**Multimodal Response and Writing as Poetry Experience**

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**Introduction**

Acknowledging poetry as arguably the oldest literary genre in human history, it is intriguing to juxtapose some of the oldest texts with some of the newest technologies. Recent research has begun to examine approaches to teaching poetry that embrace *either* response *or* authorship merged with new technologies (See, for example, Bailey, 2009; George, 2002; Jewitt, 2005; Hughes & John, 2009; McVee, Bailey, & Shanahan, 2008; Pappas & Varelas, 2009; Reilly, 2008; Wissman, 2009). This chapter explores the integration of technology with *both* response to poetry and authorship of poetic works as a means to enrich English classroom experiences. In our view, important work in this arena must not use technological tools for the sake of using technology in the classroom, but, rather, for the sake of enriching literary experiences. We also believe that any effort to teach writing must also include aspects of responding to mentor texts. Ultimately, by connecting response, authorship, and multimodal technologies, the teaching of poetry may be enhanced by the teaching of 21st century literacy skills— and vice versa. Toward these ends, we share opportunities for intertwining multimodal text with the teaching of poetry to enrich literacy and literary experience in middle and high school classrooms.

What do multimodal and digital information afford to the student and teacher with regard to responding to and writing poetry? In this chapter, we present findings from a research study that was conducted in a high school English classroom. The research helped us identify and evaluate the pedagogical affordances that technology lends to reading and writing poetry. This work, which has been tested by pre-service and in-service public school teachers, reflects an ongoing exploration of theory, research, and practice by the authors (PhDs and university professors in Literacy, English Education, Curriculum and Instruction, and Educational Technology, who are all former public school teachers).

**Theoretical Perspectives**

This section captures and shares the introspection on the part of the authors, as we worked with and expanded our own thinking on the theory and practice associated with this work. The rich theory and research that informed the work relied in part on that which informs writing and literature instruction. However, the evolving nature and constant state of flux of multimodal literacy practices led us to consider additional theoretical perspectives as we reflected critically on our findings. Though we based our initial research on the tenets of Rosenblatt’s transactional theory (1938/1995; 1978) and on the theory, ethics, and philosophy of Bakhtin (1981), we also relied on perspectives arising from the abundance of work on multimedia, design, and visual literacies (Rose & Meyer, 2002; New London Group, 1996; Alvermann, 2002). Thus, we ultimately aimed to define multimodal poetry as it is enriched by the interweaving of theoretical perspectives from the realms of literature, literacy, and technology.

**Transactional Theory**

Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of literary work (1938/1995; 1978) diverges from the New Critical perspective that readers examine texts in order to extract "the meaning." Rosenblatt states that during transactions with literary texts, readers draw on past and present literary and life experience to create meaning and posits that “'[t]he poem’ comes into being in the live circuit set up between the reader and 'the text’” (1978, p. 14). Faced with traditional curricular and new high stakes testing requirements, today's literacy educators are pressured by technology’s promise to expand the repertoire of students' literacy experiences. At this juncture, Rosenblatt’s theory offers an important reminder that regardless of, and perhaps even because of increased pressures, it is the role of the teacher to "foster fruitful... transactions" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 26) between readers and *all kinds of texts*. Transactional theory also highlights the active, recursive, and multifaceted nature of reading and response, creating a model of classroom reading that values students’ initial responses as a significant first step in meaning negotiation toward mature, considered responses (Rosenblatt, 1938/1995, 1978; Probst, 2004). In our research study, students selected multimodal content from the Internet and used it to negotiate meaning with poetry. Our work serves to complicate and enrich the meaning-making dynamic while appealing to students’ fast-paced, Internet- and image-filled lives outside of the classroom.

Bridging Rosenblatt’s theory with 21st-Century technologies, McEneaney (2003) explored hypertext as rooted in transactional theory, suggesting that “[a] transactional view of text structure... requires us to reject the notion of structure as a property of text in the same way [the transactional] theory rejects the notion that meaning is a property of text” (p. 273). As students make meaning from today's variety of texts, they transact linearly, laterally, and unsystematically— not only with words but also with infinite combinations of images, sounds, and videos (Kress, 2003). Thus, today’s teachers must not only help students respond to text but also must acknowledge that when students transact with literary texts, they do more than establish a “live circuit”: they add new transistors and switches (McVerry, 2007). These hypertext environments require our teachers and students to rapidly and repeatedly redefine what it means to be able to read, write, and communicate effectively.

**New Literacies**

New Literacies is a framework for understanding shifts in literacy due to digital technologies, but there is some variety in how scholars define the term. Some focus on new skills, strategies, and dispositions necessary to comprehend online texts (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004); others examine emerging Discourses (Gee, 2005b); and, others look at semiotic contexts (Kress, 2003; Labbo, 1996) that cause a divergence into multiliteracies, a view of literacy that extends traditional language-based approaches (New London Group, 1996). With diverse perspectives brought to bear, it can be argued that the only constant is change (Leu, 2002; Leu & Kinzer, 2000). Accordingly, many scholars who adopt a New Literacies perspective necessarily examine changes in social practices surrounding literacy events— specifically, the implications of shifts in the “space” and “stuff” of learning. Lankshear and Knobel (2003) argue that the Internet has led to new “spaces” because communities of practice are no longer limited by physical space, while shifts in the “stuff” of learning call attention to digital commodities that have no physical attributes.

We were drawn to New Literacies theory as we witnessed students write themselves into their work and the world. In fact, it was clear through our research and subsequent exploratory projects that readers and writers fashion identity and express the self through literacy practices (Tierney, 2009). The student-poets we studied were involved in “design” (New London Group, 1996); they were meaning-makers engaged in “an active and dynamic process… not something governed by static rules” (p. 74). Introducing multimodality into reading and writing poetry, we explored new engagements that allow students to discover, build, and reinforce their understandings, agency, and expression.

