

Dundee Lackey
Dr. Malea Powell
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Read-around 2: Teaching and Technology in E-Journals, 2003-2004

For my second journey through the journals of our discipline, I chose to focus on journals specializing in the intersections of technology and the teaching of composition. Clearly, in this day and age, that meant I had much to choose from, so, for the purposes of drawing a boundary somewhere, I decided to choose only from those listed on the department's "Print & Electronic Journals for Rhetoric & Composition Scholars" web page.

I began by exploring seven journals that piqued my interest: *Computers and Composition Online*, *Currents in Electronic Literacy*, *Electronic Journal of Virtual Culture*, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *Journal of Electronic Publishing*, *Journal of Literacy and Technology*, and *Kairos*. Though I am now a subscriber, I quickly eliminated for the purposes of this study the *Electronic Journal of Virtual Culture*, because it is accessible only through a listserv, with the "table of contents distributed by email" and "subscribers [...then] follow[ing] e-mail links to WWW articles" (MSU para. 13). I visited the homepages for each of the remaining six selections, explored the sites to discover what resources each offered, and surveyed the titles and abstracts of articles in the last one or two issues of each to determine what themes or patterns existed. I also, as a recent beginner at web design, considered the layout of each publication, and how well it makes use of the virtues of electronic publication.

I found several categories of articles at work. The first, which I've termed "Gender/Identity Issues", was presented only in one journal, a Fall 2004 special issues of *Computers and Composition Online*. There were a number of articles on hypertext theory and desktop publishing, a couple of research using the internet, many on the topics of literacy and new media/multimedia, one on collaborative writing, and many on web design. I expected these kinds of topics to be presented; however, I also found some surprises. For example, there were two articles in the last year (to my surprise, in separate journals) making heavy use of Foucault ("Speaking to/through the Operating System: The Personal Computer as a Foucaultian Control Mechanism" and "Sinking the Online 'Music Pirates:' Foucault, Power, and Deviance on the Web"). Additionally, there were quite a large number of articles dealing with what I'm thinking of as the intersection between cultural studies and technology (including articles such as "Typesetting Native American Languages," "Web Site Adaptation: A Cross-Cultural Comparison of U.S. and Mexican Web Sites," "Cross-National Differences in Website Appeal," and "How Flemish Online Journalists Perceive and Explore the Internet's Potential"). Though I was deeply tempted to select either this category of articles, or, my final "pattern," "Establishing Online Scholarly Journals" (comprised of articles focusing on establishing, editing, peer reviewing, and gaining credibility for online scholarly publications), I ultimately see myself primarily as a teacher, and am deeply interested in how and why we use technology in our classrooms, so I chose what turned out to be the largest category of articles, those dealing with the effects of technology on our teaching practices.

There seems to be a fairly even division here, with about half the articles on this theme published dealing with theoretical/pedagogical issues, and the other half dealing with very practical aspects of using technology to facilitate the teaching of writing. I ultimately chose six articles, which I would judge as about half theory and about half “practical application.”

Computers and Composition Online:
“Reflection in the Electronic Writing Classroom”

My first choice, “Reflection in the Electronic Writing Classroom,” was published by L. Lennie Irvin in the Fall 2003/Spring 2004 edition of *Computers and Composition Online* (a double issue in celebration of their twentieth year of publication). *Computers and Composition Online* has an appealing design. When you arrive, you hit a fairly simple index page built around a picture of a computer and a pile of paper journals. When passing your mouse over this picture, it changes to one of a woman writing at a computer. To either side of this image is a list of the editorial staff for both the online and paper versions of the journal. Overall, this page made me feel as if I were opening a paper journal; this, combined with the listing of the editors for the paper journal, seems something which may be comforting and a source of perceived “credibility” for certain readers.

Upon entering *Computers and Composition Online*, the first thing the reader encounters could be considered yet another attempt at establishing ethos: the mission statement. They point out, first, that this is “the refereed online companion journal to *Computers and Composition: An International Journal*, now in its 20th year and published by Elsevier” and describe the journal(s) as having the goal of being “...a

significant online resource for scholar teachers interested in the impact of new and emerging media upon the teaching of language and literacy in both virtual and face-to-face forums.” The mission statement also foreshadows the kinds of resources the site offers to extend the goals of the journal: “As part of this goal, we wish to foster a sense of community and collegial sharing of ideas by providing an online space where select features, announcements, and community resources work together to promote a virtual exchange for the latest and best work in the field.”

