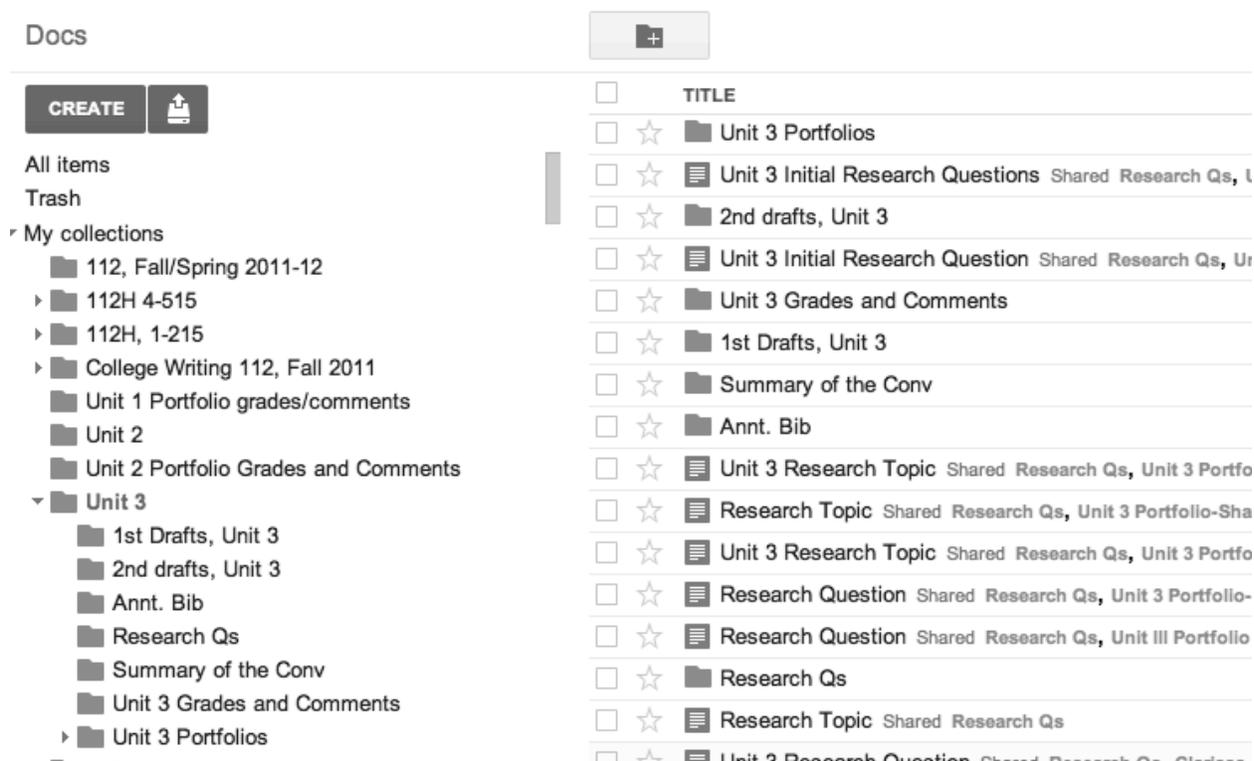
Note: Don't add student's names for them. It sounds easy and fast, but it is actually quite time-consuming. It's better to get students into the practice of naming things in a way that will make their work easy for you to find. Otherwise, you'll be adjusting 15 to 30 file names per assignment, all semester long.

Docs



- As we went through each Unit, in my own Google Docs page I added the following sub-collections:
 - 1st Draft
 - Revised Draft
 - Final Portfolios
 - Portfolio Comments/Grades

As students shared their work, I would organize it into the appropriate sub-collection on my own Google Docs page. Think of this like putting files into a folder on your computer's desktop, except that in Google Docs individual documents can be added to multiple collections without creating multiple copies of the file. Here's an example:



Grading with Google Docs

In my class, all assignments are turned in through Google Docs – which means no paperwork, no carrying portfolios home, no keeping track of portfolios while they are at home, no printing grades and notes, etc. Here's how I do it:

- At the beginning of each unit I share the assignment sheet and a checklist with all the items that should be in a student's final portfolio. (Most students use this list as an organizer.)
- When I start grading portfolios, I make duplicates of the shared checklist and use them as my rubric. That way, there are no surprises for my students.

- Since my grading rubric is a file located in Google Docs, I share it with the student when I'm done grading and he/she is immediately able to access it.

Note: While you can set a deadline by which your students must share drafts/portfolios with you, they will still be able to access these documents after the fact since they “own” them. (In Google Docs terms, the creator of a document is always the owner unless he or she transfers ownership to another user.) Even if students just open a document that they have turned in, the “last modified” date will change.

If you're concerned that your students are continuing to work on assignments after they've technically turned them in but before you have had a chance to view them, you can always download the version you see on the date it is due. However, while I did have minor concerns regarding the “last modified” dates, I like to use in-text comments when responding to drafts and final portfolios so reading a downloaded version would add an additional step to my responses. Also, the “see revision history” option in Google Docs will let you see a record (and timestamp) of any changes made to the document, so you will be able to tell if students are altering submitted assignments.

End-of-Semester Clean-Up

It's necessary to keep a reliable record of all student work and teacher response for at least two years after you've submitted final grades for a class. However, in Google Docs, individual students will have the capability to change or remove the documents they created at any time. In order to preserve the work of the semester “as is,” you'll need to download copies. Here's how:

1. Create a new collection.
2. Label this collection with the semester and year. (You can separate student work by class if you're teaching two, but I don't.)
3. Move all folders related to that semester into this collection. This should clean up your side bar, hiding all unit folders
4. Highlighting the collection, click the downward-facing arrow to the right of the label. This should produce a drop-down list.
5. Click “Download”.
6. Click the “All Items” tab.

At this stage you can choose how you would like these documents to be downloaded. You'll most likely have a mix of Microsoft Word, Excel, PDF, and Google Docs files in your collections. You can retain the original form of these documents or change them all to PDFs or Word documents.

Once you click “Download,” you'll have everything in a folder on your computer. I would rather not have an extensive collection of student work on my personal computer, so I then upload this folder to the UDrive and delete it from my desktop. This process both preserves all student work and de-clutters your personal space.

Student Feedback

At about mid-semester I always send out a Google form to get some feedback on specific elements of the course. This semester I added two questions specifically referring to Google Docs:

- 1.) What is your comfort level with Google Docs? Has Google Docs provided a useful space for writing/revising/peer review/submitting your essays?
- 2.) Have you found the use of media (including videos, Google Docs, etc.) in this class useful and productive? What specifically have you found helpful or unsuccessful?

Based on the comments I collected, there is a general preference for Google Docs in comparison to working with hard copy drafts. Students seem to grasp the idea of a 'draft' in a space where change and collaboration are expected and encouraged – whereas, in a hard copy, there is something final in the way ink looks on paper. There is also a general appreciation of cutting printing costs, which can be quite excessive for both teacher and students when working with drafts and portfolios. Finally, students seem to appreciate the way Google Docs can help manage and organize their work while still making these documents accessible at any computer.

Here are few representative responses:

- “I'm comfortable with Google Docs. I find it better than doing everything on paper since it will allow me to keep everything and refer back to it later on.”
- “Google Docs is a little confusing when sharing. It has, however, provided a very useful space to easily peer review. It allows me to feel more comfortable peer reviewing because I am not directly speaking to the author.”
- “I really like using Google Docs. I like how easily we are able to share documents, and the way we are able to comment on others is extremely helpful. It is really easy to submit essays through the program.”
- “My comfort level with Google Docs is very high because I remember using it in high school and I have started to use it more and more this semester for this class and group projects in other classes. I have been very impressed with the use of Google Docs in this class, particularly to peer reviewing with comments, and I believe it is the best system to use in any college writing class that UMass offers.”
- “I like how easy and organized it is. Also I enjoy using in text comments. Those help a lot because I am able to go through my essay and see what my peer reviewer and teacher thinks right there.”
- “YES! I think that using Google Docs is an excellent tool. I don't have to carry around tons of paper and organization is easy!”

- “I really like how this course has been centered around the use of Google Docs. I think it's a great use of technology that adds to our learning without over-complicating things. It's especially useful in peer reviewing, since we can work on it in and out of class and access it on any computer.”
- “Google Docs has seemed to really help and it makes things easy because you can write and highlight and comment on anything in the paper and share it with as many people as you want instead of having to print out a copy and then possibly lose it or not being able to understand what your peer wants from you. I also like that you can be at any computer and have your essay there in front of you instead of having to remember to attach it to an email if you want to work someplace else than at your own computer.”
- “Definitely helpful. Google Docs has kept everything much more organized and it also allows us to cut down on our printing expenses. It is also very helpful for sharing docs from professor to student and student to student.”
- “Google Docs is mostly successful. I find in-text comments extremely useful, especially when I am doing the reviewing, because they make it easier to make observations and suggestions. This ease results in more comments and more constructive, specific, and well-thought out criticism.”
- “I am very comfortable using Google Docs, it is easy to use and very helpful. In the writing process it is also helpful because I think the in text citations help to point out exactly where my work needs editing without scribbles and ink all over a hard copy of the document. The soft copy of a document also gives me the perspective that it is a tangible document that always has room for change to make it better and I strongly believe that the revision process in this class has taught me that!”

Collaborating with Wikis

John Gallagher

Project Description

I had my class set up a wiki on wikispaces.com, a commercial site that I chose because I hoped that it would have few technical issues. I wanted students to be able to edit easily and without having to worry about the interface of the wiki too much. Note: My class voted not to share the wiki publicly.

For the College Writing Unit 2 assignment, I allow my students to write on any essay in our course reader, *Other Words*, in hopes that this freedom will let them find an essay they are passionate about. However, we do not read every essay in the book. Instead, we generally read between 6-8 essays total for Units 1 and 2. While most of my students do choose to write about one of the essays I've selected for us to read as a class, one of my teaching difficulties is creating a cogent peer-review system in which students can participate both inside and outside of class while still:

- 1.) maintaining a sense of community
- 2.) having fun and personal investment in the assignment
- 3.) keeping the class, as a whole, organized

I therefore turned to the concept of the "wiki" (a simple website where my students could all add, edit, and comment on content through an Internet browser) in order to not only share drafts but also to help students create a sense of camaraderie if they were writing about the same essay. Accordingly, I set up the wiki with an entry about each essay and students were divided into groups based on which essay they decided to write about. Some groups were up to four, while others were only three. (I participated in all groups.) We created the wiki over a period of three weeks. Everyone had access to every part of the wiki and all participants had full editing access, something that course management systems like SPARK and Moodle do not allow.