**Chronotopes and Carnival**

Viewing our work through both the lenses of transactional theory and New Literacies led us to focus less on the individual writer and more on contextual and situated elements of the writing process. Specifically, our investigations interweaving technology and poetry suggest that pathways to understanding and self-expression are not constrained by time and space. Response and authorship with new and old media necessarily involve drawing upon one’s reservoir of life and literary experience (Rosenblatt, 1993). We consider our work a microcosm of the debate over meshing old and new tools and practices across time and space and accordingly work to resist dichotomies (Moje, 2009, p. 359).

To discuss time/space in English classrooms, we drew on Bakhtin’s notion of *chronotope* (Bakhtin, 1981; Brown & Renshaw, 2006; Hirst, 2004) with which he explained the inseparability of time and space in literacy acts. Chronotopes are “organizing centers for significant events” that recognize learning is not a stable or fixed process (Brown & Renshaw, 2006, p. 249). Viewing students’ “participation… as a situated, dynamic process constituted through the interaction of past experience, ongoing involvement, and yet-to-be-accomplished goals” (Brown & Renshaw, 2006, p. 249) allowed us to appropriate Rosenblattian (1993) theory within the context of multimodal literacy events and digital spaces. We argue that the transformative nature of technology, specifically the Internet, has made the interdependence of time and space more significant.

We are in a time when, as part of their adolescent lives, students build texts—connecting the past, present, and future—at breakneck speeds. Their “text” choices are no longer limited to traditional classrooms and libraries. We purport that, specifically in responding to poetry, students espouse a carnivalesque spirit (Bakhtin, 1981, Faust, Cockrill, Hancock, & Isserstedt, 2005; Fecho & Botzakis, 2007), freely connecting, associating, and letting loose, so to speak, before harnessing considered responses. Similarly, in discussing and adjusting images, color, font, and words, and working to express their identity in poetry, students enjoy a writer’s playground that fertilizes adolescent voices. Labbo’s (1996) compelling multi-leveled metaphor characterized as “screenland,” describes this sort of place for discovery and invention. Her research suggests that student stances toward computers influence the symbols they create; these become a “personal record, or memory of that experience” (p. 380): a Rosenblattian tapestry stitched with threads of the carnivalesque. We similarly embrace Hirst’s (2004) implication that chronotopes such as “old space,” “theater,” or “adventure-time” can explain classroom practices.

Our research study portrays a “screenland-like” playground for meaning negotiation with students moving from canonical poems to the Internet, back to text interpretation, to multimodal authoring. Overall, our findings suggest means to empower students to step out of “traditional English language arts land” into a mediating, potentially empowering place. Herein, multimodal response and authoring tools not only shape understandings and fuel agency but also may begin to reshape notions of English language arts in general, and, in particular, reduce fear and loathing of poetry (Faust & Dressman, 2009, p.130).

**Research Questions**

This study employed a qualitative research design that examined the knowledge, skills, and dispositions students’ employ as they include elements of multimodal response and writing as a means to experience poetry. In the study that launched our exploration of poetry and technology we asked two questions:

1. In composing multimodal responses to poetry, what happens to understandings when students identify key words and use Internet images to represent tone and negotiate meaning?

2. In authoring poetry, what happens to self-expression when students use multimedia technologies and Internet images to compose multimodal extended metaphor poems?

**Methods and Procedures**

Our methods of data collection developed from a desire to examine potential commonalities across two different poetry activities: one focusing on response, the other on writing. The study design allowed us to employ inductive practices (Merriam, 2009; Thomas, 2006) that focus in particular on thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006) and search for themes in a nonhierarchical manner, “giving fluidity to the themes and emphasizing the interconnectivity” (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 389). We chose thematic networks as our main tool in analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

**Participants and Setting**

University researchers conducted the study in an 11th grade Honors English class at a public high school in the Northeast U.S.. Participants included 18 students: 11 males and 7 females, all Caucasian. We chose this purposeful sample as an outgrowth of prior professional conversations between one researcher and the classroom teacher. Through ongoing dialogue, the English teacher had expressed dismay toward traditional activities that turned students off to poetry. As a poetry buff, however, he personally valued close reading. To explore this paradox, he was eager to experiment with new methods for teaching both response to and authorship of poetry that involve students’ close work with an expanded view of “text” to include visual, digital, and other multimodal formats (Rose & Meyer, 2002; New London Group, 2000).

**Poetry Activities**

With an eye to minimally disrupting classroom routine and targeting “regular” curricular objectives, we consulted with the classroom English teacher who, in large part, designed and implemented the activities for a weeklong poetry unit. The unit consisted of two activities: one focusing on nontraditional modes of response to canonical poems, the other on authorship of multimodal extended metaphor poems. The activities intertwined, with the response activity implemented on days one and three and authorship the focus of days two and four. Day five was a celebration of learning in the form of a Poets’ Café. Each of the first four days, one of the researchers observed and took field notes; two researchers were present on day five.

**Response activity: A Focus on tone.** The response activity aimed at representing tone and understanding poetry through use of images found on the Internet. The teacher designed this activity based on theoretical underpinnings of Rosenblatt’s transactional theory (1978). Acknowledging that any “valid” response to literature must begin with students’ initial responses, the activity relied on a simple model of *response to text over time—* moving students from a poem, to an initial response, through negotiation of meaning, and, finally, to a considered response (Probst, 2004; Rosenblatt, 1938/1995).

Each group was assigned a different poem (by Frost, Whitman, Williams, or Angelou). The teacher asked a representative from each group to read their poem aloud. Then, with the goal of capturing students’ initial responses as a point of entry (Probst, 2004), the teacher directed students to reread their poems and “free write” for three to five minutes. Next, he introduced “tone” through a quotation from Donald Murray (2005, p. 50) and dramatized a series of examples offered by this renowned scholar of writing instruction. Students then received “tone charts” on which they listed 10-12 words or phrases that they felt contributed to the overall tone of their poem. For homework, students used tone chart words and phrases as online search terms to find images at “safe sites.” Means to search keywords and select images was left wide open to student interpretation, with the expectation that some students might orient themselves linearly or literally, while others might use the Internet as “an interesting metaphor machine” (McVee, Bailey, & Shanahan, 2008, p. 123). Students printed out images at home or in school and had the option of sending them via email for the teacher to print.