The journal meets these goals by maintaining several “sections” to the site. These include “Theory into Practice, described as “longer, research-based pieces blending rhetorical and critical theory with technological practice, acknowledging pedagogical or discursive implications, “Professional Development,” which “...include[s] interviews and profiles of C&C specialists, as well as conference updates and calls for submissions,” “Print to Screen,” consisting of “online features that connect with current print journal themes and special issues,” “Reviews” of “...books, sites, CD/DVDs, events, and other blended media,” sometimes themed, and, the section Irvin’s article was available through, “The Virtual Classroom.” Other resources include an off-site [blog](#), which helps to extend the conversation, and a comprehensive running bibliography maintained at Michigan Technical University.

The site, though it *does* make me feel as if I’m reading a paper journal, somehow, makes use of the advantages of the Internet in many ways. Each section is accessible through a left-hand menu bar, and lists on its own page the mission statement, section editor, and articles (by issue) for that section. Articles are subdivided so that the user doesn’t have to scroll down forever while reading, and make use of both a bulleted menu

identifying sections of the article and the by-now-standard “next” arrow at the bottom of the “page.”

“The Virtual Classroom” publishes works on “pedagogy and classroom experience, which may include syllawebs, resource sites, and student projects.” Irvin’s article, “Reflection in the Electronic Writing Classroom” caught my eye because I make heavy use of reflective writing in my courses, both as a teacher and a student. I also use a wiki page to facilitate the sharing of information with and among students, and, in the past, have had students post drafts and “final” copies of their materials, including their portfolio reflective overviews, to their wiki sites. I often wondered what the effect of sharing that highly personal piece of writing might be, and whether it was hypocritical of me to have them submit their weekly reflections more privately, via e-mail, while coercing them to share their portfolio reflections for peer review. This piece, though it deals very much with classroom practices, also concerns itself with issues of theory and pedagogy.

Irvin begins by explaining that her article is an answer to the questions posed at the end of Kathleen Blake Yancey’s *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*, which asks: “How hospitable a medium is a computer network for reflection? ... What is the effect of public audience on reflection?” (qtd. in Irvin par. 1). Irvin goes on to say that, while there is a “...prevalence of a constructionist and ‘dialogic’ pedagogy used by many writing teachers in a computer networked environment, little has been written explicitly on the role of reflection in the electronic writing classroom” (par. 2).

This article begins by exploring the importance of reflection, taking us through two theorists’ analysis of how and why students need to go through this process. She

notes that reflection is “a catalyst for learning” (Irvin scr. 3), and illustrates this by reviewing relevant studies, including Joel English’s statement that “ ‘Writing about writing’ ... may well be their [the students] key to understanding their writing process” (qtd. in Irvin scr. 3 par. 3). Irvin spends quite a bit of time “describ[ing] how reflection has typically worked in the non-electronic classroom,” (scr. 4 par. 1), taking us through three main types of reflective writing: the writer’s log, the draft letter, and the portfolio letter. The writer’s log is described by Dawn Swartzendruber-Putnam as “...a weekly opportunity for students to step back, think, and write a paragraph about how their writing is progressing and what they are learning” (qtd. in Irvin scr. 4 par. 1). The draft letter, “...another instance of what Yancey would call ‘reflection –in-action’,” asks that students “...write a letter addressed to the teacher to accompany a single piece of writing turned in for evaluation”; as such, Irvin believes this seems to be “...a conflation of Yancey’s ‘Writer’s Memo’ where writers describe and assess their writing process and the Companion Piece where the ‘student can talk about whatever they think is important for the reader to know as she or he reads the primary text’ “ (Yancey qtd. in Irvin scr. 4 par. 1). The portfolio letter as used by Swartzendruber-Putnam “...fits the standard type of reflective piece to accompany an end-of-semester collection of a student’s work,” and “...would be described by Yancey as a *reflection-in-presentation*” (scr. 4 par. 3).

Having established the uses and value of reflection in the “standard” non-wired classroom, Irvin moves on to “...examin[ing] how reflection works in a networked computer setting,” where she “immediately see[s] the expanded social environment for reflection” (scr. 5 par. 1). Her argument here is that “typically, in a traditional writing classroom the most important ‘other’ a student engages with is the teacher; however, the

networked environment changes this teacher-centric dynamic” (scr. 5 par. 3), that, with proper planning and a careful sequencing of assignments that utilize a “...repeated sequence of *invention, reflection, and reinvention*” (such as Kemp’s “writing-feedback-adaptation-writing cycle”), can lead to a level of “shared discourse” between students that increases “...learning for students [and] the social construction of knowledge” (scr. 5 par. 5).