The following is a linear progression of the wiki assignment:

- 1.) After concluding our readings, I asked students to find an essay they'd like to write about. As a group, they created summaries of their chosen essay in-class.
- 2.) For homework, they developed analytical questions that might serve as possible topics for their Unit 2 essays.
- 3.) In class, they discussed the questions that the group developed.
- 4.) I then asked them to post a rough draft to the wiki that following Saturday. By that Monday at 5PM they were asked to comment on each other's rough drafts.
- 5.) We repeatedly commented on and revised our drafts. Students were required to revise at least three times, but many edited more than that, with at least two students editing their essay at least 10 distinct times.

Pedagogical Purpose and Goals

Incentives for Students

- To improve peer editing techniques
- To improve familiarity with editing essays in general
- To see peer review as more accessible and useful
- To improve re-visioning essay drafts and to see those changes as optional and reversible
- To see technology as part of writing, but as a tool rather than an invisible component (the wiki isn't peer review, it *facilitates* peer review)

Incentives for Teachers

- To improve peer review and its role in revision
- To enable students to see themselves as teachers and "experts" on the essay they chose to write about
- To keep revision and peer review organized
- To afford students an "open" space in which to play with their drafts and see other students' essays in-process
- Broadly, to allow the integration of multiple topics and essays in Unit 2
- To create a sense of community that goes beyond the physical classroom by allowing general collaboration that SPARK and Moodle currently do not
- To create a digital space that is student-driven, not instructor-dominated

Student Reactions/Feedback

(all reactions are unedited and appear as students turned them in)

- The main reason I hate this Wiki is because I cannot work it. Its hard to understand what people are posting. I don't know if I'm clicking on their rough drafts or evaluations or just some random post thing. Maybe posting could be organized by the assignment. Along the same lines, I hate how some people don't have a username. Its confusing seeing your name come up all the time because I don't know if you are doing the posting or someone else. I didn't find reading someone else's rough draft helpful at all (though that is something that is not necessarily Wiki's fault, but it does undermine the whole purpose of using it). Another huge, huge, complaint I have is the "write a response" thing, where we review someone else's paper. I took 45 minutes to write a detailed and thorough response to someone's paper, which was 500 words as you requested. However, I got a less than 150 word response that was vague and seemed to show little

effort. Again, this is less of a problem with Wiki, but if we're going to do collaborative work, than everyone needs to take part equally. Wiki has great potential to be like a thought-board to post ideas and comments, yet people aren't using it for that. Perhaps you could provide a reward/penalty system for working together. Maybe 5 points out of the total of our paper could be earned through meaningful collaborative work. Overall, it is too confusing for me to navigate, and I feel like people are half-assing it (of which I'm not exempt of doing) so it has provided little benefit.

- I really like the Wiki for this class. First of all, I think it is nice not printing out draft after draft every time someone decides to edit or give advice towards my piece. I also like being able to have one spot where all the information is. It is extremely helpful to read the advice towards other people's essays, too, because even if it's not about yours, it makes you look for the things they mentioned in your own essay. In the future, I think you should continue to use the Wiki, but maybe instead of everything being scattered on the first page, you could post topics, and the students could respond using the "discussion" link in the top corner. I think this would help the organization of the Wiki, because when I use it now, I am confused and it takes me a little while to find everything I'm looking for.
- I feel that the class wiki page is not that effective. I like the ability to share and read other papers online, but I would prefer to peer edit in class. Editing each other's papers in class is more direct and natural. On the wiki page, anyone can make any changes they want to my essay, whether I agree with those changes or not. In-class peer editing gives me the choice to apply the changes that others suggest.
- The wiki used in English 112 is a good resource for collaboration. It's easy to post essays and comments on other pieces that have been posted. However, I don't like that its easy to edit other people's work, I know no one would do this, but if it catches on and expands the possibility for trouble is looming. The separation of pieces is key and having the summary and evaluation of each piece is important to the reader. It's a format to spread and share ideas on a well-organized level.
- The Wiki is definitely useful when sharing and reading each other's essays. It's better than having to print everyone's single essay and reading it like a booklet. As for commenting on each others written work I feel as though it's a little more confusing and not interactive. We give each other comments, but there's still no conversation about it as if we're face-to-face and discussing. I think it'd be best if it was like a little chat room, and people are constantly writing in it.
- I definitely don't hate using wikispace. I like how we are all able to work together on papers, and that we can communicate and help each other with certain ideas. Also, it is super easy to use and very straightforward. When I get onto our page I always know exactly where to look. But, sometimes it is almost too simple. For

example: it is easy to accidentally delete your own work or someone else's work. Also, we definitely have to trust everyone in the class to not screw with our papers, which I don't think anyone in our class would.

- Can be a little confusing to add in pages or to bring over an essay to the wiki page, essays tend to lose some of the formatting. The discussion posts on each page are confusing, especially when someone posts to that instead of adding onto the actual page. The multitudes of pages on the sidebar make the page look a little bit unorganized. It might look better to have different sections that open into multiple pages. The page can be helpful, because it gives a place to look at other people's works and thoughts on the different essays and see their track of thinking, which can be helpful in broadening our ways of thinking.
- I like the wiki because it's more collaborative than just writing an essay and having someone peer edit it. With the wiki the whole class can comment and make suggestions on your paper. It is kind of confusing figuring out how to edit it and where to put which draft or response. I also don't know how to use my own email address to edit the page, so I just have to use yours. Overall though, I think that using the wiki helps with the writing process.
- The Wiki confuses me how to edit and add things that aren't already there (like on the home page). I like the summary pages that we all combined. Instead of the peer editing at the bottom of the paper, maybe use the comment button that adds someone else's review (kind of like facebook with how you can add a comment onto a picture or wall post).
- It is a good idea because it brings together everyone's ideas, but I'm not really a fan. When I write I like privacy and this doesn't really leave much room for that. I like to pick and choose who I share my thoughts and writings with. The wiki is good idea though because it is so open which allows people's ideas to be shared better and it's less of a process trying to obtain one's ideas.

Teacher Reflections

Intentions

- I intended students to see peer review as student-motivated and driven.
- I wanted students to learn about wiki-uses and see the Internet as a more interactive space rather than merely a consumptive space.
- I hoped to assist students in creating a space that they could use for other classes.

Actualities

- Students, for the most part, did not see the wiki as an effective space because technical considerations (both on my part and theirs) were not strongly foregrounded in the assignments.
- The space did turn into a student-run and student-driven space. Several of the participants noted they liked the lack of "authority" figure.
- The space did encourage peer-review, but many technical difficulties prevented this type of collaboration from achieving its full potential. These aren't insurmountable odds, but in the future I would spend much more time developing the technical skills students need to use the wiki effectively.
- The experience did allow students to see Internet spaces as less consumption-oriented and more production-oriented.
- Four of the students remarked in conferences that the most helpful part of the wiki was the creation of questions and summarizing the essays so that they could see how others were developing topics. I asked if the question-creating process was helpful and 11 of 14 students (one was absent) agreed.

Things I'd Change

- We definitely required more time experimenting with and acquiring technical knowledge of the wiki.
- Students really will only go as far as they are required to in contributing to the wiki. Therefore, I'd ask them to participate in the wiki as part of their portfolio grade (making them invested in it).
- One semi-common feedback theme was that some students didn't like the idea of collaboration, and for these students I'd try to make the wiki less obtrusive. However, these students also seemed accepting of peer review in general.
- I think (and several students have said to me since Unit 3 began) that this type of idea-generation would be especially helpful for Unit 3 and research-sharing.
- Many students liked seeing the analytical questions others generated about the essays and found these helpful. I would emphasize this aspect in the future.

Best Practices for the Future

I think that having this project be somewhat ineffective is a particularly useful experiment to share with other instructors. I wanted to use a wiki to enhance, at its simplest, peer review. But what I found was that the wiki is especially useful for sharing ideas that can lead to drafts. Ultimately, I think spending more time developing wiki-based skills and also getting students more invested in the wiki (something at stake, perhaps?) would provide incentives for wiki participation.

Exploring Conventions Via Text Message ;)

John Gallagher

Project Description

I started to make use of text messaging in my teaching because I had a difficult time explaining what I meant by conventions (or discourse). I kept trying to explain that part of the research process was learning the jargon and conventions of a topic. But “conventions” was an ambiguous term and jargon has a lot of negative baggage associated with it, so I tried to steer clear of that word.

Then, before and after class, I began to notice that students had “silent” rules about text messaging. They kept mentioning that texting had certain requirements and even social norms that could be violated. So I asked students to examine text messaging in order to develop the idea of discourse and conventions. Then I tried to relate these ideas to students’ research topics. I had them discuss the following: rules for text messaging, social norms for text messaging, the rhetorical purposes of text messaging, what kinds of writing the text message lends itself to, and what choices a writer must make while text messaging.

Handouts and Class Activities

The Language of Text Messaging

**In pairs or groups of three. Please be ready to share your answers with the class*

- 1.) Describe a moment you’ve been texting or “chatting” with someone online (typing as opposed to speaking) during which that someone has misinterpreted your words.
- 2.) In regards to #1, why do you think this happened?
- 3.) What kind of *conventions* do you use for text messaging? In other words, what kind of writing do you typically use and see when texting, such as abbreviations, punctuation, and even emoticons?
- 4.) Can you think of any ways to change these conventions so that misinterpretations won’t happen again?
- 5.) Has there ever been a moment in your school-related writing that someone has misinterpreted what you wrote? Why do you think this happened?
- 6.) What are some of the differences between conventions for texting and school-related writing?
- 7.) Why are there different conventions?
- 8.) How do you know when certain conventions are appropriate or not?

Cell-Phone Examination

For this next activity, I am asking you to take out your cell phone and look at it as a pencil or a keyboard. In other words, try to think of it as a tool used for writing.

- 1.) What company designed your phone? Describe the physical design of your phone.
- 2.) A keypad, or the place where you input information, is typically called an “interface.” An interface is important because it is the connection between you and whatever information you are dealing with. It is the thing that assists you in writing a text message, or, in the case of a computer, surfing the Internet. **Why** you think your phone interface is designed the way it is?
- 3.) What other interfaces do you experience in your academic life? Everyday life?
- 4.) Now, if we think about interface and conventions, what is the connection between the two?
- 5.) When thinking about this connection, why is it important to think about the company designing your cell phone?
- 6.) How does the interface impact your ability to text? What kinds of things can and can't you do? Why?
- 7.) When you're writing for your classes, what kinds of interfaces do you experience? How do these affect your writing?

Cell-Phone Draft

Writing Activity #1: Using your cell-phone, write up a summary of your thoughts on our class discussion. Be as detailed as possible. Then send it to two individuals: a friend outside of class and someone inside of class.