Working individually at group tables, students created “image tableaus” on newsprint (See Figures 1 and 2). Directed to choose five or six “best images,” they arranged pictures in a manner that might help them understand and represent the meaning—in particular, the tone—of the poem. In groups, students then discussed tableaus with regard to expectation, choice, surprise elicited through Internet searches, and reasons for placement and arrangement.

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Insert Figure 1 About Here

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*Figure 1.* Image tableau for “When I heard the Learn’d Astronomer” by Walt Whitman.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Insert Figure 2 About Here

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*Figure 2.* Image tableau for “Between Walls” by William Carlos Williams

Finally, students wrote two-part considered responses. Students first re-read their poems and wrote a paragraph in response to the prompt: “What, now, does the poem mean to you? How, if at all, does the tone of the poem affect your reaction or understanding?” After reviewing their initial free-writes, students wrote a second paragraph comparing their *initial response* with their *considered response*,incorporating perceptions about how creation and discussion of image tableaus helped them understand the poem.

**Authoring activity: Extended metaphor poems***.* Participating in a poetry activity inspired by Brooks and Mabry’s (2008) “A Matter of Identity” and the poem “Identity” by Julio Noboa Polanco, student-participants explored identity as expressed through extended metaphors and multimodal composition. Using graphic organizers and examples from their own lives, students mimicked how the *narrator* of Polanco’s poem (the source) is compared to a *weed* (the target), thus representing aspects of their own identity in extended metaphor. Next, the class met in a computer laboratory, so students could draft, revise, and embellish multimedia extended metaphor poems, using Microsoft Powerpoint as a tool for multimodal composition. In addition to writing the text and considering font, color, and layout, students were to directed use Internet search engines to find a background image for their poem (see Figures 3 and 4). Though each student authored a poem, the computer lab setting was conducive to collaboration.

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Insert Figure 3 About Here

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*Figure 3.*  My Mind, a student authored multimedia piece.

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Insert Figure 4 About Here

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*Figure 4.* Dance Routine, a student authored multimedia piece.

**Data Sources**

We collected a variety of data sets across participants. We reduced the fallibility of any one artifact and increased both the credibility and quality of findings through triangulation of data sources, observers, and theories (Denzin, 1989). Employing partner researchers, we analyzed data sets independently and then revisited and reworked them collaboratively, attempting to “make substantial strides in overcoming the skepticism that greets singular methods, lone analysts, and single-perspective interpretations” (Patton, 2002, p. 556). Data sources used in analysis included student artifacts (i.e., free-write, tone chart, image tableau, considered response, extended metaphor graphic organizer, extended metaphor poem); field observations from the researchers; and teacher planning materials/notes.

**Student artifacts.** Student artifacts served as our main data source. We collected and analyzed 17 initial free-write responses and 15 tone charts. Fifteen participants contributed completed image tableaus to our data, and an additional student submitted a collection of unassembled images. We also collected and analyzed 15 two-part considered responses—all of which were paired with an initial response—allowing us to compare initial and considered responses during coding. We collected 13 graphic organizers, 14 polished, multimodal extended metaphor poems, and one poem text-only. The inconsistency in number of collected artifacts reflects naturalistic conditions of classroom research, wherein tardies, absences, and missing homework inevitably affect data gathering.

**Field observations***.* To record and illuminate actions, decisions, discourse, and products seemingly evidenced in student artifacts, we recorded five days of field observations. Each day, one of us observed research activity (conducted as part of normal classroom routine) and gathered condensed field notes. On the fifth day two researchers gathered field notes. We transformed condensed notes into expanded field notes that included observations and reflections represented in T-table format. T-table entries ranged from attention to classroom atmosphere, to teacher style, to direct quotations from students and teacher. We shared T-tables and thus bolstered the research with a duet of perspectives. Field notes were member-checked with the teacher to be sure he approved of our record of timeline, intention, and sentiment (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Teacher materials and notes.**As an additional data source, we collected formal and informalteacher planning materials, including lesson plans and notes, some scribbled during lessons or debriefing with the researchers in preparation for the next class. Though these artifacts were few, they allowed us to observe differences between what actually unfolded during the natural course of classroom events versus what we knew had been planned. Complementing reflections gleaned from field notes, this type of comparison provided insights into the nature of this particular classroom’s culture as well as glimpses into the teacher’s pedagogical style and philosophy.

**Data Analysis**

The purpose of our inductive data analysis was fourfold. We worked to: (a) transform extensive, varied data into codes and categories; (b) identify connections between the data and the research questions (Thomas, 2006); (c) develop themes (Merriam, 1999) through use of thematic networks (Attride-Stirling, 2001); and (d) “take the key conceptual findings in …each thematic network, and pool them together into a cohesive story” (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 402) that might explain the role images and multimodality play in the response to and authorship of poetry.

We wanted to explore whether or not the response/tone activity affected the authorship activity and vice versa; and, we needed to explain differences in student attitudes and aptitudes that affected overall learning. Thus, we needed an analysis tool that could examine non-hierarchical, non-causal relationships that would better communicate what happened for students during the teaching/learning experience as a whole.