Having established the value of reflection, Irvin moves on to discuss what she sees as the three main types of reflection: “reflection as observation,” “reflection as refraction,” and “reflection as coherence.” Reflection as observation is described as “...students read[ing] the texts of their peers (as well as observing their own texts and experience)” (scr. 6 par. 1). Here she makes heavy use of collaborative learning theories (such as those of Kenneth Bruffee) to explain how human learn from observing one another. Her argument is that:

as spectators, students are engaged in a form of reflection that can have a significant impact on their subsequent participation where they put the knowledge gained from ‘spectating/reflecting’ into action. Likewise, students produce texts as participants with a heightened critical awareness because they know their peers will be reading their work (scr. 6 par. 10).

As teachers, then, we “...need to promote students reading the work of their peers, even if that requires “...teach[ing] a new kind of reading [to] many students” (scr. 6 par. 11).

The concept of “reflection as refraction” relies upon Carol Pope’s use of ‘refraction’ “...to describe this movement beyond reflection where the same activity is seen but from a different angle” (scr. 7 par. 4). Irvin terms “refraction p[as] an extension of reflection, [which] suggests an added way of seeing,” and suggests, “reflecting upon

reflections, then, is a kind of ‘refraction’ that heightens and deepens the learning gained from reflection” (scr. 7 par. 4). She makes this point as an answer to Yancey’s question: “What is the affect of public audience on reflection?”

The final type of reflection, “reflection as coherence,” is explained as a way of “...help[ing] those engaged in computer-mediated communication make sense of the discourse;” this is especially valuable in the “wired” classroom because, as Lester Faigley pointed out in *Fragment of Rationality*, “...computer discourse tends to be more multivocal, more fragmented, simply more...” (scr. 8 par. 1).

Ultimately, Irvin believes that “...computer networks are, indeed, hospitable mediums for reflection” (scr. 1 par. 2). She argues that “...reflection is at the center of learning” (Atherton qtd. in Irvin scr. 9 par. 1) and that “...an electronic writing classroom creates a richer social setting—an expanded Zone of Proximal Development—where students are able to observe and learn from each other” (scr. 9 par. 3), thereby “...magnify[ing] the potential for reflection’s role within this learning cycle” (scr. 9 par. 1)

Journal of Literacy and Technology:
“Computers, Technology, and Literacies”

My second selection came from the Volume 4 (Spring 2003) of the *Journal of Literacy and Technology*. Upon arriving at this site, the reader finds a very simple page with a vaguely high-tech looking graphic of computer keys and pencils, offering us three choices: contents, about *JLT*, and author guidelines.

The *JLT* describes itself as:

... an online journal for teachers which explores the complex relationship between literacy and technology in educational, workplace, public, and individual spheres. Articles span from the historical to the cutting-edge, from scholarship to

theory to practice. *JLT* provides a free, accessible forum for all interested parties to explore and debate these issues with the goal of making ideologies and assumptions apparent and considering possibilities and alternatives (“About” par. 1).

There are four articles listed in the issue previous to the one I surveyed, which I identify here to establish the kinds of topics presented in the journal. They are: Kevin Miller and Jonathan Taylor’s Editorial Introduction, Minchu Chen, Richard Ferdig, and Aisha Wood’s “Understanding technology-enhanced storybooks and their roles in teaching and learning: An investigation of electronic storybooks in education,” a book review by Vanessa Raney on “Subversive Practices: The Internet as a Site of Colonialization”, and Kate Williams’ “Literacy and Computer Literacy: Analyzing the NRC’s *Being Fluent with Information Technology*”. (Given that *JLT* has an obvious focus on literacy, it was not surprising to see several on this theme here; however, this was, as I’ve noted earlier, something of a pattern in the journals surveyed overall).

The journal includes a contents page linking readers to all articles published in the journal back to its inception in the fall of 2000, an “about” page listing the mission statement, sponsors, editor, and contact information, a call for texts, an editor’s note (which centers on the “literacy crisis” and, given the focus on “The Need for *JLT*,” could be considered an extension of the mission statement, a page describing the required style for all submissions, and a resource page linking visitors to other online resources on literacy and technology. (This last differs visually from the other pages, making use of a different header and graphic design, which I found an interesting choice.)

Interestingly, though this site looks and acts more like a paper journal than the last I visited (with far less interlinking of pages and menu options), it is the only one I

discovered during this read-around that is making use of the “on demand” nature of internet publications by instituting “...rolling deadlines throughout the calendar year rather than publish[ing] ‘issues’,” a choice made because “the editors believe that publishing articles as they come in better reflects *JLT*’s status as an online-only journal” (“Call for Texts: Volume 4, 2004” par. 1). (This was a particularly interesting discovery to me, as the journal I read just previous to this one included a letter to the editor begging the journal to consider breaking free of the “print mindset,” and a response saying, essentially, “PLEASE don’t go too far with that. If I log on and find 80 new articles, I will have to ‘walk away’.”)

