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Exploring Multimodal Composing in Today's Classroom and Beyond

Ewa McGrail

Georgia State University, emcgrail@gsu.edu

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Georgia State University

Correspondence concerning this editorial should be addressed to Ewa McGrail, Ph.D., Georgia State University, College of Education, 30 Pryor Street, Atlanta, GA 30303.

Contact: researchubiquity@gmail.com

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Exploring Multimodal Composing in Today's Classroom and Beyond

Although composing in multiple modes (e.g., visual, audio, audiovisual and textual) and multiple forms and genres (e.g., essay, poetry or film) is not a new concept in education, the multimodal aspect of such communication has been delegated to a secondary role over the print-based communication that continues to control student learning experiences with composition at school, and in similar contexts with student-generated writing and communication (Curwood, 2012). Hicks, Young, Kajder and Hunt (2012) speak to that effect when they conclude that teaching English, especially writing, is the “same as it ever was” (p. 68). These researchers reviewed publications on writing, technology and multimedia in the past issues of *English Journal* and elaborated on their conclusion in this way:

Despite all the cultural and technological changes in the types of texts we are able to produce and consume, and the revolutionary predictions we have made, not much has really changed in the teaching of English over the past 100 years. (p. 68)

Today however, multimodality and hybridity have become the primary modes of expression for young writers and artists who regularly utilize technologies such as a smartphone, iPad, or other tablet for multimodal and multimedia-based expressive communication with others (Jenkins, 2006; Kafai & Peppler, 2011; Lankshear & Knobel, 2010). Indeed, in digital media texts and resources, “writing is being displaced by image as the central mode for representation” (Bezemer & Kress, 2008, p. 166).

These latest changes in the landscape of composition among young writers and content creators, and in some teaching materials, have inspired the *Ubiquity Research Strand* to invite scholars, methodologists, academics and researcher artists to explore their understandings of

multimodal and multimedia theories of composition and of the multiple facets involved in learning and teaching that such meaning-making processes require, both from their creators and those involved in working with these young authors. Our current issue also represents our interest in how teachers and students alike are actually enacting in practice their understandings of meaning-making. Such meaning making involves “diverse semiotic resources” and “multiple modes of representation” (Curwood, 2012, p. 232).

The articles included in the *Research Strand* of this *Ubiquity* issue are a response to this invitation. Taken together, this collection of scholarship and research represents a wide range of conceptual frameworks, contexts, and instructional approaches to teaching multimodal composition in the K-12 classroom and teacher education. More specifically, in the self-study, “*Imagining the Impact of Images: Visual Scenario-Based Approaches in English Language Arts*,” Darren Crovitz and Rob Montgomery analyze and critique visual scenario-based learning and the impact of this pedagogical approach on student understanding and enacting of multimodal composing for diverse contexts and audiences. Through an analysis of teacher artifacts and student thought-processes about creating multimodal representations in a high school classroom, the researchers elucidate the principles of multimodal composition that promote critical reading of the visual text and of multimodal contexts for which they have been designed. Likewise, through the auto-ethnography of the lived experiences with multimodal pedagogies in her home country, Turkey, “*Arts in Turkey and the Need for Multimodally-Oriented Curriculum Based on Lived Experiences*,” Tuba Angay-Crowder makes a case for a more fully integrated arts-based multicultural curriculum in the U.S. and in other educational contexts.

In a qualitative case study, “*There’s Nothing That Booms*”: *Tensions of Collaborative Media Production*,” Nicholas Husbye examines the challenges and tensions experienced by the researcher and the children participating in a collaborative media production project. Husbye is particularly interested in investigating the multiple discourses that emerged during the production of his class film and the ways in which the multiple and intertwined voices of his students contributed to or challenged the media product they were creating. The emphasis of this process-oriented analysis of the composing process in grades kindergarten through eight is also on the social and power relationships among their participants as well as the negotiation of individual and community members’ interests and conceptions of the film making practices and their expectations concerning the desired outcome, a single but collaboratively created film.

In “*Ogres Remind me of Expanding*,”: *First-Graders Multimodal Autobiographies*,” which is a naturalistic inquiry study, Katherine Batchelor, William Kist, Melanie Kidder-Brown and Brittany Bejcek-Long examine how first graders created multimodal autobiographies. The researchers’ exploration of the ways in which children formed perceptions of themselves, utilized higher meta-level reasoning skills and higher level thinking has important implications both for research and practice and policy in the area of multimodal composition, particularly autobiography, among young writers in elementary school.

We hope that the articles in the *Research* strand in this issue of *Ubiquity* will leave the readers with important observations about the conceptions and processes associated with multimodal meaning-making and that they will also provide inspiration for future research and scholarship. We also extend our gratitude for the hard work, expert opinion, and dedication of our peer reviewers, editors, and staff members and we thank the authors who submitted their scholarly works to the *Research Strand*.

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Author Bio: Ewa McGrail is an Associate Professor of Language and Literacy at Georgia State University. She is the winner (with Anne Davis) of the *Journal of Research in Childhood Education* Distinguished Education Research Article Award and the recipient (with J. Patrick McGrail) of the *Georgia Association of Teacher Educators* Distinguished Research in Teacher Education Award. In her research, McGrail examines digital writing and new media composition; copyright and media literacy; technology in teaching and learning, and multimodal assessment.