

Preface

It is no secret that technology changes what, when, why, how, and where we do things. A common misperception, however, is that technology is dropped into an environment and that context is forever changed—end of story. Perhaps a more realistic understanding is that the process is recursive in nature (Zhao, Englert, Jones, Chen, & Ferdig, 2000). Technology arises from a given need or opportunity. It is adopted or used in a particular way that reshapes the context. The context then shapes the need for an adapted technology...and on and on. In the end, the technologies have evolved, as has how, what, when, why, and where we do things.

Writing and composition are great examples of these recursive processes. Simple word processing software allowed writers to easily create and revise their works. Internet and desktop publishing then opened up possibilities of easily and naturally including other media in compositions. Writers began considering how different digital modes such as images, video, music, and sound had a specific function in the creation of a new text. In a seemingly short time frame, writing and composition tools that started with word processing now includes a wide variety of technologies from *Twitter* to *Blogger* and from *Youtube* to *iTunes*. This is obviously an overly simplistic description of a very complex interaction between innovation and practice. The point is that how we think about writing and composition are now changed by ubiquitous technologies; many of those same technologies have been shaped by our desires to write, compose, and communicate.

Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, Castek, and Henry (2013), in a very thoughtful piece on New Literacies and new literacies, rightfully note:

Thus, to have been literate yesterday, in a world defined primarily by relatively static book technologies, does not ensure that one is fully literate today where we encounter new technologies such as Google docs, Skype, iMovie, Contribute, Basecamp, Dropbox, Facebook, Google, Foursquare, Chrome, educational video games, or thousands of mobile apps. To be literate tomorrow will be defined by even newer technologies that have yet to appear and even newer discourses and social practices that will be created to meet future needs. Thus, when we speak of new literacies, we mean that literacy is not just new today; it becomes new every day of our lives.... Social contexts have always shaped both the function and form of literate practices and been shaped by them in return. We discuss the social context of the current period and explain how this has produced new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), and the new literacies that these technologies demand (pp. 1150-1151).

Given this changing nature of writing as well as its recursive relationship with technology, we can stop and ask:

1. How is technology changing how we compose and write?
2. How is technology changing how we define composition and writing?
3. How is technology changing how we learn to compose and write?
4. How is technology changing how we teach (and prepare others to teach) multimodal composition and digital writing?
5. How are our current views of multimodal composition and digital writing going to shape new technologies that may emerge?

HOW THIS BOOK CAME TO BE

The instructional technology program and the literacy program are situated within two different departments within the College of Education, Health, and Human Services at Kent State University. In March 2011, the dean invited a group of faculty for an interdisciplinary conversation. Kristy was working with both writing instruction and young adult literature, but began to see both become heavily influenced by the ubiquity of technology. Rick was working on the innovative use of technologies for blended and online instruction; he found himself continually returning to conversations about digital literacy and the multimodal creation of artifacts.

What began as friendly banter turned into long and often heated conversations about technology and literacy. More specifically, we started to ask the aforementioned important questions that impact the fields of literacy and instructional technology. We began to read and share articles from our respective fields that addressed topics in the other's area of expertise.

Our collaborative work began two years ago, but we have both been doing work in this field for a long time as researchers and practitioners. We had also participated with, presented with, and read the work of friends and colleagues who were attempting to answer these tough questions. Thus, we knew we were not alone in this quest; however, all the collected volumes seemed to focus more on reading than writing. We believed that bringing together a collective voice and inquiry on the recursive relationship between technology and writing would draw attention to the individual research being completed across the globe.

Once we decided to bring everyone together, we chose IGI Global as our publisher. In addition to our successful past projects with IGI, we wanted to work with a publisher who could help us publish this important work on a very tight timeline. Technology changes so quickly that any publication process of 18+ months renders much content dated before it even reaches the intended audience. This book has undergone a strenuous review process and yet went from concept to print in less than a year.