The only article published (thus far) in this most current issue is Paul Cesarini’s “Computers, Technology, and Literacies.” As noted before, this journal does not make use of as many of the “conventions” of Internet publication. One example of that is how the articles are formatted on the page. Cesarini’s article is all posted to one page on the site, requiring the reader to scroll down to read. They do, however, include a left-hand menu bar listing the sections of the article so we can jump right to the one we’d like to read. These choices are both a strength and a weakness. In this situation, I found the formatting preferable, as I wanted to print the article out to do a close reading of it, and having it all at one web address facilitated this; however, if I were here browsing, I would be very disappointed if they had not had the menu-bar option. Oddly, they also have a link to a “printer-friendly” version, which differs from the original in that there is no menu bar and therefore no “jump back to the top” arrows at the end of each section.

In Cesarini’s article, he “...plot[s] out key points in the history of technology literacy, analyze[s] overlapping definitions of the term, and forecast[s] a potential path

for the near future” (par. 4). The article is heavily theoretical, but, at the end, is “practical” in that it asks us to consider our classroom practices and shape them in ways that maximize the potential for the development of critical literacy.

Cesarini begins by tracing the history of the term “literacy,” using as a point of departure D. Brandt’s statement that “...how to define and measure literacy in any given period has been a thorny methodological question” (qtd. in Cesarini par. 7), and the explanation of “the Ongian notion of literacy [, which] attempts to frame it [the notion of literacy] around a ‘great divide’ between print based literacy, which he views as inherently more objective and interiorized, and orality, which he asserts follow more situation, externalized path” (par. 7).

As part of his discussion, he traces several definitions of “information literacy” and “technical literacy, including those issued by the ACRL, which defines IL as “...a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the information needed” and “computer or technological literacy as ‘rote learning of specific hardware and software applications”” (par. 8). He points out other terms used for these same ideas, such as “ ‘information competence,’ ‘fluency with technology,’ ‘media literacy,’ and ‘computer literacy’ (par. 8) before going on to explain how the field of composition and rhetoric defines these terms, using C. Selfe’s definition of “technology literacy” as:

...a complex set of socially and culturally situated values, practices, and skills involved in operating linguistically within the context of electronic environments, including reading, writing, and communicating.... In this context, technological literacy refers to social and cultural contexts for discourse and communication, as well as the social and linguistic products and practices of communication and the waves in which electronic communication environments have become essential parts of our cultural understanding of what it means to be literate (qtd. in Cesarini par. 11).

Here Cesarini points out that this conception of “technological literacy” “advocates [it] as having critical social and cultural components, if not responsibilities, to both trainer and trainee, both teacher and student” (par. 12), which makes it a “natural[...] fit with earlier notions of literacy, as espoused by Freire and others” (par. 13). He goes on to trace these notions of literacy, and then diverges into tracing the history of computers and literacy through technological developments from the early attempts at “computer assisted learning” through the switch from NCP to TCP/IP to current uses of computer mediated learning (par. 17-24) in an attempt to locate “...a starting point” for “...detailing the relationships between computers and literacy” (par. 17).

The purpose for this discussion is to explain how “the diffusion of these tools into computer-mediated learning environments [has] prompted Haas, John-Eiola, Faigley and others to reexamine classical assumptions that dictated text be a linear, hard-copy document” (par. 25) and to explore the advantages of “hypertexts and computer-mediated communication in general...over traditional, linear texts in the classroom” and the subsequent changes to our “...literacy and writing processes [themselves, which] were enhanced or at least reconceptualized due to” computer use (par. 26). All of this is set up for the point his final argument builds upon: that, even though, “the very nature of texts has changed into something wholly different from what existed even twenty years ago. Now, ... we tend to have an umbrella-like definition of the term” (par. 34), even though this has changed our ways of writing, and our ways of teaching, “...computers have yet to provide a panacea for any recent literacy crisis” (par. 35).