We chose thematic network analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001), which maps a six-step journey from data through analysis to findings. As an explicit and effective means to unify what was communicated through various data sets, thematic network analysis allowed us to “unearth the themes salient in a text at different levels, and… facilitate[d] the structuring and depiction of these themes” (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 387). Working inward from basic to global themes, we were ultimately able to identify key conceptual findings in the summaries of each network and weave them into a cohesive story related to the research questions and theoretical grounding of our study (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Boyatzis, 1998; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

First we worked to reduce the data (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Accordingly, two researchers coded large chunks of text across all data sets and reexamined the codes based on theoretical underpinnings of the research questions. This process led to an initial list of 80 raw codes (See Table 1), which we recorded in table format reflecting frequency of occurrence.

Table 1

*Initial Raw Codes Used in Data Analysis*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Initial Code | Frequency:  Coder 1 | Frequency:  Coder 2 |
| Summarize | 5 | 8 |
| Process helped | 2 | 2 |
| Identifying Words help | 3 | 3 |
| Critique | 15 | 19 |
| Stuck to questions posed | 1 | 1 |
| Searching for images improved understanding | 3 | 2 |
| Images did not help | 3 | 3 |
| Noticed imagery | 3 | 2 |
| Took notes | 1 |  |
| Connection to peer | 1 | 1 |
| Identified main idea | 5 |  |
| Noticed change in meaning | 4 | 1 |
| Used direct quotes | 6 | 8 |
| Noticed time had an effect on meaning | 1 | 2 |
| Discussion helped | 4 | 4 |
| Looked for deeper meaning | 3 | 1 |
| Inference |  | 4 |
| Impact of poem | 1 |  |
| Activities improved understanding of poem | 2 | 2 |
| Change in tone based on activity | 2 | 3 |
| Identity | 4 | 5 |
| Personal connection | 3 | 4 |
| Consequences |  | 1 |
| Rereading | 4 | 4 |
| Identity as a writer |  | 3 |
| Free write and considered response are same | 2 | 2 |
| Free write and considered response are different | 2 | 4 |
| Change in attitude about poetry | 1 | 1 |
| Opinion of poetry | 2 | 2 |
| Enjoyed poem | 2 | 3 |
| Disliked poem | 1 | 1 |
| Gender | 2 | 2 |
| Discussion of Tone | 6 | 8 |
| Tone changed understanding | 2 | 3 |
| Tableau did not help | 1 | 1 |
| Tableau helped | 2 | 3 |
| Poems contain meaning | 1 | 1 |
| Makes personal meaning | 1 | 2 |
| Poet is narrator | 1 | 1 |
| Follows directions | 1 | 2 |
| Visualizes | 1 | 2 |
| Intertextual Connections | 1 | 1 |
| Personal response | 1 | 2 |
| Move to deeper understanding |  | 2 |
| Creative Alternate Interpretation | 2 | 5 |
| Recognizes multiple meaning |  | 1 |
| Asked questions | 4 | 5 |
| Theme  -going against norm  -life decisions  -control destiny  -sexual  -human nature/condition  -freedom captivity  -invidual vs conformity | 7 | 9 |
| Connects to poetry | 2 | 2 |
| Connects to other poetry | 2 | 2 |
| Researchers infer change/student doesn’t | 4 | 5 |
| Off task comment |  | 1 |
| Recognizes symbols | 4 | 6 |
| Uses poetic language | 1 |  |

*Note.* Codes included represent 60 out of 80 raw codes.

Next we derived basic themes from the codes (Attride-Stirling, 2001). As we identified basic themes, we made sure that each was discrete enough but also encapsulated multiple text segments across all data. From our initial codes, we developed a list of 26 basic themes (See Table 2).

Table 2

*Basic Themes of Codes Used in Analysis of Data*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *Codes* | *Issues Discussed* | *Basic Themes* |
| Reading strategies | Summarizes | 1. Readers employ a variety of strategies to understand poems. |
|  | Identifies main idea | 2. There is not *one way* to read a poem. |
|  | Uses direct quotes | 3. Students recognize formal elements to respond to poetry. |
|  | Re-reads |  |
|  | Visualizes |  |
|  | Asks questions |  |
|  | Makes inferences |  |
|  | Takes notes while reading |  |
|  | Responds personally |  |
|  |  |  |
| Critiquing Poem | Recognizes symbols | 4. Reader’s life experience influences meaning. |
| Responding to poetry | Critiques poem | 5. There are multiple layers of meaning. |
|  | Looks for deeper meaning | 6. Epistemological beliefs influence meaning. |
|  | Makes personal meaning |  |
|  | Uses poetic language in response | 7. Meaning located in text vs. transaction. |
|  | Creates alternative meaning |  |
|  | Recognizes multiple meaning |  |
|  | Responds to poem |  |
|  | Poems contain meaning |  |
|  | Poet is narrator |  |
|  |  |  |
| Effect of learning activities | Moves to deeper understanding | 8. Effect of activities varies across groups. |
| Images | Process helped | 9. Effect of activities varied across students. |
| Tone | Searching for images improved understanding | 10. Some activities had more effect that others. |
| Keyword search | Searching for images did not help | 11. Prior opinion of poetry may have influenced effect of activities. |
| Negotiates meaning over time | Noticed a change in meaning | 12. Some students didn’t recognize evidence of change. |
|  | Discussion helped |  |
|  | Activities improved understanding of poem |  |
|  | Tableau helped |  |
|  | Tableau did not help |  |
|  | Change in tone based on activity |  |
|  | Free write and considered response are the same |  |
|  | Researchers infer change/student doesn’t |  |
|  | Free write and considered response are the different |  |
|  | Placement helped |  |
|  | Responds to prompt |  |
|  |  |  |
| Agency | Nature/condition | 13. Students use poetry to explore identity |
| Theme | Life decisions | 14. Students use poetry as a form of expression. |
| Identity | Going against norm | 15. Students interests cluster around typical adolescent concerns. |
|  | Control destiny |  |
|  | Sexuality |  |
|  | Freedom vs. captivity |  |
|  | Individual vs. conformity |  |
|  | Gender |  |
|  | Identity as writer |  |
|  | True Self |  |
|  |  |  |
| Connections | Connections to peer | 16. Intertextual connections affect meaning |
|  | Intertextual connections | 17. Students incorporate “their worlds” into meaning making. |
|  | Pop-culture |  |
|  | Personal connections |  |
|  | Connects to poem |  |
|  | Connects to other poems |  |
|  | Hobbies |  |
|  | Family and friends |  |
|  |  |  |
| Poetry | Change in attitude about poetry | 18. Students can engage positively with poetry. |
|  | Opinion of poetry | 19. Students may have a negative predisposition to poetry. |
|  | Enjoyed poem |  |
|  | Disliked poem |  |
|  | Personal impact of poem |  |
|  |  |  |
| Classroom structure | In class technology | 20. Teaching style and approaches can affect student engagement with poetry. |
| Teacher attitude | Teacher professionalism | 21. Affective education is pertinent to response and authorship of poetry. |
| Technology and curriculum | Alternative teaching methods | 22. New technologies offer approachable pathways to poetry. |
|  | Informal atmosphere | 23. Nonverbocentric modes offer new entries into poetry |
|  | Respect |  |
|  | Instructional approaches to poetry |  |
|  | Reference to research |  |
|  | Relevance as teaching method |  |
|  | Student Centered |  |
|  | Encouraging self esteem |  |
|  | Stresses process |  |
|  | Didactic |  |
|  | Seriousness of purpose |  |
|  | Technology as invisible |  |
|  |  |  |
| Authorship | Design elements | 24. Composition instruction must acknowledge new technology. |
| Writing Process | Multimodal | 25. Authors are not islands; they seek collaborations. |
|  | Collaboration as writers | 26. Technology may change the authorship process. |
|  | Repetition |  |
|  | Writing questions |  |
|  | Uses extended metaphor |  |
|  | Searches for images before writing |  |
|  | Doesn’t use graphic organizer |  |
|  | Makes own organizer |  |

