Chapter 22
Using ResponsiveDesign as a Shared Approach to Address the Challenge of Composing with Digital Tools

Ralph A. Córdova
University of Missouri-Saint Louis, USA

Ann Taylor
University of Missouri-Saint Louis, USA

Jeff Hudson
Alton High School, USA

Jason Sellers
French American International School, USA

Jessica Pilgreen
Wesclin High School, USA

Donna Goetz
Mater Dei High School, USA

Dawn Jung
The CoLab, USA

ABSTRACT

In this chapter, a team of two university and four school teacher-researchers, members of a Liquid Networked Innovating Community (LiqNIC) called the Cultural Landscapes Community (CoLab), draw on an interactional ethnographic perspective to examine the theoretical roots of the CoLab, how it emerged as a LiqNIC, and its impact on their professional learning. By constructing four telling cases, the team investigates how they drew on the CoLab’s shared theory of action, ResponsiveDesign, to innovate their practices teaching writing to incorporate new media and digital tools (Twitter, Googledocs, Weebly, Edmodo, Prezi, Storify). Analyses reveal the local ways each teacher drew on ResponsiveDesign’s iterative cycles of exploring, envisioning and enacting as habits of action. In and through the local ways they harnessed ResponsiveDesign to integrate digital tools into their writing instruction, the teacher-researchers developed habits of mind as prototypers and innovators of teaching practices. Analyses also reveal how ResponsiveDesign’s core theoretical traditions were lived out in the habits of action and habits of mind that the teachers developed.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-5982-7.ch022
USING RESPONSIVE DESIGN AS A SHARED APPROACH TO ADDRESS THE CHALLENGE OF COMPOSING WITH DIGITAL TOOLS

You can’t effectively jump ahead when you want to. But when the Web of supporting technological species are in place, an invention will erupt with such urgency that it will occur to many people at once. (Kelly, 2010, p. 155)

In What Technology Wants Kevin Kelly (2010, p. 155) explains that for inventions and technological advances to become popular, the larger cultural group, or societal structure must find a collective need for them. Digital tools permeate our everyday lives and our students are actively using them. Out of school, students are digitally connected, engaged and thriving in affinity communities in local and distant places (Ito et al., 2010), yet, in school, students are often asked to “power-off” and put away their connectivity tools and technologies because they may distract them from the core subject and the teacher. Thus, there is a disconnect in the composing process between cultural practices valued by students out of schools and those valued by teachers in schools. We believe there is a way to re-see this apparent split and successfully reconnect these worlds.

We are living in a time of major cultural shifts, pushed along by the development of digital tools, which surface tensions around whose knowledge counts; between the writing and knowledge generation processes valued in previous generations, and, their newly and ever evolving counterparts made possible with new digital media functions and forms. In this chapter, we make visible the shared conceptual approaches, ones steeped in ethnographic traditions and design-centric principles, that fellow teacher-researchers and co-authors are harnessing in order to navigate these shifts in instruction and learning with new media. In order to do so, we make visible how the shared theory of action, ResponsiveDesign, that guides their work, manifests itself in locally responsive ways meeting the particular needs of respective classroom cultures.

In a recent study, Purcel, Heap, Buchanan & Friedrich (2013) report that while teachers in fact do recognize the value of students using digital tools, they find themselves in a cultural shift connecting traditional forms of composing with today’s functions of digital media and tools. This seeming disconnect between composing in traditional and new media forms and functions that teachers and students experience in schools is consistent with the findings by Mizuko Ito et al. in their three-year ethnographic study Hanging Out, Messing Around and Geeking Out (2010). Findings reveal how students readily use digital tools in ways purposeful to them: to communicate, compose multiple texts and capture and share information with peers. And in doing so, youth are co-constructing non-physical local to global learning communities, ones fluid and temporal, which are user-driven. Ito et al. help us see that the seeming infinite horizon made visible to us by new media, its unending use for problem-solving and innovating, are not fixed and physical, rather they are permeable and shape-shifting cultural landscapes acted, written and talked into being by people all over the globe. This robust reality of the social-construction of new media spaces outside of schools are ones driven by affinities and shared needs of its users. It is both the reasons for and ways in which youth go about creating intentional learning communities that can inform how we see, or, need in order to re-see, those existing practices transforming learning inside formal school settings. We believe this separation between school and community, and how technologies are used within them, is one of the biggest cultural problems facing schools, educators and students.

In and of themselves, digital technologies are not a solution; they are inert and can be as ineffective as the weakest worksheet. In order for technologies to flourish, they require an innovating culture, what Kelly calls a “Web of supporting