Writing Activity #2: Either as a text message or series of text messages, reflect on the summary you just sent. What are the differences between the two recipients? What do you think their reactions will be? Which one will be more interested in the information and why?

Writing Activity #3: Re-read what you wrote and then re-write it by hand or on a computer. What are some of the similarities and differences in what/how you have written? Why do you think these similarities and differences exist?

Final Writing Activity: When you text message other people or even write to them, how do you decide what to write? In other words, what kinds of conventions do you decide to use during the writing process? How does the interface impact what you can write?

Pedagogical Goals and Purpose

I had the following goals for students:

- To allow students to make classroom use of their text-messaging practices
- To encourage students to see writing in their everyday lives
- To demonstrate how writing is connected to real people, places, and events
- To break down academic writing
- To raise awareness of various audiences and the variety of interfaces
- To establish the notion of discourse conventions, as well as social conventions
- To assist in short, dense writing
- To write to a variety of audiences

I had the following goals for myself as a teacher:

- To raise awareness of audience and discourse conventions, especially for Unit 3
- To generate class discussion about both non-academic writing and academic writing
- To introduce conversations about interfaces and the role they play in information literacy
- To make classroom conversations about audience, audiences, and audience(s) awareness(es) more accessible

One of the most important steps for this project was to have students develop the language themselves. I didn't want to co-opt this type of writing, but I also didn't want them simply chatting aimlessly about text messaging; I wanted them to develop a "language" for the "rules" of text messaging. I put a lot of effort into having them develop, as a class, social norms for the writing of a text message, including expectations for grammar, punctuation, length, and so forth. Once I told them that all writing has expectations, it was easier to turn the discussion towards their research topics and the "conventions" that their topics use.

Teacher Reflections

I found that this assignment stimulated class discussion effectively. Students actively engaged with social norms and writing during the assignment, but it was hard to relate it back to Unit 3 at times. Once we managed to transition to Unit 3, I felt a lot of lights go on in terms of connecting text messaging to conventions. Further, students understood from this lesson that writing to audiences such as the "general public" could not occur; the lesson showed that "audiences" are always part of a community. Surprisingly,

students engaged quite a bit in conversations about interface and this helped developed their *processes* of research.

If I were to re-do this assignment, which took place over the course of a week for a Tuesday/Thursday class, I would split up the conversation into audience and interface (the conversation blurred a bit) as a way of introducing research as a process of understanding discourse conventions. I might also focus more on the issue of access – which we discussed, both economically and technically, in the context of cell-phones. We also discussed access to technology in terms of the UMass community, Massachusetts, and the U.S.A., and several students brought up issues of class, gender, and race. I did not intend to discuss this idea of access as thoroughly as we did, but it became a focal point for my class, especially when I pointed out that ALL of them had laptops and that some students cannot even afford a computer.

Best Practices

I attempted to allow students to discuss the "culture" of text messaging and they enjoyed this freedom. But one of the most important parts of this lesson was to emphasize that the lesson is not about text messaging but about the issues that text messaging raises. Also, many of my students needed some explanation about what I meant by "conventions" and "interface," so I explained this in the beginning of the lesson to make sure the goals were clear to them.

Re-Visioning Teacher Feedback

Hari Stephen Kumar

Project Overview

How can technology help teachers re-vision the process of providing feedback on student writing? This question motivated me throughout my project, and it started with an off-hand remark by another participant (Mark Leidner) in a Teaching with Technology Practicum session early in Fall 2011. Mark wished he could just talk with a student instead of writing feedback on a draft. His remark triggered a series of insights for me. I wondered what it was about the situation of actually talking with a student that made the process of providing feedback so much different from the situation of writing comments about the student's text. And, I wondered what it was about imagining the act of *speaking* my comments out loud that made me approach feedback very differently than if I imagined myself *writing* my comments. I began to sense that the nature of my comments themselves would change. Furthermore, I wondered what technologies would help me compose feedback into a spoken/visual format to give to a student.

There are various technologies that can help me record my voice if I want to narrate my comments about a student's draft. If I'm collecting papers electronically (such as PDF files or Word documents), there are also various software products that can record both my voice and my computer screen as I highlight parts of a student's draft while speaking my comments out loud. However, I became really interested in how much my feedback might change *because* of the shift in my own stance toward feedback: a shift away from composing typed/hand-written text to composing spoken/visual text. That is, even though we already use a variety of embodied technologies for typing/handwriting feedback, I wanted to see what changes when we shift to using different embodied technologies—and in turn how that shift can inform and improve even typed feedback.

Therefore, the actual focus of my project was NOT technology itself—i.e. I was NOT interested in exploring specific products for audio-recording my spoken comments or for video-recording my screen gestures on a student's draft. Rather, I was more focused on using technologies to re-imagine the process of teacher feedback itself. For me, when I imagine writing comments on a student's draft versus speaking out loud about the same draft, there is something that feels much more embodied about imagining talking *with* a student compared to imagining writing *to* a student. If I'm imagining the act of writing feedback, the student's paper becomes central to my vision as a product, an artifact, an object that I must analyze and in turn produce a written product as response. But if I'm imagining the act of speaking my comments, even if I know that I'm not actually going to meet with the student, just imagining the process of preparing to speak with a student about their draft makes me more inclined to speak/write as if I'm actually addressing a living human being. The embodied relationship between me and this other writer becomes clearer in my vision, with the text itself becoming an in-process backdrop, so that our conversation can center more around the writing than the written. And that re-centering of purpose can help even with typed/handwritten comments.

Project Trajectory and Intended Outcomes

Some major directions I wanted to pursue at the start of the project include:

- Re-visioning my own approach to feedback using process-based insights.
- Exploring and understanding time/efficiency concerns.
- Exploring and understanding technical learning-curve issues.

Some key outcomes I was hoping for at the start of the project include:

- To shift from being a product-focused writer to a process-centered writer when it comes to my own feedback texts.
- To improve the quality of my feedback in terms of usefulness and specificity. Or, at least to think of my feedback text more rhetorically in terms of my intended audience (this other writer who is my student) and my re-visioned purpose (to come alongside this other writer in order to help them focus on their own rhetorical goals).
- To solve (or alleviate) my writer's block when it comes to feedback.
- To make the process of feedback quicker/easier or at least more manageable.

From Written Feedback to Spoken/Visual Feedback

As an act of re-vision, moving from a primarily writing-oriented approach to feedback to a primarily speaking-gestural approach helped me re-see the process of feedback itself. I began by imagining the following framing situation:

Imagine that you are about to meet with a student to give them feedback on their first draft. Imagine that you want to spend the first few minutes of this meeting telling them your feedback comments. What might you want to say in those first few minutes?

This frame felt very different to me than the frame I'm used to—and thinking through the differences helped me re-see some of my assumptions and expectations. The frame I'm used to can be summarized as follows:

I have a student draft. The student is not present when I type/write my comments. I type/write my comments up, copyedit them, and deliver the student draft back to the student with my comments. Not much is said in the moment of delivery except, perhaps, "Here are my comments, feel free to email me if you have any questions." Student reads my comments. I am not present when student reads my comments.

Thinking about this second frame, I realized that the bulk of my feedback had to be delivered through what I wrote—my words, on paper, had to carry the entire range of purposes I wanted to achieve with my feedback. And I realized that this was one major reason why I often felt a huge writer's block when it came to composing written feedback: I am often paralyzed by over-analysis of things like tone, content, minutiae, general directions, clarifications, etc.

So what felt different with the first frame? I felt more relaxed imagining the first frame, because I realized I had access to a variety of other modes of expression in addition to just my words. My voice could carry different registers of tone and feeling. I could smile (or frown) as I said various things, and those feelings would not only be visible to my student but would show up in my voice. My hands could point to different parts of their draft as I spoke.

Of course, the first frame also implies a more dialogical and conversational setting: interaction would be two-way, and there would be some chitchat to begin. In a real conversation with a student, I would more likely begin with some questions, asking the student to talk to me first about their purposes for the draft, etc. In a real conversation face-to-face, both of us would also be aware of each other's body language and cues—subtle gestures even while listening 'quietly'. All this interactive material would be missing in a purely one-way feedback text, such as if I recorded my voice.

But, if I imagine that the audience for my text, my student, is actually a real live person present with me when I compose my feedback, my mode of address changes. The kinds of things I want to say to a particular student change based on my evolving knowledge of who this person is and my previous conversations with this person in class. My feedback becomes more personally tailored, more purposefully specific to that person's individual goals as a writer who is in the middle of her/his own process.

To some extent such an awareness of audience should always be part of our writing as teachers, even with 'traditional' hand-written comments, and I know other teachers who are better at this than me. What this act of re-visioning helped me re-see was how much my own written feedback suffered from a lack of audience-awareness—and how much I was paralyzed by writer's block in trying to make my written feedback more useful for particular students. This act of re-situating myself in relation to my students helped me make my feedback BOTH about the writer AND about their texts.

In shifting my orientation toward a more spoken/visual interaction with an actual student, my focus and purpose for my feedback changed. Rather than focus on parts of their draft that felt 'deficient' to me as a teacher, I began looking for parts of their draft that I could emphasize were working well—and then put the parts that needed more work in perspective as suggested directions for revision. I felt like I could talk more naturally about what goals and directions students might have for their writing rather than be more distanced in analyzing their draft. But this meant I first needed more from the student than just their draft! In order to have a meaningful start of a conversation about their writing, I felt I wanted them to first tell me about their own purposes and choices.

This meant that I began asking my students to give me not only their drafts but also an accompanying short reflection.

That is, reflective writing became more central to my feedback process than the actual drafts themselves. And I began to see the value of such reflective writing in process-based portfolios—I also began to realize how some of my own teachers had me do such reflective writing even in graduate seminars, and how their own written feedback to me seemed to be more specifically tailored as a result.

Specific Strategies for Spoken/Visual Feedback

I explored two different strategies for spoken/visual feedback. The first was using both speech and visual gestures: recording both spoken comments and highlighting parts of a student's draft on-screen. The second strategy focused on using speech alone: recording spoken comments in audio format and giving students access to the resulting audio file. There is a wide spectrum of choices and strategies for multimodal feedback, but I wanted to focus on just a couple of options primarily to see how they can help teachers re-vision feedback.

I explored the first option in depth, using various screencasting tools and strategies for feedback in both the Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 semesters. My Tech Fellows colleague John Gallagher used audio feedback techniques extensively in his Spring 2012 classes and contributed significant insights, both his own reflections and survey responses from his students. My other Tech Fellows colleagues were also co-explorers at various stages in this project. In focused trial sessions, each of my colleagues tried out a few different technologies for revisioning their feedback practices and wrote up their experiences.