Our next step in data reduction was to organize the basic themes by clustering them into organizing themes. Finally, these organizing themes were gathered into global themes to better understand the complexity of student responses as represented by the data (See Table 3) used in analysis of the data (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

Table 3

*Global Themes Organized from Clusters of Basic Themes*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *Basic Themes* | *Organizing Themes* | *Global Themes* |
| 1. Readers employ a variety of strategies to understand poems. | Inherent flexibility in reading strategies | Meaning making is a negotiation that encompasses time and space. |
| 2. There is not *one way* to read a poem. |  |  |
| 3. Students recognize formal elements to respond to poetry. |  |  |
| 4. Readers’ life experience influence meaning. | Reader and meaning are related |  |
| 5. There are multiple layers of meaning. |  |  |
| 6. Epistemological beliefs influence meaning. |  |  |
| 7. Meaning located in text vs. transaction. |  |  |
| 16. Intertextual connections affect meaning making. | Connections affect meaning making |  |
| 17. Students incorporate “their worlds” into meaning making |  |  |
|  |  |  |
| 18. Students can engage with positively with poetry. | Predispositions to poetry affect meaning-making |  |
| 19. Students may have a negative pre-disposition to poetry. |  |  |
|  |  |  |
| 8. Effect of activities varied across groups. | Effect of learning activities varied | Multimodal, non-verbocentic teaching approaches affect student engagement |
| 9. Effect of activities varied across students. |  |  |
| 10. Some activities had more effect than others. |  |  |
| 11. Prior opinion of poetry may have influence effect of activities. | Perception of effect of learning activities varied |  |
| 12. Some students didn’t recognize evidence of change while researchers did. |  |  |
| 20. Teaching style and approaches can effect student engagement with poetry | Teaching approaches determine level of engagement |  |
| 21. Affective education is pertinent in response to and authorship of poetry |  |  |
| 22. New technologies offer approachable pathways to poetry. |  |  |
| 23. Non-verbocentric modes offer new entries into poetry. |  |  |
|  |  |  |
| 13. Students use poetry to explore identity. | Avenue for adolescent expression | Technology and authorship are identity toolkits |
| 14. Students use poetry as tool for expression. |  |  |
| 15. Student interests cluster around typical adolescent concerns. |  |  |
| 25. Composition instruction must acknowledge new technologies. | Technology affects authorship |  |
| 26. Authors are not islands; they seek collaborations |  |  |
| 27. Technology may change the authorship process. |  |  |

Once the global themes were derived, we created visual representations of the data process, which placed the global theme at the center of the web with corresponding organizing and basic themes as offshoots (Attride-Stirling, 2001). We then returned to our data sets and reread them through the lenses of our global, organizing, and basic themes. With the goal of transforming the networks into “not only a tool for the researcher, but also for the reader” (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 393), we worked to include text segments and other examples from original transcripts to support our analysis.

**Findings**

The findings from this foundational study were representative of responses in student work product. The findings were important as they helped us identify the salient themes across all data. The three themes presented in this section were later used to guide work conducted by all three authors in subsequent classroom explorations of multimodal response and writing as a means to experience poetry.

**Theme One: Meaning Making is a Negotiation that Encompasses Time and Space**

Meaning making is a negotiation that does not exist in one person, one text, one moment, or one space; it is an idiosyncratic transaction between reader and text that reaches through time and space (Rosenblatt, 1978; 1938/1995). The first thematic network illustrates that meaning negotiation with poetry encompasses four organizing themes: *Flexible strategy use*, *Predispositions to poetry*, *Connections a reader makes*, and the *Relationship between reader orientation and meaning*. See Figure 5 for a visual representation of our thematic analytical tool.

