Digital Writing Spaces as Rhetorical Locales of Invention

Josephine N. Walwema, Oakland University, Rochester, MI, USA

ABSTRACT

This article examines the shifting nature of invention with digital infrastructure as a rhetorical locale for composing writing collaboratively. Because composing collaboratively involves inquiry, the article examines the framework for a successful community of inquiry in a digital space already predisposed to engaging interconnected communities, local and global. Thus, the article examines how digital locales of invention, by virtue of their accessible nature, engage wider communities, making composing with and for an active audience possible.

KEYWORDS

Argumentation, Collaboration, Community of Inquiry, Composing, Open Inquiry

INTRODUCTION

Speculation over the ills of the Internet (Neuhaus, 1996; Carr, 2008, 2011) in general, and writing and composition in particular (Ferris, 2002; Purcell, Buchanan, & Friedrich, 2014) inspire theories on the decline of traditional scholarship (Burton & Chadwick, 2000; Biddix, Chung, & Park, 2011). Such theories lead to essays examining ways in which the immediacy of the Internet erodes knowledge and decimates our attention (Carr, 2011), as well as how social networking disconnects us from real people while providing the illusion of a networked society (Boulianne, 2009; Turkle, 2012). Societal worries center on distractions made possible by digital communication, and its ability to disconnect us from conceptual thought by rendering us browsers and surfers. In academia, the fear is that students might eschew traditional forms of research for “instant access” afforded by the Internet. While research integrating computers and writing (Lanham, 1993; Inman, 2004; Lunsford, 2006) has gradually laid some of those concerns to rest (Clark, 2010; Hunter, 2011; Madden, 2014), less attention has been paid to the benefits inherent in the Internet’s open accessibility as explorative and interpretive spaces. In this paper, I examine the opportunity digitized spaces offer as expanded avenues of composing. I briefly conceptualize invention, and discuss how an understanding of invention in a networked culture can effectively make use of digital composing spaces as explorative and interpretive
places. I examine collaborative modes of “digitality” (Landow, 2005, p. 196)—the quality of being
digital—that now encompass the infrastructure that supports community engagement in digital
platforms. That engagement, I argue, brings together communities of interest in topics as diverse as
social history, economics, law, and politics. Digital infrastructure, I argue grants writers composing
liberties not limited to the standard tools of invention (Sirc, 2010, 2012) ordinarily confined to mind
maps, brainstorming, and outlines, which are individual pursuits governed by institutionalized rules
and procedures and aimed at persuasion. That model of invention, as Warnick (2001) suggests is
Aristotelian in nature, in that an opening thesis defines the rest of the argument, unlike open inquiry,
which is more suited to sophistic theory of deliberating from commonly held truths and conventions
(p. 62). Those conventions then become a starting place for discourse. Composing processes that
benefit from collaborative invention, because they draw from such conventions, allow writers avenues
to many voices within a community of inquiry. Such access renders invention a collective enterprise
and is invaluable in fostering communication beyond one’s locale.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Invention, in writing studies, has been understood as a “generative system” (Hall, 1976, p. 14,
Simonson, 2014) that extends our understanding of a subject rather than solidify its meaning.
Investigating insights and theories of invention in digital writing – sometimes referred to as new
media – which encompasses advances in computer technologies, examines how texts are created,
and the ways in which technology plays a role in identity formation and agency as related forms of
invention (Wysocki, 2004). Some of those insights focus on the technologies of writing themselves.

Digital writing traces its roots to Manovich (2001) who identifies forms of new media and the
way information is generated, archived, and distributed, with the database as a medium and software
applications to support a multiplicity of techniques. One of those techniques is to “turn a viewer
into an active user” (p. 167) – an immersive process that extends old media– the difference being
that users can do more with what is digital. Within such a network, users, are not passive, but can
co-create texts. Manovíc suggests that the “logic of the computer has the potential to significantly
influence the traditional cultural logic of new media” (p. 63). Thus, through the navigable space
made possible by the database, users can “view, navigate, search” (p. 219) texts more actively than
they would traditional media.

It is new media that make digital collaborative invention possible by opening up communicative
situations in which knowledge is produced, shaped, stored, and transmitted. New media weren’t always
this supportive, however. Linearity of text was maintained until the advent of hypertext (Landow,
1996), which brought with it the ability of documents to link to each other, and for readers to follow
a reading path that made the most sense to them, not necessarily one prescribed by the author (as in
print media). To succeed, the readers needed a functional digital literacy enabling them to comprehend
the “core competencies of the Internet” (Giles, 1997) so they could search, navigate, assemble, and
evaluate texts for their information quotient. However, while hypertext is seen as replicating the logic
of print media (Lanham, 1989, p. 287), Johnson-Eilola values hypertext for its ability to decenter the
author and allow for “reader complicity in textual construction” (1993, p.383). Of importance to this
paper is the technological interface that makes possible the sharing of ideas and conversations among
users through what Bolter (2001) conceives of as writing spaces, which are forms and technologies of
writing.

As well, Lanham (1993), who interrogates “what happens when the text moves from page to
screen” finds that “the fixed, authoritative, canonical text, simply explodes into the ether” (p. 31). This
Related Content

**Teacher Directed Instruction for Student Engagement**
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/teacher-directed-instruction-student-engagement/58478?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/teacher-directed-instruction-student-engagement/58478?camid=4v1a)

**Where Time Goes: The Role of Online Technology During Leisure Time Learning**
[www.igi-global.com/article/time-goes-role-online-technology/65737?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/time-goes-role-online-technology/65737?camid=4v1a)
Proposed Framework of Competences for Career Counsellors Employed at Primary Schools: A Case Study
www.igi-global.com/chapter/proposed-framework-of-competences-for-career-counsellors-employed-at-primary-schools/210873?camid=4v1a

Improving Course Assessment via Web-based Homework
www.igi-global.com/article/improving-course-assessment-via-web-based-homework/176610?camid=4v1a