Some key insights that were shared by all of us:

- Spoken feedback allows for a LOT more in terms of both type of content and amount of content. In our trial sessions we all felt that speaking out loud helped in some obvious ways, such as with tone and subtle register. But what surprised us, I think, was just how many words we could say in a few minutes. For example, typical speaking rates for recorded audiobooks are about 150 words per minute. Typical conversational speech rates vary between 120 to 150 words per minute. This means that we can say about 750 words worth of feedback in five minutes. In contrast, professional typists usually type around 80 words per minute—and that's assuming that the text itself has been pre-composed.

In one of our trial sessions we all looked at a sample first draft from one of my students (who gave me permission to use the draft for this session). We each spent an equal amount of time preparing individual notes for our respective feedback comments. Then, each of us wrote up our feedback separately using different methods. David Bartone hand-wrote teacherly comments on a paper copy of the student's draft. Travis Grandy typed inline comments on a Google

Docs version of the student's draft. Christina Jones and Gina Occasion collaborated on using Microsoft Word's "Track Changes" feature to type up sidebar comments on a Word document version of the draft. John Gallagher recorded audio comments. I recorded a screencast. John was finished with his 3-minute recording before most of us had started our feedback process. And John had recorded twice—first to try out the system, and then when he heard himself speak he did an on-the-fly revision so he recorded his comments a second time. Listening to his recording, we all felt that John was able to say more in those three minutes than most of us were able to type or write in our session overall.

- Spoken feedback also shifted our tone and attitudes toward a more relational and personal frame. In the same trial session described above, several people commented on how John was able to begin his feedback for my student "Bill" by saying something as conversational as: "Hi Bill, I really enjoyed your first draft." We've all written similar things to begin our written feedback in other contexts, but we were struck by how naturally and easily this phrase became the first thing that John said. It just felt like the best way to address the student in this context. And it also set the tone, literally, for the rest of John's comments. Something about John starting out with that tone, with that voice, made us hear his feedback differently than if he had typed up the same content.
- The visual element of feedback helped us focus both our attention and our students' attention on specific parts of the text. Those of us who did in-line comments using Google Docs or Microsoft Word (or PDF's annotation features) remarked that doing so felt very much like "pointing" to a specific part of the draft and "saying" something about that part. This "pointing-and-saying" gesture allowed us to write our feedback more fluidly and informally as something integrated into the draft itself, compared to having the feedback text be something that had to stand alone as a separate mini-essay about the draft.

These insights combine a variety of dimensions to make feedback more fully textured depending on the type of strategy you use. As a summary, here are some specific things to consider with each strategy:

Overall Strategic Preparation

- Imagine the embodied situation of your student as a reader/listener/viewer of your feedback text. What are the key purposes of your feedback to that person who is reading/hearing/viewing your text? What key things do you want to highlight, emphasize, point out? What kind of tone/attitude do you want to convey in your feedback? Or, what kind of tone do you feel will come across most effectively for that particular student in order to achieve your pedagogical goal for this feedback stage?
- Take notes on overall comments that you want to give to all students versus specific things you want to point out or say to each student individually. This will

make a big difference in how your own body composes the different tone/mood/attitude components of each feedback.

- Scan your drafts first to get a sense for what kinds of writing situations await you, and group your drafts according to the types of situations. Some drafts might pose more complex writing situations for you to engage: students for whom you will need to compose your feedback more carefully or more extensively versus those other drafts for which you might only need marginal comments. Decide what kind of tone you want to set for these different situations.
- Rehearse: Take a few sample drafts and practice your feedback strategy on them to get a sense for time and content expectations.

Audio Feedback

- Decide how you want to record yourself and prepare your own embodied situation accordingly. For example, if you have physical copies of your student drafts, you might want to use a digital voice recorder that you can hold in your hands and speak into while reading through your notes on a student's draft—and this is something you can do wherever is most comfortable for you and amenable to recording audio. Or, if you're reading your drafts as electronic documents on a computer screen, you might want to use a simple voice-recording program on your computer as you narrate your feedback—and this will mean being somewhere where you must have your computer with you.
- Rehearse: Try recording a couple of different times and then listen to the recordings. Listen for trends, patterns, things you tend to say that work well or things that you want to carefully avoid saying. For example, I noticed in one of my earlier recordings that when I was annoyed with a certain student a tone of annoyance or condescension came through in my voiced feedback. This was important for me to realize as it probably came through that way even in my in-class conversations with that student. Hearing my voice during rehearsal helped me revise my overall textual strategy for that student beyond just feedback.
- Workflow: Decide how you want to format your audio into a mode that you can deliver effectively to your students. For just your voice, you will not need very high-quality audio settings. So adjust your recording program or device accordingly, or you might get audio files that are needlessly large. If you're not sure how to work with audio, contact the OIT Instructional Media Lab (413-545-2823 or instruct@oit.umass.edu) and they will be happy to give you advice. They also have an on-campus lab where you can get a hands-on tutorial on a variety of audio recording technologies.
- Delivery: Decide whether you want to email your audio file to your students or if you want to upload the file to a website and send them a link. Large files can be cumbersome for email—both to send and to receive. However, audio recordings

of up to ten minutes in length tend to be fairly reasonable in size. When in doubt, try sending yourself an example file and see if it takes a while to send/receive.

- Note: Christina has used audio feedback with her students and she reports that she could easily upload 7-15 minute MP3 files as part of her grading on Moodle (the system that will replace SPARK in Fall 2012).

Screencasting Feedback

- Screencasting software records part of your computer screen while also recording your voice through your computer's microphone (if you have one). This means that you can have notes for each draft in a separate word file that you can pull up alongside the draft, and then you can set the screencast to only record the draft portion of your screen. This also means you need to have an electronic version of your student's draft, such as a word document, PDF, or Google Doc.
- Since screencasting requires using your computer, much of your own embodied situation for feedback will depend on what kind of computer setup you have. If you have a laptop, the size of the screen may make it difficult for you to have both the draft and your notes up on the screen. So you might want to have hand-written notes jotted down in a notebook as you record.
- Your student is going to view your feedback as a video that also has an audio soundtrack—but most of what they see on the screen will be their own draft. Decide how you want to use the visual component of your feedback. For example, you can use your mouse cursor to point to particular parts of the draft, and you can select and highlight particular sections of text as you make a comment about them. And you can word your comment to refer to that action: "So, Bill, I really like what you say *here* and I think it really connects well with this other place *here* in the paragraph when you mention XYZ." And with the words *here* your mouse cursor is selecting and highlighting those parts of the text. This makes for a more integrated audio-visual experience for your student—and makes it easier for you to just speak about that part of the text as if Bill were seeing you point to that part. In other words, let your body compose that part of the quote for you. If you are talking for a lot of the video but there's nothing else going on, the viewer is going to see just a static page with most of the content in the audio. If that's your pattern, though, and it works for you, you might want to consider using purely audio feedback instead.
- Rehearse: Try a couple of different recordings, one with a more complex draft and one with a more "typical" draft. Get a sense for how you tend to use pointing gestures in your feedback and whether that helps you make a more useful suggestion for your student.
- Workflow: Screencasting tools are often more complicated to configure than audio recording tools. However, there are some easy solutions available, such as Jing or SnagIt. Contact the Instructional Media Lab (413-545-2823 or

instruct@oit.umass.edu) for more specific advice and hands-on tutorials for screencasting.

- Delivery: Video files can quickly become very large even if configured correctly. So you should plan on sending students links to your videos rather than emailing them the video files. The easier/simpler tools like Jing produce fairly reasonable files that are also easier to share online as a link. For FERPA reasons, though, you should look into using the UMass UDrive system for uploading and sharing video feedback with your students. Contact the Instructional Media Lab (413-545-2823 or instruct@oit.umass.edu) for a tutorial on using UDrive.

Student and Teacher Reflections: Audio Feedback

John Gallagher wrote up the following teacher reflection on his use of audio feedback with his Spring 2012 College Writing class:

Introduction

For me, the most unpleasant, difficult, and vague activity I engage in as an instructor of writing is the grading process. Unlike my conferences, which are consistently rated as my most helpful activity, the grading process occurs in isolation from not only my students but also from my peers and colleagues. With Hari's help and guidance this semester, I have given my students audio feedback as "final" feedback because it allows me to articulate why I graded their essays "up" or "down" while offering in-depth explanation. I hoped this activity would save me time, which it did – but not nearly as much as I thought. Instead, it allowed me to give about three times as much feedback in the 20-minute segment it takes me to evaluate a paper. (I typically read the paper once, then a second time making notes in the margins, and a third time to add a grade.)

What Brought Me to this Activity

I have coached water polo for the past four years, and several of my players complained that they knew what they had done wrong in their writing, but it was much less clear to them what they have done "right." In other words, when they received a C they understood why they'd gotten it – but if they received an "A" they weren't exactly sure. Consequently, I would read their papers and explain the places where they were strong. They often remarked that their professors should have written more. In response, I said writing and evaluating papers takes a lot of time. Thus, when Hari told me about the audio feedback, I heard my water polo players' comments hovering in the back of my mind, like pleasant ghosts. I decided I would try audio feedback with my Spring 2012 College Writing class.

The Survey:

I prefaced my audio feedback for the first paper with a vote: I asked the class who would like audio feedback and everyone voted yes, primarily, I think, because it was new and unusual. For the second paper, 11 of 15 students requested audio feedback,

with the remaining 4 voting that they didn't have a preference either way. For Unit 3 I am offering audio feedback, along with screencasting, and all students asked to receive this kind of feedback.

My Take

The vast majority of my students all seem to like the feedback, though they often receive a generalized response that is not as precise as a more detailed write-up. Hence why I am turning to screencasting. However, the overwhelming request to have me offer the audio feedback again inspired me to continue reevaluating my feedback and its process.

Here are some reflections from John's students:

Student A

One drawback I see to the audio response to our papers is that some professors may find it harder to give honest but harsh constructive criticism. Also, one thing I noticed was that the tone of the professor's voice definitely has an affect on how I interpreted the feedback I got. On the first paper I could tell you were more pleased than in the second paper's feedback. Maybe you were tired or busy or maybe I'm imagining it but I could almost hear a bit of disappointment or disapproval. By the end of the audio feedback, when you tried to be positive and say I was doing well in the class, the tone of the rest of the audio kinda took away from the positive ending. Again, this could all just be me but I thought it was interesting. At first I was very open to the audio feedback but I think another downside to it is that it can lead to an over-generalization of how the paper is (which I appreciate but I also love the detail that you get when professors underline specific lines or highlight paragraphs). Instead of giving details, a professor may just try and say how the paper is overall at the expense of details. An important thing to note when comparing the audio feedback to "normal" feedback of other professors is that every professor is different. I mostly get two or three lines of response that are very general and rarely contain any constructive criticism. One professor, however, put comments in the margins and gave a solid paragraph of feedback. Considering the fact that this class is about writing skill, I definitely think that a lot of feedback is great. I think audio feedback can make it easier for a professor to give that detailed feedback because they can just talk versus write. But I do think that detail needs to be emphasized in the audio feedback because it's easy to generalize the whole paper when speaking versus when writing. I have no experience on the other end of the feedback (never gave feedback myself) but those are just my thoughts.