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Insert Figure 5 About Here

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*Figure 5.*  Thematic Network constructed around Global Theme #1

**Flexible strategy use.** In order to write a multimodal response to their poems, students flexibly and independently employed a variety of reading strategies. Evidenced through free-writes, considered responses, and reflections, these strategies included summarizing, rereading, and visualizing (e.g., Fisher & Frey, 2012, Bomer, 2008, Beers, 2003; Tovani, 2004). For example, one male participant summarized Angelou’s “Impeccable Conception” upfront, with the main idea: “This poem talks about the inspiration and the passion of a poet,” whereas another male student noted using a rereading strategy: “I found myself jumping back to previous lines in each verse, sort of trying to get a feeling of the whole rather than recalling only disjunctive fragments.” Other strategies included students visualizing and “hearing” words during reading; a reader of Whitman “pictured the scene, a bored young man in a lecture hall…” and, responding to Williams another wrote, “When I read [my poem] in my head it sounded so different from when it was read aloud.”

**Predispositions to poetry affect meaning making.**Expressing a positive predisposition to poetry, a male student clarified atypical boredom with “his” particular poem: “And this is NOT because I dislike poetry. In fact, I love poetry, and I enjoy writing it myself.” Another male student expressed a negative predisposition to poetry, calling it “meaningless words on a piece of paper that people overanalyze to whatever suits their fancy on that particular day.” Our data evidenced interesting findings with regard to these students’ predispositions.

The first “positively predisposed” student showed expected mature engagement with Angelou’s text; he questioned why the poet is specified as a woman and wondered about potential sexual overtones in the pants/romance rhyme. However, he later concluded that, “writing poetry about writing poetry is dumb.” Contrast between this colloquial language and the student’s initial sophisticated critique suggests that distaste for the poem influenced his interest in meaning making, despite his positive predisposition. The second student, whose predisposition suggests he would *not* expect to find “deep meaning” through poetry, expressed a compelling transaction with “Between Walls,” exploring the repeated use of the words “might,” “may,” and “maybe.” He also used what we characterized as poetic language in his own writing: “…feathers stop growing, the only thing that remains is a remembrance of what used to be, that reflect/refract the sun’s broken rays, pieces of a green bottle…” Furthermore, as shown in Figure 2, his image tableau showed an eclectic choice of images, attention to detail, and deliberate placement, suggesting that this student was clearly working to make meaning, despite his “declared” predisposition that poetry can be meaningless.

Thus, it appears that a positive predisposition can be derailed, and a negative or neutral predisposition can be channeled toward fruitfulness. These two students suggest that predispositions to poetry can act as a switch in the live circuit of meaning making, depending upon pedagogical context, a finding echoed elsewhere in the data.

**Connections affect meaning making.** Personal and intertextual connections (e.g., Keene & Zimmermann, 1997) were expressed through virtually all image tableaus, with the definition of “text” broadened beyond the traditional.One male student connected the theme of the Whitman poem to *Catcher in the Rye,* offering that both texts include “a non-conformist who learns in non-conventional ways,” while another included both van Gogh’s *Starry Night* and Munch’s *The Scream* on his image tableau (as shown in Figure 1). Expressing distaste for Angelou’s “stupid poem,” another made reference to outside texts declaring he preferred the intrigue and mystery of Edgar Allen Poe, naming specifically “The Raven” and “The Bells.” Another intertextual connection emerged during authoring, when a student began his poem with an Anne Bronte title: “Vanitas Vanitatum, Omnia Vanitas.” Still other students connected idiosyncratically; about “Between Walls,” a girl wrote, “The back wings of the hospital…reminded me of angel wings,” while a boy wrote that a rhyme he found “weird” was “like something [classmate] would say. He’s weird too.”

Use of the Internet also consistently connected students to popular culture—an aspect of their world outside the classroom. Keyword searches led to images of characters from “Peanuts,” popular bands such as “My Chemical Romance,” and (given that the last stanza of “Impeccable Conception” includes the line “then hurry home to be alone”) a familiar mug shot from the movie “Home Alone.” Students also sought popular culture images as background for student-authored poems; notably, one student spent over 15 minutes searching for a man with a lantern and ultimately chose an image from “Phantom of the Opera.” These connections exemplified the Internet as “an interesting metaphor machine” (McVee, Bailey, & Shanahan, 2008, p. 123), leaving meaning negotiation open to the effects of connections serendipitous and deliberate, intertextual and personal, with meaning making threaded through time and space.

**Reader and meaning are related.**In many cases, students intentionally sought deep, multiple layers of meaning as they wrote multimodal responses; in other instances, it appeared meaning making was primarily influenced by the readers’ epistemological beliefs. Furthermore, though location of meaning on a reader to text continuum was in question, readers’ unique life experiences that spanned time and space clearly influenced meaning making.

Many students dug for multiple layers of meaning. Whereas a typical response to “When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer” might praise alternatives to lecture-based learning, one boy wandered outside the box, “Was this poem about an astronomer’s wife that knew he was dead or ‘away up in the stars?’” and another bored through layers to conclude that the poem “can be directly related to finding true love…true love may be similar because the journey for finding love teaches us more knowledge than after love is found.”

Meaning making was also influenced by epistemological beliefs. One male student’s recursive written discussion about “Impeccable Conception” echoed elements of his personal epistemology: “This poem is exactly the same as the senseless poem it is talking about…It is about a meaningless subject… and talks about nothing, and makes no conclusions. However, because I was able to connect with it so well, I rather enjoyed the poem… [It] is very ironic.” Handed a “considered response” worksheet, another student argued, “What if I don’t think [the poem] means anything? Why can’t it be literal? Not everything is allegorical.”

**Theme Two: Multimodal, Non-verbocentric Teaching Approaches Affect Student Engagement**

The second thematic network describes how alternative approaches to teaching poetry—specifically, the use of Internet images in meaning negotiation and multiple modalities in authorship— can influence student engagement. Through two organizing themes, *Effects of learning activities varied* and *Multimodal teaching approaches determine level of engagement,* we describe student engagement across groups. See Figure 6 for a visual representation of our analytical tool.

