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Reading: “Genre and Transfer in a Multimodal Composition Class,” Ball, Bowen, and Fenn

English 998, Multimodality, Multimedia and Digital Rhetoric in Composition

“Controlled chaos.” I like the phrase Cheryl’s student used when describing her course material / syllabus. She was obviously pushing the bounds of multimodality in the – 2006 – classroom and stressing the importance of looking at other things (e.g. visual, spatial, gestural, etc.) as equally important to alphabetic text. At times, I find myself in “controlled chaos,” or an exploration of a genre I know nothing about at the exact same time as my students (that’s how I look at it). I find her lack of assigning justification texts in multimodal classrooms as something that pushes us to a deeper thinking: what is the purpose of the justification text in a multimodal classroom? Is it counterproductive? I feel like justifications help with understanding process. I’m resistant to throw them away, but I also see how they can be overly emphasized. For example, as stated before, the zine assignment. Are we emphasizing the multimodality or the academic reflection? That’s a trap I think we have to be cautious of. The *Introduction* does a nice job talking about “genre” and how genre allows us to examine conventions and question academic norms / texts with other modes and mediums of composing.

Transfer. Cheryl talks about transfer by bringing in Tia and Tyrell’s reflections. But, I wonder if this is the minority. We can pick two or three students in our class that are actively engaged in every classroom discussion, turn in exceptional work, etc. They can probably communicate how English 101 is benefitting them inside and outside academia. They could talk about transfer in a round-about way. I could pick those two students in the future to write a reflection on how English 101 has helped them in their own fields, etc. But, what about the others? Could I email a student that randomly made a contribution to class and expect the same response? Doubt it. I’m not trying to be pessimistic. I’m usually overly optimistic. But this just seems framed in a “look at this success” type way – even with the beginning of the article deconstructing that type of model to some extent. Did she choose two students to make a model of exemplary work with the ability to engage in a discussion on transfer that benefits her English classroom? I’m not trying to create an ideal classroom with ideal pedagogy and ideal students because that doesn’t exist. I’m interested in best practices to engage all students though. This might go back to something we’ve commented on before – each pedagogy affords some students with something while not affording that to other students. I’d be interested in doing a documentary-like video in English 101, and I’m terrified at the same time because I know nothing about making a documentary. How do you think our English 101 students would respond to that type of assignment? How does it meet our course goals and outcomes?

Question: Cheryl talks about how she doesn’t assign justifications in her multimodal classroom (p. 28). So, what is the purpose of a justification text other than it being a “school-based genre”? I was thinking about other contexts in which justifications would be needed outside academia (maybe workplace documents)?

Question: how do we measure transfer in a multimodal classroom? How do we measure transfer in a traditional classroom? Can we only measure transfer down the road – when students are no longer in our class?