Student B

So I think the responses for our papers are better when you record your voice. I think this because traditional responses there is usually limited room to write everything that you would want to say, so I would be making some mistakes and they would just have been underlined or there would be a question mark there and I would not have known what I did wrong. In addition I also like it better because some of my classes just give

me a grade and if we want to question it we have to meet with the TA during their office hours. That takes up more time for both the student and the person grading them. And I know sometimes personally I'll get a good grade so I don't even bother trying to meet with the TA and learn what I did wrong.

Student C

I personally prefer this over professors directly commenting on my paper, because as students receiving worthy commentary can only help us. Obviously having in-class discussion with every student just cuts time out of official "class time". So by being able to listen to the comments and the reasoning becomes a substitute for discussions.

Teacher Reflections: Video Feedback

Much of my own teacherly reflection is written in the previous parts of this chapter. Overall, my main realization is that doing video screencasting has made me a more conscious composer of feedback in my words, my voice, and my gestures—and not just in the feedback, but also back in the classroom when interacting with my students in person. I have often finished a screencast wishing I could talk more with my students about their writing—and that has given me motivation to actually engage them individually in the classroom about their respective processes.

I did not collect student reflections about my use of video screencasting, but I conducted several informal in-class and in-conference conversations about how I could best make these screencasts useful for my students. Some general trends that emerged in their responses were:

- Overwhelmingly students were positive and enthusiastic about receiving video feedback. The single biggest reason, echoed by virtually everybody, was that while watching my screencasts they “felt like you were right there with me talking with me about my essay.” This quote was repeated almost verbatim across many different conversations with many different students.
- Several students said they really liked playing the video multiple times during their revision process, so they could revisit particular suggestions or critiques more thoughtfully. They would stop and replay particular sections of the video and take notes on ideas they got from my comments.
- Many students said it was really helpful to see my highlighting of specific sections of the text as I spoke—some of them compared it to having a professor’s obscure tick mark on the margin of a draft, saying “with something like that you don’t know why he made that mark, but in your video you explain what it is you’re saying about that sentence.”

Textual Tag-Team: Multimedia and College Writing

Christina Jones

The dreaded “info dump” research paper. Students hate writing it, teachers hate reading it, and – even though it eats weeks of everyone’s life – no one wants to look at it ever again once the semester is over. In an effort to save myself and my students from this awful fate, I asked them to work in groups to compose a 3-5 minute video alongside a 5-7-page research essay. I thought that working across mediums would help get students engaged and that the process would challenge them to develop their ideas into a focused, well-articulated argument informed by research but controlled by their own voice and sense of purpose.

Project Description

My initial goal for this project was to teach my students ways to avoid “info dump” research papers. But what I ended up doing was teaching myself about why they write those papers in the first place. Part of the reason students turn in information dumps is because they aren’t familiar with how to make a sustained academic argument, or with the expectation that they should be making one in a “research” paper in the first place. But part of the reason why *any* of us resort to the info dump approach is that we just don’t care about what we’re writing, or can’t see why it matters. I decided that I wanted to change that in my class by making the form (and thus perhaps the content?) of the research project something students might find more engaging.

My initial theory was that working in video would help my more visually minded and multimedia-consuming students develop a narrative – a claim, a question, an argument – rather than just a pile of data. Also, I hoped that moving back and forth between writing a video and an essay would encourage students to develop their thinking about the process of composing and the results of their choices. I mean, I know *I’ve* never felt so aware of the importance of my content, structure, organization, and tone as when I was trying to make over 300 two-second video clips form a concrete narrative. (Aaaarg!)

The thing is, it’s already plenty challenging to bring together a body of research and turn it into a coherent written text. But, because it’s a challenge we and our students are at least passingly familiar with, we often end up thinking of The Academic Research Essay as a singular and/or required form. We don’t think about the many potential variations on that form, or when and why particular written structures are valuable. For my students, making a short movie opened the door to new ways to use sources (especially audio, music, images, and video) to inform an argument and engage an audience. But the process of *creating* that video presentation was also an opportunity to take students out of their familiar writing ruts and get them thinking about questions of composition in new and sophisticated ways.

To give you an idea of what all that looked like in practice, here's a sampling of our class activities:

- To model the benefits of considering one argument in multiple mediums, the class put together a video storyboard for an essay from the *Student Anthology*. Then, with a new perspective on which ideas were most compelling (which would “play” the best with the audience), and which evidence best supported those ideas, we wrote a plan to revise the original essay.
- Students wrote research proposals and did preliminary research for their own essays as usual. But, rather than a paper outline, they put together a storyboard that imagined what they had learned so far as a video presentation with a particular audience and purpose.
- Based on the “storyline” of the intended video, students narrowed the scope of their research and developed specific goals in terms of what information they needed to tell that story.
- In class we explored the kinds of videos and essays students might produce and tried to develop a sense of how those kinds of texts were put together. I showed, and asked my class to evaluate, other student-created examples. (YouTube is a good source for student videos if you don't have any examples on hand.) I also asked students to share effective and ineffective texts they'd found, both video and essay, and to write reflections about them for our class blog.
- Students created a rough draft of their video *before* writing their essays in order to push them towards synthesizing and purposefully using research rather than just regurgitating it. (It's difficult, after all, to just dump several lines of jargon-filled text into a video. Which is not to say that some people didn't try – just that their peer reviewers were much quicker to call them on it in this medium.)

Note: I asked students to work in groups of 2-3 for the Unit 3 project unless they could give me a compelling reason why they didn't want to or weren't able to. I did this in order to cut down on the work load and to make sure that people had a support network for dealing with the technical (and other) challenges of the assignment.

Teacher Evaluation

Short and sweet: I would say the project went well. Many students said that making the video made them feel more interested in, engaged with, or confident about the project. Most tellingly, however, the final projects actually were all driven by student arguments, many of them impassioned, which were supported but not controlled by outside research. While the videos (like the papers) were executed with various levels of skill, they all acted as either as compelling stand-alone arguments or effective supplements to the students' essays.

Even just the process of thinking about their research project like a movie seemed to be helpful to my students. It was a metaphor that gave them a better sense of what it meant to have a specific audience, and what it would take to appeal to that audience. How to make a point compelling and convincing also seemed to matter more in that context. My students were able to articulate strategies they saw at work in media every day – shock value, “sexy” topics, emotional and visual appeals – and apply them to enhancing arguments in papers that were still fundamentally academic in terms of their use of logic, inquiry, and outside sources. On the flip side of that equation, students were also able to see how some more conventionally “academic” strategies might be useful in composing outside of strictly school environments.

Also, beyond just thinking in visual or cinematic terms, the act of *making* the video helped students shape their project ideas more specifically and effectively. Creating a storyboard helped them to develop a narrative (later a controlling argument and purpose) early on. Working with basic video-editing software like iMovie or Windows Movie Maker also gave students the chance to experiment with content and order in a context where they could more easily visualize and rearrange their ideas. (The workspace of both video editors is a storyboard-style display where the individual pieces that make up the video are sequential blocks that can easily be moved around.)

Several students also commented in their end-of-unit reflections that the process of searching for material to put in their video helped them find new content or think of new ideas for their papers. Tellingly, not a single research paper had a jargon-filled quote without context or explanation — which I think was at least in part because translating connections and information between mediums forced writers to understand their outside sources, instead of simply repeating them.

Student Responses

Based on in-class activities and their written reflections, it seemed that students were generally enthusiastic about making arguments in video. One student was especially excited to work in a medium where he felt he could express himself more clearly than he was able to in English, which was not his first language. “Not only did I like my [paper] topic,” he writes in his end-of-semester reflection, “I was also pumped for making a video for it.” Explaining the reason for his enthusiasm, he writes that, “multimedia is more effective because it helps to put our imagination into pictures and images and not through words that are more difficult.” An avid media consumer, he became more confident and comfortable with the idea of himself as a writer when he could take the skills we’d been talking about in class and apply them to a medium in which he felt like more of an expert. This also held true for quite a few other students.

While that level of engagement is equally possible with other kinds of texts, I noticed that many students *assumed* a multimedia project would have an audience (and reacted accordingly) in a way that they often don’t with an alphabetic text. As one student writes in her final reflection: “your audience is the most important aspect to writing, because if

your target group is one thing but your text does not appeal to them, then your ideas mean nothing.” This awareness of audience also seemed to translate back to the way students understood writing more generally. After his experience with the video project, another student even focused his course Final Reflection around his growing awareness that choosing your audience and making choices that speak directly to that audience is essential to good writing. He asks his reader to imagine what would happen “if Martin Luther King Jr. had gotten up in front of the huge crowd at the Lincoln Memorial that day and rattled off a bunch of random facts about racism and segregation” -- and concludes that “[w]ell put together arguments presented in an appropriate way can do more than just a bundle of information presented mindlessly.”

I think this increased awareness of audience was a significant factor in the decrease in "info dumping" in the Unit 3 research projects. It seemed from reading my students' reflections and final products (and from watching them work during peer review) that they were very engaged in making sure their videos were as convincing and as aesthetically pleasing as possible. This forced them to summarize, synthesize, and otherwise process information in order to convey it in video format – and that understanding of sources and presentation also translated back into their essays.

The Laser-Eyed Benefits of Hindsight

Looking back on the semester, I realize that the video project would probably have seemed tacked on if I hadn't spent the entire semester asking the class to think about the many kinds of texts there are in the world and how “composition” is a series of choices that can apply to them all. For instance, in Unit 2 we used rhetorical analysis to engage with, rather than just consume, movies. In their final reflections, quite a few students described this as a memorable and favorite aspect of the class. “[I]t was my first experience with watching a film and actually analytically thinking about it,” one student wrote. “It opened my eyes to how films can actually be set up.”