The peer review process was rigorous but straightforward. We developed a call that invited authors who were interested in answering some of the aforementioned questions about the relationships between writing and technology. We asked for theoretical and empirical chapters that had the following recommended topics:

- Multimodal Writing Processes
- Digital Assessment and Evaluation of Writing
- Online Writing Communities

- Technology-Facilitated Feedback and Revision
- Technology to Support Writing for English Language Learners
- Early and Elementary Writing Instruction
- Adolescent and Adult Writing Instruction
- Writing Practices in and out of School
- Adaptive and Assistive Technologies to Facilitate Writing Instruction
- Digital Media and Collaborative Writing Tools
- Online Education and Writing Instruction
- Writing Practices of Information and Communication Technologies
- Technology for Writing Acquisition
- Pre-Service Teacher Education in Writing
- In-Service Teachers
- National Writing Project
- Professional Development in Writing
- Disciplinary Writing
- Advances in Technology and Digital Media
- Future Research and Development Needs and Goals

The call was then distributed in multiple venues.

1. We worked with our graduate assistant to collect the names and email addresses of anyone who had been funded to do work on writing and technology in the last 10 years, as evidenced by a search in the *National Science Foundation* and *Institute of Education Sciences* databases. We did a similar search using various academic search engines to find authors who had published on this topic within the same timeframe. Both sets of awardees and authors were sent a copy of the call.
2. We sent the call to various email distribution lists. This included the *ITForum*, the LRA listserv, the NCTE discussion forum, the ALER listserv (thanks to Kristine Still), the AERA Writing and Literacies SIG (thanks to Heather Pleasants), and the IRA TILE-SIG (thanks to Julie Coiro).
3. We created an Editorial Review Board. In addition to asking them to review chapters, we asked them to open their networks and share the call for chapters.
4. We created a Website that contained pertinent information for potential authors.

The request that was distributed was actually a call for proposals rather than a call for chapters. Authors were instructed to submit a 1-2 page overview that summarized the mission of the proposed chapter. We were originally expecting to receive 12-15 proposals. We knew the topic was popular, as evidence by the number of people we contacted and those who initially responded with interest. However, we also understood that people had multiple venues to present and disseminate their work. By the time the deadline arrived, we were shocked to receive well over 100 proposals.

The initial peer review process was handled by the editors. The proposals were accepted based mainly on: a) the match between their content and the purpose of the book and b) the quality of the theoretical or empirical research presented and/or proposed. Authors were notified and then were given time (and instructions) to complete a full chapter. Full chapters were received and sent through a double-blind peer review process with our Editorial Review Board. Accepted chapters were then provided comments from three reviewers, comments from the editors, and time for revisions.

This brief history is provided to underscore the rigorous, peer review process. This was not an edited book where specific authors were handpicked to write particular chapters. This was an open process where all chapters were blindly reviewed and accepted or rejected based on the quality of their content and their appropriateness for this book.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

This book is divided into five sections:

1. **Conceptualizing and Redefining Multimodal Composition and Digital Writing:** How have we defined these terms, what does the research tell us, and how are beginning to re-conceptualize multimodal composition and digital writing based on that research?
2. **Designing and Assessing Multimodal Composition and Digital Writing:** What happens when teachers or students design multimodal projects or compositions that are digital in nature? How can we think about assessing such projects?
3. **Multimodal Composition and Digital Writing in K-12 Environments:** What does the research tell us about multimodal composition and digital writing that is implemented into K-12 teaching and learning environments?
4. **Multimodal Composition and Digital Writing in Teacher Education:** What does the research tell us about multimodal composition and digital writing that is implemented in teacher education?
5. **Research on Strategies and Technologies within Multimodal Composition and Digital Writing:** Multimodal composition and digital writing can include specific strategies and tools; how do we begin to understand the design and implementation of particular strategies or technologies?