Here he makes, finally, the “throw” he’s been setting us up for: “...the ongoing transition from analog to digital context ... carries along with it implied assumptions of multilayered literacies” (par. 37). In other words, technology is “influence[ing] and affect[ing] traditional literacy” (par. 37). Cesarini believes that, given this, we must as a field self-consciously and “critically examine” both texts and “...the technologies we use in the classroom—to examine them as technology systems, arrived at through myriad legislative policies, political deals, and existing technologies of control. ...we must peer deep into their origins to better understand them, in order to better understand how these technologies affect literacy” (par. 40). He argues that if we neglect this examination of what we use, why and how we came to use it, and how it affects our work, “...we risk seeing the very tools we use to make our students more literate, more critically aware, become little more than the online equivalent of Channel One: predetermined content being pushed toward our students rather than pulled from them” (par. 42).

To accomplish this, Cesarini “...propose[s] we advocate a somewhat circular IT literacy that involves using technology to learn about the technology industry, to better understand the technology we all use” (par. 43). Through this action, we could examine all the things stated earlier, but also “prevent...our rights as end users from completely eroding under a sea of banners, ads, unsolicited email, stolen identities and limited choices” (par. 46) by “...understand the implications of using these technologies as consumers, teachers, and as students” (par. 50). Ultimately, Cesarini argues, we “owe” this to our students, who “...deserve to develop critical literacies of the industry many of them will intentionally or unintentionally graduate into” (par. 52).

Currents in Electronic Literacy:

- “Reading the Rhetoric of Web Pages: Rethinking the Goals of Student Research in the Computer Classroom”
- “Virtual Conversations: The Use of Internet Based Synchronous Chat in Basic Writing”

Currents in Electronic Literacy, published by the University of Texas, is the most “paper-like” of all the online journals I examined. Each article appears on one long page, and have no subsidiary menus or linkings. The only concession they’ve made, it seems, to being an e-journal is to number the paragraphs for ease of citation, something none of the other sources surveyed did. The visual design makes use of a kind of gold and orange theme (reminiscent of all the burnt-orange Longhorn everything in Austin) that is neither particularly welcoming nor particularly unpleasant. The site is, overall, very basic (it almost looks like a blog, in fact) and lacking in any kind of visual appeal; however, the content is quite good.

The site does not, apparently, publish calls for papers for anything but their own publication. There is also a “calls for reviews” page, listing the texts they would like to have reviewed for upcoming issues. *CEL* does work to extend the conversation by making use of a discussion forum. It provides access to past issues (going back to Spring 1999, at which time it “replace[d] Computer Writing, Rhetoric, and Literature as the official e-journal of the CWRL” (*CEL* “Past Issues”).

The Statement of Purpose describes the *CEL* as:

...striv[ing] to provide a forum for the scholarly discussion of issues pertaining to electronic literacy, widely construed. In general, *Currents* publishes work addressing the use of electronic texts and technologies for reading, writing, teaching, and learning in fields including but not restricted to the following: literature (in English and in other languages), rhetoric and composition, languages (English, foreign, and ESL), communications, media studies, and education.

Though it looks as if their goal is to publish twice yearly (fall and spring), currently there is a call for papers up for the Spring 2004 issue (still). The Fall 2003 issue (number 7) is apparently the last published, and contains four articles and a review of books. I read two of these articles: “Reading the Rhetoric of Web Pages: Rethinking the Goals of Student Research in the Computer Classroom” by Bill Wolff, and “Virtual Conversations: The Use of Internet Based Synchronous Chat in Basic Writing” by Richard C. Hay. Both of these are articles for the teacher-practitioner, detailing ways of making the “best” use of technology in the composition classroom. Other articles in this issue focused on the differences between teachers and administrators, and human-computer interaction.

The first article surveyed, Wolff’s “Reading the Rhetoric of Web Pages”, begins by pointing out that:

...despite an almost pervasive acknowledgement of the potential benefits of research focused, not on ‘texts’ exclusively but on the ‘contexts’ in which writers produce them, relatively little ethnographic—that is, true contextual research—has appeared in composition studies generally and computer-based composition studies especially” (Curtis and Klern qtd. in Wolff par. 1).

Further, Wolff notes, there have been “...few studies ...published on the benefits of the World Wide Web as a research tool for students” (par. 1).

In this article, Wolff sets out to rectify this absence of scholarship by discussing a course he taught at Rutgers University, Expository Writing II, which focused on “War and Ethics.” Wolff acknowledges that more dangerous than the pornography that abounds on the WWW is “...the amount of misinformation on the internet” (Faigley qtd. in Wolff par. 3) and that teachers often see allowing students to use WWW sources, therefore, requires more work on the part of both teacher and student; however, he feels

that not only does the WWW offer students sources simply not available in print (par. 1), but that, precisely because “on the internet, fringe groups and academic scholars have the same standing” (Strickland qtd. in Wolff par. 3), the use of the WWW as a research tool also helps to teach essential critical reading and critical thinking skills.