To build up to analyzing movies, I asked students to bring in their favorite texts for the class to analyze during Unit 1. We ended up thinking about the rhetorical choices made in songs, bumper stickers, Facebook pages, comics, and billboard advertisements, among other things. This idea that texts were “not just one kind of thing” was a central focus of the entire semester. In her Final Reflection, one student wrote that the structure of the class “forced [her] to adapt to new assignments and new ways of thinking about a variety of texts,” when prior to the class she “had not thought about ‘text’ meaning anything but a written document.” Many students reported that this sense that “writing” applied to more than just academic essays was what got them excited about the course. As one student put it:

Doing things like watching movies for homework and analyzing them, writing my papers in many different styles, and making movies was a different yet extremely effective way to run the class. I found myself actually interested in what I was doing and even finding some enjoyment in what I have done.

While the goals of my project revolved around developing the Unit 3 research paper, the potential of multimedia literacy and composition in the writing classroom is much broader. In my experience, working with these kinds of texts can engage students and make them feel more confident and competent as writers of both multimedia *and* “traditional” essays. A crucial element seems to be finding texts students are excited about and bringing them into the classroom as both objects for analysis and forms of composition. Also important, however, is making sure that these activities are thoughtfully integrated with the goals and content of the course so that they don’t feel superfluous, or like an exercise in pandering.

Advice for Working with Multimedia

This project ended well, but that doesn’t mean there weren’t a lot of bumps along the road! So that you can skip right over those, here are some things I learned while doing video work with my class:

- If you're not comfortable with a particular technology, take some time to experiment with it on your own. It can be especially helpful to actually *do* the assignment you're giving to your students. Then you have both an example text to show and a better sense of what issues they might run into. If you want an expert to walk you through using a particular program, contact the university's Instructional Media Lab at 413-545-2823 or instruct@oit.umass.edu to schedule a one-on-one tutorial. (They also have, or can point you to, how-to handouts that you can copy for your students.)
- In terms of material resources: The library has a limited amount of digital cameras, audio recorders, microphones, tripods, and video camcorders. Students can check them out on a three-day loan from the Circulation Desk in the Learning Commons. (Though, really, the video functions in students’ own cameras or smartphones might be perfectly sufficient for their needs, and will likely be less complicated in terms of access and operation.) Basic video-editing software like iMovie or Windows Movie Maker is available in all campus computer labs and on the computers in the Learning Commons. Also, iMovie comes free with all Macs and Windows Movie Maker is available free for Windows computers.
- One of the major problems you can run into with multimedia is finding effective ways to transfer parts/entire projects between different computers – especially if you have to deal with potential conflicts between operating systems. Always test run these kinds of things in advance. And, if you're in a computer lab, be very clear about what students will need to bring in order to 1.) work on their projects in that space and 2.) take their work with them when they leave.
- Keep in mind that, even though the technology might be a new element, the process of putting together a multimedia text can be a familiar parallel to other kinds of writing. For example, videos and essays both require brainstorming, developing a sense of audience, finding sources, outlining/storyboarding, drafting, revising, etc.

Frame your assignment in terms of the work your students have already done in the class, and it will seem less daunting (and/or out of place).

- Lots of teachers worry about how to assess multimedia texts. One effective strategy I've found is to 1.) work with my class to decide what sorts of criteria are important for an effective video and then 2.) base my grading on those agreed upon qualities. I also require regular written reflections from individual students explaining the choices they've made and the rationale behind those choices. I take these self-evaluations significantly into account as I assign a grade to the project.
- While many students enjoy the creative opportunity of a multimedia project, it's only when they have a framework for understanding what they're being asked to do – and *why* – that they're able to get the most out of the experience. So give clear and regular explanations of your rationale to help students understand the benefits of what they're doing. Also, if you do significant work building students' understanding of multimedia analysis and composition prior to (and/or during) the assignment, your activity will go more smoothly and be more productive.

Two Years Later: Older, Wiser(?), Crazier

The project I've been describing here is one I did in the spring semester of 2010. So it's been two years since then. Two years of teaching in the Writing Program, of leading the Technology Fellows, and of acting as the Writing Program's Technology Coordinator. As you might expect, my thinking about this project (and about teaching with technology in general) has shifted a bit.

As you may remember from a certain example at the start of this chapter, the argument for using multimedia in teaching often goes that students are more likely to engage with these kinds of texts because they are familiar with them, excited by them, and/or will be required to use them in the "real world". But, despite an increasing conviction that these kinds of texts are important in the lives and futures of our students, many teachers still consider multimedia classroom projects to be an "extra" that takes time away from what the class is *really* supposed to be learning.

In my own teaching, I've found that incorporating multimedia literacy (in terms of both analysis and production) not only enhances my students' engagement with the class but also their understanding of the core curriculum and their confidence in themselves as writers. However, I also often found myself still treating the alphabetic academic text as the gold standard for my course. Looking back, that's part of what motivated my desire to have students write *both* a paper and a video. I knew that I didn't want to just have them convert the former to the latter; but, in retrospect, it's clear to me that I thought students wouldn't really be learning what they were "supposed" to learn if they had done only a video.

Two years later, let me stop and pull that assumption apart a little.

For instructors of an introductory college writing class, the idea that we “should” be teaching any single form of writing is already an illusion. The truth is that there *is* no such thing as “College Writing” – unless you mean something so general as “texts that are written in or for an academic environment,” and then there is certainly no one set of rules that will apply to every field our students will eventually go on to major in. Beyond the very broadest of generalizations, there’s not even a particular style of writing that will apply to *most* of those majors.

As an English graduate student specializing in Composition and Rhetoric, I can tell you that a paper written for an English literature class has significant differences from one written for a class in rhetoric – even though those courses are offered within the same department. As a former Assistant Director of a Writing Center and a veteran writing consultant, I can tell you that differences in perceptions of what constitutes “good” and “effective” writing are multiplied exponentially across disciplines, within majors, and even between particular kinds of texts in a single field. As a writer of technical documentation I can tell you that every office has its own particular style requirements, and memorizing one set won’t necessarily help you at your next job. (And the research says our students are likely to have quite a few different jobs over the course of their professional careers.) And, as a student ten years into her higher education, I can tell you that no one has ever (yet) handed me the keys to the kingdom where writing is concerned. How do you write an article in the field? Apparently: “Read the journals and figure it out.”

So, the more I thought about writing and my own experiences with it, the more I realized that what I “should” be teaching was how to analyze a text in terms of how it was put together and why it was structured that way. And I should be finding better ways to teach my students to see their own texts as acts with purpose and audience, in order to help them replicate and/or adjust the writing strategies they’d observed in order to meet their own goals.

As a small scale example, think of why it’s more important that someone understand how to use a style guide rather than know MLA citation by heart -- or why understanding the general principles behind running an effective search is more important than memorizing navigation for a particular online database. Because you’re going to need more than one citation style or database over the course of your life. More importantly, because citation rules change, technology updates, writing styles evolve. So if we think communicating effectively, especially in writing, is one of the foundations of students’ future academic, professional, civic, and personal lives, then why focus on a set of static skills? Why not try out ways of teaching that help prepare students to assess and respond to the incredibly diverse and dynamic writing situations they’ll encounter, both within the university and beyond it?

Once I started thinking like that, it seemed less important that my students turn in 5-7 double spaced pages in Times New Roman font with at least 5 sources cited according to MLA standards. It was definitely important for my students to be able to recognize and replicate particular writing styles and strategies in order to succeed in their

academic classes – but it was also important that they be able to do that through careful analysis rather than by simple repetition. At that point, I began thinking that maybe I didn't absolutely need to assign the paper portion of the research project in order to be a responsible teacher.

So I broke my research unit down into a series of hands-on workshops: on finding sources and assessing their reliability, on creating and supporting an argument, on incorporating and citing sources in text, on design choices and how they impact particular audiences. And I stopped requiring any specific medium for the research project and instead left it up to my students to decide what format best matched the content, audience, purpose, and intended circulation of their text.

I won't pretend that this has been an easy, breezy transition, or that it's one I recommend for all teachers, everywhere – not least because it took me years, and possibly a relentless masochistic streak, to develop the technical know-how to (somewhat) confidently support a number of composing formats. Still, despite (or maybe because of) a great many "how-to" Google searches, I've found teaching this way extremely rewarding in terms of both personal enjoyment and end results.

Right now in my Spring 2012 class – which I teach in a room where the only "technology" is me, chalk, and two walls of blackboards – I have students creating research essays and videos. But I also have students creating podcasts, prezis, wikis, blogs, magazines, pamphlets, journals, photo essays, and more. And, while it's a challenge for my students to be going in so many directions, it's also an invigorating one. Because when there are no easy answers, no singular way to write The College Essay, you really have to explore, engage, and innovate with "the rules". So now, instead of me giving one-way 30-minute lectures on how to make an argument, appeal to an audience, or give credit to sources, students bring in examples from their own fields and of their own chosen mediums and we work together to tease out standards and expectations in context. And, I'm not ashamed to tell you, I learn as much from that as they do.

I still lecture, of course. I still have handouts and speeches and things I think I need to share with my students to help them succeed in the specific context of writing in college. But I also increasingly believe that the best thing I can do to help them succeed is to make them self-sufficient at assessing and responding to the wild variety of writing tasks that will likely come their way. For me, right now, the way I do that is by incorporating multimedia into my class. But next year it could be something totally different. After all, if there's anything that my time in Tech Fellows has taught me, it's the value both of innovation and of never thinking you've got it all figured out.

Best Practices for Teaching with Technology

Christina Jones

I've spent five years diving headfirst into experiments with teaching and technology -- experiments both well and very, very ill advised. So, based on my own flirtations with technological tragedy, I've put together some broad guidelines to help you think about teaching with technology. Let's call it, "Mistakes I Made So You Don't Have To."

1. Do no harm

Challenge yourself and your students, but don't do anything that damages either your peace of mind or the likelihood that your students will learn what they need to from your class. If you try something and realize it isn't going to work out, STOP.

2. Have a pedagogical goal

It's tempting to use technology because it's new, shiny, and/or fun. But every technological tool you bring into the classroom should enhance some aspect of your teaching, the curriculum, and/or the students' writing processes.

3. Don't assume technology will do your teaching for you

The day of our robot overlords has not yet arrived, so technology is still the tool rather than the teacher. It's your careful planning and use of technology that makes it effective in class, not the technology itself.

4. Limit the technology you use, but commit to it

Instead of trying to do twenty different things throughout the semester, focus on using a small number of technological tools consistently. This way, students are used to the tools and are able to see their value throughout the course.

5. Show students that you value the technology

When you introduce a new technology, the degree to which students embrace it is directly related to the value that you place on it, both in terms of grading and your attention. Make sure the effort using the technology requires is reflected both in how you grade and in how you talk to the class about what they're doing.