It is worth noting that, first, these sections are not meant to be mutually exclusive; chapters cut across multiple themes and multiple sections. For instance, Shanahan, McVee, and Bailey's work on multimodality in action has been placed in a section on redefining multimodal composition. However, it includes research on middle and high school students and could just as easily fit into the section on K-12 research. Foley, Guzzetti, Agnello, and Lesley's research is situated within a first-grade classroom and was placed in the section on K-12 research. They are working on digital storytelling and their research obviously discusses design and strategies and has implications for how we define multimodal composition. Second, authors were not writing for a particular section as they prepared their chapters. The sections were added after all final chapters were completed and submitted.

Given these factors, why include section headings at all if they are somewhat artificial boundaries imposed after the submission deadline? Why separate the chapters if most of them discuss multiple topics? Edited book proposals might start with themes and then attempt to find chapters to fill those sections. The overall purpose of this book was to present readers with an overview of the current research on multimodal composition and digital writing. Although we knew many of the authors of these chapters before their submissions and we knew general topics they might write about, we did not know what research they would specifically choose to highlight. As such, the sections here emerged from a careful reading of not only the chapters in this book, but also the multitude of proposals we received.

Imagine a conference with a symposium presentation on multimodal composition and digital writing. Or, imagine a class where the instructor wants her students to synthesize what we know about these

topics. The proposals and chapters suggested a framework where you would first attempt to define the terms and understand how research is helping us re-conceptualize our definitions. Once given a base understanding, we might begin thinking about the actual implementation of such projects, evaluating how teachers and students design and assess such projects. Drawing on what we know about pedagogical content knowledge and the role of technology in such a model (Shulman, 1986; Ferdig, 2006), we might further expand our discussion to explore digital projects within specific environments such as K-12 or teacher education. And, we might conclude with recognizing that there are specific technologies or strategies that change how we view multimodal composition and digital writing. Such an approach represents the framework for this book and the related section headings.

Regardless of the chapter's location in a section, we hope each chapter is read with an inquiring attitude to discern:

- How are the authors defining multimodal composition and digital writing?
- How are their definitions or their research changing the broader field?
- What are the methods in which such projects are designed, implemented, or evaluated?
- Is there something specific about the environment or context that led to the outcomes?
- Is there something specific about the technologies or strategies that led to the outcomes?

CONCLUSION

We think it is fair to say that a tremendous amount of attention has recently been paid to Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM). Literacy has not necessarily enjoyed the rich attention it received in the past. This is not to suggest that literacy is not important; it is just that it has not necessarily been perceived as such by some policy-makers and funders. New technologies have begun to change our perception and definition of literacy; recent research has continued to highlight the critical role of literacy within content area and disciplinary knowledge acquisition.

We proudly present this collected volume as a way to support the recognition of importance of digital writing and the role of multimodal composition. We believe researchers doing work in this area will find questions and answers to important topics within this field. Students new to the field will have a chance to explore where we have been and where we are going. Teachers and practitioners at multiple levels will find implications to improve their instruction. Finally, policymakers and funders will be able to learn more about the role of multimodal composition and digital writing across our curricula.

Respectfully,

Richard E. Ferdig
Kent State University, USA

Kristine E. Pytash
Kent State University, USA

March 4, 2013

REFERENCES

- Ferdig, R. E. (2006). Assessing technologies for teaching and learning: Understanding the importance of technological-pedagogical content knowledge. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 37(5), 749–760. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8535.2006.00559.x.
- Leu, D. J., Kinzer, C. K., Coiro, J., Castek, J., & Henry, L. A. (2013). New literacies: A dual-level theory of the changing nature of literacy, instruction, and assessment. In Alvermann, D. E., Unrau, N. J., & Ruddell, R. B. (Eds.), *Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading* (6th ed.). Newark, DE: International Reading Association. doi:10.1598/0710.42.
- Shulman, L. S. (1986). Those who understand: Knowledge growth in teaching. *Educational Researcher*, 15(2), 4–31. doi:10.3102/0013189X015002004.
- Zhao, Y., Englert, C. S., Jones, C. S., Chen, J., & Ferdig, R. E. (2000). The development of a web-based learning environment: A dialogue between innovation and established practices. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 32(4), 435–454.