In order to demonstrate “...the kind of work that becomes possible in a course using the World Wide Web, while illustrating the limitations of a pedagogy that does not take into consideration the importance of training students to look critically at information on the web” (par. 1), Wolff integrates sample visual arguments and quotes from assigned readings, as well as his assignments and student responses (with lengthy analysis), to illustrate ways of teaching critical reading/source analysis, to help students develop as writers.

“Critical thinking and writing,” Wolff argues, “...do not simply happen as a result of technology, nor merely from savvy pedagogical use of technology, but rather from a specific type of pedagogical practice in relation to technology” (Mayers qtd. in Wolff par. 15). The goals, therefore, of using the web in the classroom, require that we approach its use with specific goals: “...encourag[ing] [them] to question the motivations behind the rhetoric, the specific context in which the essay is placed, or how their readings help them to better understand society as a whole” (par. 17).

Overall, Wolff’s argument is that:

one way to bridge the chasm between the traditional goals of a university liberal arts education, urgent contemporary issues, and a lack of critical thought about technology is by advocating the use of Website—both ‘reliable’ and ‘unreliable’—which can then enable students to think more critically about issues of relevance to contemporary society (par. 5).

Once we recognize this, Wolff says, “the questions then become: What is gained by learning to read the Web rhetorically? And, when students eventually discover that much of the information they read is biased, what kind of research is left for them to do?” (par. 13). These are questions he leaves unanswered, to be explored at another time, or by another researcher. He does, however, assert that we must, despite these unanswered questions, still find a way to bridge the gap students perceive between their education and their lives in contemporary society, and suggests, again, that making use of the WWW as a research tool, and consciously teaching source analysis skills, are one way of accomplishing this, a way which also carries the benefit of allowing/encouraging students “...to take what they learn in the classroom to re-think contemporary society” (par. 21).

The second piece I read in *CEL*, “Virtual Conversations: The Use of Internet Based Synchronous Chat”, by Richard C. Hay, begins by acknowledging that “the idea of creating an atmosphere for conversation in the classroom, and specifically in the composition and the basic writing classrooms, has been a motivation and a goal of many instructors for many years” (par. 2), a goal that is now frequently reached for through the installation of class chat rooms on our syllawebs. Oftentimes, however, we find that these chat rooms serve no purpose to use, or to our students; they are simply another link on an already overcrowded page (and schedule). In this article, Hay takes us through his failed experiences at using chats, and through the discoveries he made about them that enabled him to use them successfully, as a real tool for conversation and learning.

This article is, to me, related to the earlier article on reflection, in that Hays argument builds on the ways in which students can use chat to learn from their own reflections, and from those “refracted” by other learners.

Hays suggests that, in order to use chat successfully, we must first “give... the chat a reason to exist” (par. 5). Simply having this option available to students does not work, for, realistically, they are going to wind up in a chat room, more than likely alone, with no real reason for being there. Instead, Hays “...provided a set purpose—it was to be a place where, at a specific time and date, student could join their instructor online to discuss a specific assignment” (par. 7). He publicized the purpose and times for these meetings frequently.

Hay planned, at first, to meet once a month (or once an assignment) for about three hours, but as the students began to find this process useful they requested that these meetings occur once per week. He also noticed that as time passed, “instead of simply asking a question and then waiting for the perceived omniscient instructor to provide the answer, the students began posing questions and asking for evaluations of their work and then providing the answers and the discussion themselves” (par. 9) By giving the chat room a reason to be, by assigning each student an anonymous user-id automatically upon entrance, and making the instructor very visible (by using his name as his id), Hay, was, then, “...able to develop a virtual conversation with and among my students that has create a virtual-space where the students work together, writing and revising in an open environment” (par. 2), a space in which “...productive conversation is not limited by class periods, a sometimes-hindering respect between teacher and student, or even shyness or fear that inhibits some students” (par. 3). This is what we all dream of when we install that link in the first place!

Kairos:“When Blogging Goes Bad: A Cautionary Tale about Blogs, Email Lists, Discussions and Interaction”“Wireless Laptop Classrooms: Sketching Social and Material Spaces”

The first thing the visitor sees is the mission statement. *Kairos* positions itself as “... a refereed online journal exploring the intersections of rhetoric, technology, and pedagogy. Each issue presents varied perspectives on special topics such as ‘Critical Issues in Computers and Writing,’ ‘Technology and the Face of Language Arts in the K-12 Classroom,’ and ‘Hypertext Fiction/Hypertext Poetry.’” (*Kairos* scr. 1 par. 1).