6. Make your expectations clear, and clearly relate them to larger goals

In assignment sheets and in conversations with your class, be exact about what you want your students to do with a particular technological tool. Also, explain *why* they are using it – beyond "to get a grade". What's the payoff in relation to the course goals? Is experience with this tool relevant to any other aspect of students' lives?

7. Test early and test often

Practice with the technology before you use it in class. Know how to use it, and also how long using it will take – and remember to account for potential questions and troubleshooting when you estimate how much class time an activity will require. Also, keep in mind that what works on your computer setup at home may not work in your

classroom, so visit your room ahead of time and test the actual equipment you will be using. For example, make sure you know how to work a data projector if there is no lab aid, that the program you want to use is on the computers in your space, and that you have a way for students to save a copy of their work if you are in a computer lab.

8. Consider the classroom space as well as the technology in it

Plan for how you will engage students in your particular classroom space. For example, what sort of interactions do the seating arrangements and room orientation promote? Do students always need to be using the technology, and, if not, will you ask them to move away from it physically when the class is focused elsewhere? Remember: just because a room has computers doesn't mean students need to be (or should be) in front of them all the time.

9. When it comes to troubleshooting, check the simple stuff first

Before you get discouraged or try complex fixes, check all the easy solutions. Look for unplugged cables, muted volume, or a missed step in set-up. And remember one of the simplest fixes of all: the Internet search. You will be amazed at how many problems can be solved by the first page of returns on Google.

10. If it doesn't work, try it again

Another simple fix is to run through the basic set-up instructions again. Sometimes, the problem will not repeat. When it comes to the Internet, try refreshing the page, closing and restarting the browser, or choosing another browser entirely. If none of these solutions solve the problem, try restarting your computer. While not fail-proof, the "Retry, Refresh, Reboot" strategy will solve a staggering number of your problems.

11. Know who to call (and in what circumstances)

When your own troubleshooting fails, it's time to call in the experts. However, who the "experts" are for a particular problem can vary. Get to know your on-campus resources (the OIT Help Desk, Instructional Media Lab, Academic Instructional Media Services, etc.) and keep a list of contact numbers with you at all times. Also, find out what person or office you should call to report a technology malfunction in your specific classroom.

12. Always have a backup

Always prepare a technology-free alternative. Knowing that you have a safety net for the day is a great way to hold back the rising tides of panic when things don't work out on the first try. Also, you should be prepared to deviate from a lesson plan if you see it isn't accomplishing your goals. And, speaking of backups, remember that disks, drives, servers, and other devices can fail or be destroyed. So always keep more than one copy of a file, and never keep all your backups in the same place.

13. Don't panic

In *any* kind of teaching, things will go wrong sometimes. Accept this, plan for it as best you can, and, if your lesson plan doesn't work out despite your best efforts, take a deep breath and know that it's not the end of the world. Teaching is a process, just like writing. So reflect, revise, and don't get discouraged!

The Tech Fellows Talk Shop

Ah, the spring. When a young Tech Fellow's fancy turns to thoughts of Final Reflection...

As our students were writing their own reflections on what they'd learned over the course of the semester, we got together to think about what we would be taking away from the experience of being Technology Fellows. Surprisingly, "severe mental and emotional trauma" didn't come up as often as you might think.

In one word, what is technology? What does it do for you as a teacher and/or student?

Gina: Organization.

I understand technology in College Writing to be a space to stay organized and manage the many tasks inherent in reading, commenting on, and grading student writing. Before using Google Docs, for example, I was collecting hard copies of everything and printing my comments and grades for each student in each unit. Not only was there the constant threat that I could lose someone's work on the way to the parking lot, but also the visual of thirty portfolios stacked on my desk at home was very unpleasant.

Travis: Mediation.

I think of technology as a thing that controls the way we interact with each other, as both a barrier and an opportunity. On the one hand, like Gina said, technology can make you more efficient. Also, technology calls attention to how we use writing and you don't have to work as hard to get students excited or justify why you're spending your time that way. On the other hand, because of my enthusiasm, a common pitfall of mine is to devote time toward technology only to wonder after the fact if there were ways of spending that time more purposefully. One way I temper that enthusiasm is to be more reflective about my teaching practice and how I use technology. What that means is I try to ground anything that happens in my class in a specific learning outcome or goal, and keep in mind that sometimes technology is not the answer.

Christina: Service.

I'm in a slightly different position than the rest of the group because I've been a Tech Fellow for three years now, and for two of those years I've been both the leader of the group and the Writing Program's Technology Coordinator. What this means is that my view of technology is a lot more service-oriented -- because it's literally my job to help other people think about how to use technology effectively in the classroom.

So, for me, sometimes teaching with technology is composing multimedia texts, using blogs and wikis, or helping students rethink peer review through collaborative online writing. Other days, it's posting handouts to a course webpage, calculating grades in a spreadsheet, or adding images to a text document. Some days, it's just getting a data projector into a dorm classroom. But, while most of those are digital technologies, really, "technology" can be any number of things -- from a whirring, blinking, wire-trailing concept that makes us shudder to the everyday processes and materials we mostly take for granted.

Hari: Embodied.

For me, technology has to connect with the reality of a living human body that is trying to do something in the world -- and so I think about technologies in terms of whether they get in the way or help that body. Like Christina said, sometimes technology is about an actual human body trying to get an image of some sort to project onto a physical wall so that other bodies in a room can see it and say something about it in that living space. So what technology does for me as a teacher is make me remember that my own human body is itself a technology -- that I have certain sophisticated technological resources available to me in my voice, my hands and feet, my eyes -- and that some digital technologies can help me best use those resources with my students while others... well, others I might need to be a bit more cautious toward. Put another way, I think technology helps me also remember the embodied situation of my students. I think of what these bodies are doing in my classroom, typing or viewing something on a screen, and I'm more interested in technologies that help these bodies ALSO do something living in the moment with each other.

John: Communication.

Technology is not important by itself: it's a tool for communicating something. These tools can include anything -- from our expensive machines, like computers and mobile phones, to interpretive dance or the set construction of a play. In a positive light, I prefer to think of technology as something that skates through and along the lines of our communicative realities, including talking, chatting, and discussing. It encourages us to come closer, to understand one another as we are and can be. Technology asks us to see the world in ways we hadn't thought of before. In a more negative light, technology sees itself as important, outside of its uses. Often, technology makes us think that it is supercool so that we don't see how technology is only a tool. But I prefer to think of technology as something that moves the fertilizer to make a productive garden. Technology is like manure: it's useful when spread around in order to help other things grow, but by itself it's smelly, useless, and unseemly.

What got you into using technology in your teaching? Why did you apply to the Technology Fellows Program?

Travis:

I've always felt very comfortable with technology, and as soon as I started teaching I never questioned that it would have a place in my class. I don't know how else to put it. It was kind of a natural thing for me. For example, on my first day as a Writing Program TO, I prepared a PowerPoint for my students explaining the structure of College Writing with a graphic of the rhetorical triangle that I spent probably an hour making. After a semester of teaching, though, I realized that my technology practices were really unreflective. There were things I was taking for granted about how technology should be making my teaching better or helping my students -- and, more importantly, the outcomes I had assumed weren't coming true. So, my reason for joining Tech Fellows came down to knowing that there was probably a "better way" to use technology in my teaching and wanting to put myself in an environment where I could be challenged to figure that out.

Gina:

I also applied to be a Tech Fellow because I wasn't sure how to facilitate the use of technology in College Writing. I knew I wanted to use more of it, but I wasn't sure how that would look. It was hard for me to conceptualize how everyone would be using technology independently, but still retaining the writing community. The use of a computer classroom has been a huge asset as I've been able to see how technologies such as Google Docs and blogs can improve the classroom community by extending the time and space for communication beyond the Tuesday/Thursday class schedule.

Christina:

For most of my life technology has been a mystery at best and a horror show at worst. I grew up using only the severely outdated family computer, and then spent my college years waging a constant (and losing) war against the endless implosions of three different laptops. I might have given up on technology entirely... except for the fact that, dammit, someone had to defend the honor of humanities majors everywhere from my smug friends in Engineering!

My overdeveloped competitive streak aside, I've always liked research, collaboration, and problem-solving, and working with technology let me do all of those things at once. In fact, most of the tech skills I have are the products of extremely nerdy "What if...?" ventures like collaboratively writing a comic with someone 2,000 miles away, or figuring out how to cut together 327 video clips into a five minute explanation of a film genre. (I should probably be embarrassed about those things, but that would require me to have the capacity for shame.) Once I realized how much fun I was having with these kinds of compositions -- and how challenging myself to take on new ways of composing was

making me a better and more thoughtful writer overall -- I knew I wanted to find ways to incorporate the same kinds of opportunities in my teaching.

So, basically, I applied to Tech Fellows for one of the same reasons Travis and Gina did: because I thought it would give me the opportunity to develop my teaching by working with other teachers who shared my questions about using technology in College Writing.

Hari:

I have a murky past as an engineer. I used to write a lot of software programs that would eventually find their way into microchips for things like car braking systems or aircraft landing controllers or... well, more inhumane things like missile guidance systems. So I think some of my past experiences working with technology as a scientist and an engineer shape the ways I want to experience technology as a human in the humanities. One of the major influences in my life was the use of software technology for teaching in my previous job, especially the use of simulations and software-based exercises. In that context, we used technology as an environment for learning-by-doing: the technology helped us simulate doing something that was problem-oriented, and in doing it together we also got many opportunities to discuss what we found/learned as we used the technology. So we were being a learning community, I guess, like how Gina described a writing community. I especially enjoyed doing that kind of teaching in computer classrooms, because we were continually switching back and forth between working on the computer and dynamic in-class discussion. I wanted to draw from that experience as a bridge between my previous life and my current life.

So, frankly, the main reason why I applied for Tech Fellows was to teach in a computer classroom. I missed that from my previous life, and I wanted to see how much my teaching of writing could benefit from bringing some of that energy back.

John:

I applied to Tech Fellows because I wanted to join a group where I could exchange ideas about how to integrate technology into a writing classroom. Because my research for my dissertation focuses on similar ideas. And because, like Christina, Travis, and Gina, I wanted to work with others teachers concerned with technology. Also, frankly, I thought joining Tech Fellows would help further my career in the field of Composition and Rhetoric.

What are some of the benefits of this kind of work?

Christina:

We're all living in an era where digital literacies are increasingly a part of daily life. Not only that, but they're relevant to and in line with much of the way we teach composition. And, from my own experience, I can tell you that comparing academic composing with the kinds of composing students are already doing daily outside of the classroom can help them translate unfamiliar concepts and feel like they have more expertise to bring to the table.