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Insert Figure 6 About Here

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*Figure 6.*  Thematic Network constructed around Global Theme #2

**Varying effect of learning activities*.*** Small group discussion of assigned poems and whole-class discussion of Polanco’s poem “Identity” were considered to be the most successful pedagogical tools. Students wrote that discussions “allowed me hear what others perceived,” “opened my eyes to other possibilities,” and “sparked me to think more and draw my own conclusions.” Of all activities, students commented most on discussion (an activity that clearly requires a high level of student engagement) as catalyst toward understanding. Of students who mentioned the effect of discussion, none said that discussion *did not* help.

Identifying and searching for key words helped students compose multimodal responses but played out variously across participants and groups. Students reported that identifying key words helped them “notice that certain words contribute to the poem more” or understand better “because when words and phrases are separated, it is easier to interpret their meaning.” Ten out of the eighteen students commented on how either identifying words, collecting Internet images, or placing images on the tableaus *did* change their understanding of the poem. This finding was substantiated further through our own analysis of initial and considered responses.

Field observations support our finding that the tableau activity influenced engagement. After reading Whitman, one student noted that the narrator was getting bored with the lecture “but when he went outside [under the stars], he appreciated it more.” Seeming to represent an inside-outside dichotomy in his tableau, he *said* that he deliberately placed a particular image “out” and created his tableau accordingly. The same student commented in considered written response that Internet searches “gave me a picture” and the tableau “showed what was important to the writer in the poem.” Therefore, we can say that, across students, multimodal activities promoted student engagement and helped develop sophisticated understandings over time.

**Role of** **multimodal teaching approaches**. Numerous instances suggested that searching for and manipulating Internet images promoted positive student engagement through response to poetry. We witnessed a similar pattern with student authorship. One boy began his poem with the question: “What?” and used the Nike symbol as background. It can be argued that employing the image of a question mark that resembles the Nike symbol combined with the familiar slogan “Just Do It,” this student may have worked toward a multimodal question-and-answer-type expression; moreover, if not, he was clearly otherwise engaged. Another male student made a poignant observation that those activities that involved technology “almost forced me to approach [poetry] from new and differing ‘angles’ in order that I could derive a fuller and more comprehensive understanding.” The same student used technology to draw on popular culture, choosing and elaborating on an image representing the band “My Chemical Romance.” He explained use of this image: “I took this poem to mean the opposite of romance, but I guess that’s the joke, that’s the point.” Thus, technology played a part in engagement both directly and indirectly.

**Theme Three: Technology and Authorship are Identity Toolkits.**

Through two organizing themes, *Avenue for adolescent expression* and *Technology affects authorship,* the third thematic network represents the integration of technology and authorship as a type of identity toolkit (Gee, 2005a). See Figure 7 for a visual representation of our analytical tool.

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*Figure 7.*  Thematic Network constructed around Global Theme #3

**Adolescent expression*.*** Though it is not surprising that adolescent students would use poetry writing as a tool for expression, the extended metaphor poems created during our research, exhibited a degree of self-expression that isn’t typically encountered and applauded in high school classrooms. Echoing Polanco’s opening line “Let them be as flowers,” one female student wrote a poem about childhood that began “Let them grow up” and included the lines “why would I want to forget/ what made me who I am?” Lines written in a simple, pink font and imposed on an image of a young girl donned in pink pants and shoes, spinning a blanket about herself in the grass capture childhood’s essence.

Reflective topics clustered around typical adolescent concerns such as hobbies, destiny, family, and friends. In writing, many students compared themselves to a hobby or sport; personal metaphors included dance, playing in a band, video games, running, and surfing. It appeared that students defined themselves more by what they do rather than who they are. Put another way, they expressed that who you are may be defined by what you do.

Another common theme across extended metaphor poems was a sense of control or lack thereof over one’s life. Herein, a striking gender difference emerged. Male students wrote about being in control or able to change one’s destiny, whereas female students communicated being stuck in routine. One male wrote: “I am a river/ Flowing, twisting, and shaping the land/ Carving a path of my own.” His poem further communicated power either to destroy riverbanks or “meander with the sweet breeze.” Another male student compared himself to a surfboard. Let the waves transport him where they will, he still feels control over the final destination; no matter the conditions, he is able to control the ride into shore. Finally, in the “mY m1nd” poem (See Figure 3), we found a strong sense of being in control of the unknown, as a male student wrote (in “gaming” terminology), “I decide what/ I decide when/ I decide why/ and not you.”

In contrast, any female who touched on destiny or control expressed, through poetry, a desire for more freedom. For example, one girl wrote a poem about a dance routine (See Figure 4). By comparing herself to a structured routine and including a desire for more improvisation, this poet communicated feeling stuck in routine. In another poignant poem, a female student saw herself as the town inside a snow globe, set upon a mantelpiece (See Figure 8). Here, images, fonts, text, and color work together, for a compelling overall effect; the last stanza is particularly illustrative of the gendered pattern.

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Insert Figure 8 About Here

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*Figure 8.*  Snow Globe, a student authored multimedia piece.

**Technology and authorship***.* Analysis of the relationship between technology and composition processes showed that collaboration was key. We observed various iterations of one student asking “how to do that” and another demonstrating facility with technological tools during the writing process. While composing, two girls leaned toward each other and one tilted her screen to show her “draft.” Field notes evidenced her reading aloud, “My life is a dance routine…I can’t end it…seems kind of…” and another girl broke in, “You need something ‘action-y.” Conversations like these evidenced how working with and around technology may encourage new opportunities for collaboration, influencing authorship in novel ways. Creating such environments may thus hold promise with regard to the teaching of writing.