The first thing that struck me about this e-journal is that, of those I visited, it is the only one that truly makes use of all the internet has to offer, and the only one that truly “breaks free of the page.” The graphic design is appealing and easily navigable, with redundant paths, and nothing on this site looks like it was written for print distribution and then (slightly) altered to publish online. The mission statement explains this, saying:

In *Kairos*, we publish ‘webtexts,’ which are texts authored specifically for publication on the World Wide Web. These webtexts include scholarly examinations of large-scale issues related to special topics, individual and collaborative reviews of books and media, news and announcements of interest, interactive exchanges about previous *Kairos* publications, and extended interviews with leading scholars (*Kairos* par. 2).

The current issue, 9.1 (Fall 2004), focuses on “The Rhetoric and Pedagogy of Portable Technologies.” As part of this, they published several “cover web” texts dealing with the special topic for this issue. In addition, there are several “feature” articles, (including one by our own Dr. Ellen Cushman), two interviews, two “praxis” articles, and a large selection of reviews.

I surveyed two of these webtexts. The first article surveyed here is one of the “praxis” selections, Steven D. Krause’s “When Blogging Goes Bad: A Cautionary Tale

about Blogs, Email Lists, Discussion and Interaction.” This piece caught my attention because of the direct relationship between it and “Virtual Conversations.” In this article (which is itself formatted to look like a blog, allowing the reader to proceed from top to bottom or to use the hotlinks on the menu to jump to the section that interests them), Krause argues that, although “...blogs have become the ‘killer app’ of the moment” (para. 1), and are currently used quite heavily in the field of composition (par. 3), they are used for quite different purposes from class to class and with tremendously variant degrees of success.

Hays notes that “...a quick glance through [the] examples [he provides us] would suggest that many writing teachers seem to be using blog spaces as places to facilitate dynamic and interactive writing experiences. This approach to the use of blogs is consistent with what at least some advocates of weblogs in education settings have suggested for a while now” (par. 4). Hays, however, believes that blogs are not truly places for interactive writing, nor are they conducive to creating “dynamic discussion” (par. 22).

He takes us through his argument by relating an experience he had while teaching a graduate course in which students were required to use blogs to reflect upon readings. Following a class discussion, one member of the group was upset over the lack of discussion following the reading of Susan Herring’s “Gender Differences in Computer-Mediated Communication: Bringing Familiar Baggage to the New Frontier,” which he made an unfortunate comment about. The student, incensed and desirous of a real conversation about this text, went home and wrote a lengthy posting sent out through the

class e-mail list. This sparked a great discussion, it seems, one carried on in both virtual and physical spaces by the class. Hays believes that the student's choice to send this out over email, rather than post it on her blog, demonstrates an intuitive understand on her part that "...while blog posts are interactive and dynamic texts in the sense that there is a dialog between bloggers and their texts, the dialog is not the *literal* sort that is fostered and promoted by email exchanges" (par. 34). This led Hays to the realization that "if you have a piece of writing that you want to 'deliver' or 'publish' as a more or less finished text, put it on a blog. If you have something to say to a particular audience in order to enter into a discussion with them, put it on a mailing list" (par. 36), where it can have a chance of "...result[ing] in a reborn sense of collaboration and interaction" (par. 6), as it did for his class. The fact that this resulted in a real exchange of ideas, as opposed to a visitor reading (and *possibly* posting comments beneath) a "finished" piece of writing, demonstrates that "...email offers a better opportunity for collaborative writing" (par. 35).

At the end of it all, Hays believes that blogs are not a truly interactive writing tool and, therefore, that "...we shouldn't substitute blogs for other electronic writing tools that foster discussion and interactive writing, particularly email lists" (par. 5). He does suggest that are ways of using blogs in class successfully for other purposes, particularly as "...online journals for students" (Goodwin-Jones qtd. in Hays par. 39) and as ways of "...foster[ing] an *ownership* of text, a *personal responsibility* for writing that is distinctly different from the give and take interactions of the discussion in forums like email" (par. 40).