Plus, for me, working with technology has always been both an exciting learning experience and a refreshingly collaborative process. Every time I learn something new, or play with a different way of composing, it makes me rethink my own ideas about what writing is and how best to teach it. That helps me keep my teaching from stagnating, but it also lets me talk to other people, like the Tech Fellows, and learn from what they're doing. Maybe I'm just the kind of person who gets a thrill out of looking over the office at a colleague and saying, "Yes, but what if we try... [insert Christina's latest wacky idea here]?" But I do love a challenge, and it keeps me out of trouble (mostly) and excited about coming in to work.

Travis:

This fellowship has been really helpful at encouraging experimentation in my teaching. As I was heading into my second year as a Writing Program instructor, I started to feel comfortable in front of my students. A worry I had was that "comfort" would turn into "complacent." Having the space and resources to experiment with different ways of structuring my classroom, and with the kinds of writing I had students doing, was a great way to make me feel some *discomfort*. Especially when something broke or didn't work as expected. Like Christina said, it's nice to be kept on my toes.

Gina:

For my specific project, the most obvious benefit has been the efficiency of it. I'm more organized; I'm able to respond to drafts quickly; and it's easier to manage two classes. From the student feedback that I've been getting, they seem to appreciate the same benefits of Google Docs – enough so that they use this space to manage their work in other classes, which I think is really great.

Hari:

Well, for one thing, teaching in a computer classroom helped me rediscover some of my joy for teaching, some of the things that made me want to change careers toward teaching in the first place! So, one major benefit of being a Tech Fellow this year has been that opportunity -- not just to play with something but also to get a chance to think carefully about how this "something" can help me further enjoy my teaching life. Another

major benefit of being a Tech Fellow is quite literally the fellowship, as Travis said. And, like Christina says, there's that crazy thrill of working with a colleague on a new idea. You know, one of the cool things about the Writing Program is how it attracts people who are passionate about teaching -- and the Technology Fellowship is a place for some of this passion to be channeled together in a focused way on specific dimensions of using technology, primarily for better teaching. And it's quite energizing to be in fellowship with these other passionate teachers as we actually do teaching and technology together!

John:

Perhaps I'm going to sound a bit sensitive, but I also really enjoyed the camaraderie that Tech Fellows has provided. Meeting with individuals who are interested in using technology to teach has inspired me. With Hari's help, for instance, I reinvigorated my evaluation process by using audio feedback. With everyone's input, I adjusted my text message lesson plan, which is designed to help with recognizing conventions that specific disciplines use. In other words, while the advantages to being in Tech Fellows include lots of teaching tips, a stipend, an office, and computer classrooms, the other people in it with me were my most cherished benefit.

What are some of the challenges of teaching with technology?

John:

The challenges? Of course there aren't any challenges. It's all easy, breezy work, right?

Actually, I would say that technology is always challenging, whether it's learning technicalities, thinking about the teaching purposes of your technology, or getting students excited about technology (which depends on the first two). The technical challenge usually comes first, though. By technical, I mean learning to use particular hardware and software, including all the little in-and-outs of the programming. Part of this is access to the various technologies, which can be anything from having the hardware to having knowledge of how to use software to being able to effectively and meaningfully integrate technology into one's life.

Another consideration is social: why am I using the technology in my classroom? I used to find myself trying to use fun programs, but not having a pedagogical goal. But now I know the goals and communication must come first. The technology must be a tool to help achieve this success.

The final consideration/challenge of technology is rhetorical. Am I teaching my students to be critical users of technology and not passive consumers of it? Can they critique it? Can they investigate it in-depth? If students and teachers can use technology and critique it, can they then use it to make powerful, purposeful, and persuasive arguments?

Gina:

When I was putting together my Tech Fellows project, the challenges were mostly in the start up. For example, just deciding what kind of technology I wanted to use and when. Especially since, when using something like Google Docs, it's a commitment. Once we were all set up, I pretty much had to keep going with it and the entire course was structured around the availability and use of this space. Looking forward, now that I have seen how students are using Google Docs and I'm comfortable presenting this space to my students, I can translate this technology to a course that is not in a computer classroom. The challenge then is that I really needed to see how this space would work for students together, in a classroom, before I could understand how it could work for students individually.

Travis:

I teach in a computer lab, but on a recent sunny day I held my class under a tree outside of Bartlett. A student said that she appreciated being outside and feeling more

connected to the ground, because sometimes computers "come between us." It's good to acknowledge that computers do exactly that. They come between people. When computers mediate our relationships, they can be a great tool, potentially bridging people together across great distances. But a big challenge that I encountered this year is that computers can also impose distances between people. A major frustration I had was when my class was doing peer review, and though students were clearly done reading each others' work, rather than striking up a conversation they would be sitting with their eyes glued to the screen. It takes a little effort on my part to break them from those screens.

Christina:

I've noticed a Big Three when it comes to the challenges of teaching with technology.

1.) Technology freaks a lot of people out.

Technology is constantly changing, and at a breakneck pace. If I'm confident in my skills now, it's hard to keep up. If I'm just thinking of dipping a toe in the water, it might seem like there's not even a point to trying to get up to speed. Also, other things are constantly changing as well: the curriculum, our pedagogy, our theoretical or practical understanding of our subject matter and ourselves as teachers, etc. With all that going on, it's no wonder avoiding technology is an appealing option.

2.) Technology is a learning process, and things will likely go wrong.

We're teachers, the people who stand up in front of the class because we have a claim to some kind of expertise. (Or at least who are getting a gold star in faking it.) Which is why it's really hard to introduce an element into our teaching that makes us look or feel like amateurs. And, with all the things that can go wrong in any given class, it takes courage to tempt fate by adding one more thing to which Murphy's Law could apply.

3.) There is no one right answer.

Thoughtful use of technology can enhance the writing classroom and help students improve as writers, right? But which technology? Before we add anything to the delicate balance that is our curriculum, we need to consider our goals in the classroom; how technology might help us accomplish them; and what technologies are best suited to our needs, our available resources, and our classroom style. And that's a lot of extra work for an already burdened teacher.

Hari:

There is definitely the "ooh shiny" factor when working with technology -- and sometimes the challenge is for me to get over the "shininess" of whatever latest technology-mediated tool is "cool" and think through how (or whether) I really need to use that in my teaching. Like, sometimes a blackboard and chalk can be the most effective and reliable technology available -- or paper and pencil. These are perhaps not

so sexy or shiny, but they are available resources, and shouldn't we as part-time rhetoricians see the use of ALL available resources? And, like Travis said, even if I as a teacher can detach myself from the shininess of technology enough to focus on what's going on with my teaching, I can see my students getting fixated on the screen-world. I've also experienced what Travis described, when my students don't talk with each other unless they have to if there's a screen available in front of them where they can jump onto Facebook or answer their emails. And I've noticed that phenomenon even when we're not in a computer classroom. In a regular classroom, when a peer review conversation dwindles out or a group "finishes" discussing the assigned prompts, at least a few students in the peer review group will pull out their phones and start texting or checking something. And, you know, I'm guilty of it too. When they're in the middle of group work and I'm looking around the room just waiting for them to be done, sometimes I catch myself wanting to check my email or to hop onto Moodle and post something there for my students.

So, yeah, I'd say some big challenges for me in teaching with technology are learning to put it into perspective, seeking some balance, and using it in ways that support and encourage a broader and more communal learning process.

What have you learned from being a Tech Fellow?

Gina:

I've learned a great deal about how technology can innovate the Writing Program's curriculum. Hearing and talking about the different Tech Fellows projects as they developed has been a great experience. We are all working with technology for different purposes but within the same space so it's interesting to see how our ideas can come together. Now I can see that my students really thrive in a space where they can see connections to their life outside of 112, and it's important for me to be able to present meaningful technology that is useful and productive.

Christina:

I've learned that my definition of technology could include something as simple as the pencil, as close to home as my own body, or as terrifyingly complex as the mutated iPhone that will become our robot overlord -- but what really matters is how the people I'm working with think of (and feel about) technology. As the Technology Coordinator, I learned really quickly that just because I've had a good experience turning research papers into video projects, using Google Docs, and/or asking my students to do every assignment as an interpretive dance, that doesn't mean that approach will automatically work for someone else. In short, I've learned that you have to meet people where they live. For each individual teacher, you have to find the tool that works for the class and students they teach, the space they teach in, and the kind of teacher they are.

I also learned that you need patience and a sense of humor to do this kind of work -- not to mention just the slightest hint of reckless daring. And, from the other Tech Fellows, I learned that everything is easier when you're working with colleagues who are willing to jump off that edge with you and laugh on the way down.

Travis:

I feel like this year has made me into a better teacher, and one who is constantly reflecting on his teaching practice. More specifically, I feel like the experimenting I've gotten to do in my teaching, and the conversations I've had with my fellow Tech Fellows, have helped me consider how various technologies help and hinder what I'm trying to do in the classroom.

Probably the biggest thing I've learned this year is how I should be framing the use of Moodle for my class. For some time, I was thinking that my Learning Management System (i.e., Moodle or SPARK) was "the place where the learning happened". But, in practice, this is really not the case. Something like Moodle is useful for sending reminders and collecting work, but when it comes to building the community of a writing class, that's when you really need to cut out the go-between and just get back to the basics of a well-structured, face-to-face conversation in the classroom.

John:

This might sound odd, but I haven't learned anything. I'd prefer to say "we" learned, as a fellowship, to understand and investigate the various sets of technology that surround the Writing Program, the English department, Bartlett Hall, UMass Amherst, Amherst town, Western Massachusetts, Massachusetts, and some of the ideological concerns of higher education in the U.S. There is so much I believe I've learned. But if I have to pick one idea it's this: technology is only the tools in the process. The more important part is who uses that technology, what the individual or group wants to use technology for, and what results comes from the technology's use. In this way, Tech Fellows has taught me that it is much more about the "-fellow" part of the world. It is the people who make the technology and Tech Fellows program.

Hari:

I have learned not to let Christina write the answers to my interview questions...

No, but seriously, I've learned the value of exploring new ideas with enthusiastic and playful colleagues. There wasn't a single Tech Fellows meeting this year when we didn't share moments of laughter and joy. I think there's something about that energy, that commitment to do our work seriously but not to take ourselves too seriously in the process, that focus on play and joy in being willing to take risks together in trying something out. Because there also wasn't a single Tech Fellows meeting this year when we didn't have some kind of serious discussion/debate about different points of view on technology and pedagogy. But the focus on trying things out, playfully AND seriously, made a difference in how much we were willing to dive in together. Like John said, it really made learning happen for everyone, not just for one person – and everyone, I think, learned a lot more together. And that made Tech Fellows truly a hopeful space for me.