**Discussion and Instructional Opportunities**

In the study we have detailed in this chapter, student experience was enriched by expanded definitions of response to poetry and authorship of poetic works—through multimodality and the use of 21st century technological tools. Looking for implications and unifying threads that might suggest future steps in our own research and inform other researchers, the authors united in discussion of the initial research, focusing on the three themes that emerged: (1) Meaning making is a negotiation that encompasses time and space, Multimodal, (2) Non-verbocentric teaching approaches affect student engagement, and (3) Technology and authorship are identity toolkits. With regard to poetry experience for secondary students (i.e., meaning negotiation and composition), the findings call for teaching approaches that push on the dimensions of time and space: into students’ personal histories and giving them voice beyond classroom walls. They also suggest that student engagement toward meaning-making and expression may best be achieved with the inclusion of new and multimodalities.

Next steps point toward projects that may assist a larger group of teachers and students to engage in this work. Researchers and teachers also need to develop sophisticated and sensitive strategies to assess work process and product as detailed in this chapter. Finally, as a community of literacy researchers, educators, and students we need to continue to expand our view of “text” and “writing.” As digital media and the socio-communicative backdrop of the Internet increasingly inundate our students, we must provide opportunities in school for them to effectively interact with and write multimodal text. Foremost, our findings suggest that poetry may serve as one agent for adolescent voices to be heard through unique uses of technology. Keeping the results of our research in mind, we challenged ourselves to consider their implications with regard to poetry’s place in today’s classrooms as well as in today’s society. In the next section, we present activities inspired by our research, which could provide students with opportunities to respond to poetry and create multimodal content.

**Exploratory Projects Celebrating U.S. Poet Laureates**

One possible way to enrich the poetry experience through the use of new technologies is through study the works of contemporary U.S. Poet Laureates. This fascination became the impetus for further exploration both in public school classrooms and in pre-service education courses. In this section, we share three ongoing explorations. Each suggested activity highlights authentic uses of technology in middle and high school writing instruction, while embracing the important themes that emerged from the research presented in this chapter.

**W.S. Merwin: Poetry for social justice**. Merwin, as a poet, uses his words for social good; yet he is oftentimes viewed as deeply suspicious of technology. Informed by basic tenets of critical literacy (Freire & Macedo, 1987) and multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000), and expanding upon findings from our research, one possible activity would enable student-authors to use the words of W. S. Merwin to consider issues of social justice in their lives. To spark civic engagement, students could then use their own cellphones to take digital photographs of their surroundings that they believe capture essence of Merwin’s works or other critical societal issues such as pollution, economic disparity, or prejudice. Students could then write and edit text and photographs into short movies incorporating Merwin’s poems as the narration or captions for multimodal products.

This sort of exploration of Merwin’s work reflects Theme One, as students would use cellphones to break down the walls between the school and their own neighborhoods. Elements of technology and authorship would allow students to bridge time and space between elements of Merwin’s work, their own lives, and the typical school climate. In addition, their own photographs would provide non-verbocentric foundations (reflective of Theme Two) for their multimodal compositions.

**Kay Ryan: Twitter and “twitpoems.”** The poems of Kay Ryan have often been described as having a style and wit that is reminiscent of the short staccato communication found in the “microblogging”service known as Twitter. “Their compact refinement, though, does not suggest ease or chic. [Ryan’s] voice is quizzical and impertinent, funny in uncomfortable ways, scuffed by failure and loss.... has some awkwardness in it, some essential gawkiness that draws you close” (Garner, 2010, para. 1). With this project, students could explore the sound, simplicity and depth of Ryan’s poetry by reading and responding to many of her works, including comparing and contrasting these pieces with “twitpoems” found online. Finally, students would author multimodal responses to Kay Ryan’s poetry.

This suggested activity would explore and reinforce the power of Theme Two, as it involves non-traditional, non-verbocentric avenues to engage young poets. Students would develop affinity to and “an ear for” the emerging platform of micro-poetry and reconstruct what it means to compose responses to poetry. Microblogging also represents a means for powerful personal expression in that Tweeting involves choices, styles, and preferences that reinforce the type of identity-shaping practices reflected through Theme three.

**Robert Pinsky: Celebrating the jazz of poems through podcasting**. In line with recent research that suggests that our students are inundated by online and digital media (Lenhart, Madden, & Hitlin, 2005; Jones & Fox, 2009), and in some situations consume over seven hours per day (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010), this suggested activity would include the use of technology as a tool to *limit* the media students consume and create while experiencing poetry. Using audio podcasts, teachers could focus specifically on the lyrical and rhythmic quality of spoken performances of poetry, appreciation of oral tradition, and empowerment/expression through recorded poetic podcasts. In most of Pinsky’s work, he focuses on the rhythmic nature of the words and stanzas of his poetry. With this activity, students would use audio recording and podcasting tools to capture and review performances of the work of the Poet Laureate.

In terms of Theme Two, through this work, students would focus on non-verbocentric approaches to poetry response as a means for engagement. Students would be empowered to act as digital ethnographers, collecting audio evidence of what the words of Pinsky’s work sound to them. The end result is a powerful reconstruction of meaning and social justice inspired by the works of Pinsky. With regard to Theme Three, authorship of multimodal content could be used to represent an identity toolkit, as students are able to produce and present their versions of a poetic performance.

**Implications for Research and Practice**

This work was motivated by a desire to play on the bleeding edge of educational technology use, while maintaining a focus on academic rigor and standards. The focus of our work was poetry, but we view that focus as potentially representative of curricular components in various content areas (Prain & Waldrip, 2006). Our work is important because it can be problematic for students to find an entry point into poetry and engage meaningfully with the words and formats. We believe that the multimodal response and the types of writing explored in this chapter are well suited to assisting students’ experiences with poetry. Additionally, the research findings and associated instructional applications encourage and empower students and teachers to identify and relate with the poets’ creations. The preservice and veteran teachers we collaborated with shared our willingness to work on the fringes of mulitmodal response and writing, as they taught poetry. Teachers and students ultimately were successful in remixing and writing multimodal text as a means to experience and engage with poetry. This work highlights one possible opportunity to rethink and challenge the accepted definitions of literacy instruction, text, and writing in the classroom.

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