The second *Kairos* article I studied is one of the coverweb texts, “Wireless Laptop Classroom: Sketching Social and Material Spaces,” by Missy Meeks. Of all the articles I read this week, this one makes the best use of being published as hypertext. There are multiple links throughout the article, which allows the reader to move through this sequentially by clicking the “next” arrows OR by making use of the menu bar and jumping to and through sections as interest and time dictate; however, you can also click on hyperlinked words and jump through one section to the next, following specific ideas:

Meeks spends the bulk of the article taking through the very impractical things that occurs in her classroom, located within a university which requires that incoming students purchase either a “high-end” or “low-end” laptop during the freshman year (scr. 2 par. 1). This choice, she makes clear, amounts to a difference in processing power that “marks” students (scr. 3) as members of certain social classes (initially) but winds up frustrating them all eventually (as by the time they are seniors, their “high end” model does not compare to the power of the “low end” model possessed by new students). This is something that necessitated a change in her teaching, requiring her to plan things so that *all* students have time to boot up their machines before the “computer work” begins (scr. 3). Meeks also explains that, in addition to students being “marked” by their computers, they “mark” them, with students’ choices in desktop wallpapers and other customizations raising issues of public/private space and to requiring that she teach certain computer maintenance skills (such as defragging) that seem to fall outside the “bounds” of what we expect, as comp. teachers, to “deal” with (scr. 4).

Meeks moves on to discuss issues of “space,” explaining the problems of establishing community in a room which may place the teacher in an unwanted “power” position by anchoring them to the computer connected to the projector (wherever the computer technicians may have placed that) and affecting the possible physical interaction with students (often negatively) (scr. 5 and 6). As she does throughout the article, Meeks makes practical recommendations for teachers who find themselves in similar situations. Another issue of space that is vital in the composition classroom is “accommodating group work.” Meeks advice here is basically to “move things anyway,” as much as is possible, and to “make the screens disappear” by setting laptops to a specific lid-shut option that enables students to open and close the computer without powering down (scr. 7).

Here we are beginning to get at what is, for Meeks, the most important part of her pedagogy: building community. She advocates claiming our authority in three ways: “the authority of thoughtful planning, the authority of talking in a shared language, and the authoring of knocking on the front door” (scr. 8 par. 2), attempts at claiming the powers we need to construct a “classroom culture,” something which is problematic “...in a wireless environment where technology often garners the most power” (scr. 8 par. 1). Thoughtful planning requires that we “identify when laptops are necessary” (scr. 9 par. 2), “account for different proficiencies” (scr. 9 par. 3), and “schedule simultaneous learning curves” by “build[ing] activities that teach students to use technology in the ways you want it used, and in the context of the intellectual tasks you want them to accomplish” (scr. 9 par. 8).

The “authority of talking in a shared language” addresses the ways in which we must work together to develop ways of talking about technology and giving instructions for its use (scr. 10). Meeks advises that we develop our own “click here language, preferably one that allows multiple methods of accomplishing each tasks, as well as a troubleshooting protocol (scr. 10).

The “authority of knocking on the front door” deals with the problems of “overconnection,” or with the fact that, in the wireless classroom, “there are too many convenient ways to interact with each other all the time” (scr. 11 par. 1). Some of these things require that we “claim priority” in the classroom and state explicitly what things we consider “rude” or “off task” (such as IM-ing friends during what should be on-task time) (scr. 11 par. 5-8). Another thing to consider is that just because we CAN contact each other in multiple ways doesn’t necessarily mean we should. Being “a front door guest” means choosing one primary way of communicating and designating that the “front door;” Meeks believes this is a move which “...create[s] a classroom culture that respects the boundaries between community space and personal space” (scr. 11 par. 2).

This is, perhaps, the most “practical” of the articles that I read, in that it graphs the very real social and physical difficulties of teaching in a laptop classroom and takes the reader through ways of dealing with these problems. Despite my take on this, it could also be argued that this is an ethnographic study, and one that is highly theoretical, because Meeks does tie this physical exploration back to pedagogy, defined here as “...an ethical act, a series of choices from a position of institutional power that situates self, students, and resources according to one’s own sense of what is right and good and useful

within the classroom” (scr. 1 par. 3). Meeks explains that she had to expand her conception of “pedagogy” because “...the lenses through which we have learned to notice pedagogy are inadequate and sometimes inappropriate for wireless spaces” (scr. 1 par. 3). Her explorations of the very real physical and social concerns that come with teaching in a wireless laptop classroom require a pedagogical shifts which:

- ...account for ownership, for the ways in which students are marked by ownerships, and for the ways in which students mark their ownership
- ...negotiate space differently...
- ...establish a classroom culture that is ethically sensitive by thoughtfully anticipating and responding to needs, by intentionally developing a shared language, and by respectfully behaving as a front door guest (scr. 1 par. 4).

There are many possible themes within the journals I selected. I chose to focus on issues of teaching with technology because I believe, all too frequently, we are seduced by new toys without considering exactly what it is we want to the toy to help us do as teachers and learners. I found these articles to be a nice mix of theory and application, providing pedagogical explorations as well as more “nuts and bolts” advice on when, how, and why we use technology as a teaching tool.

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