Transcending Binaries of Course Delivery: A Transmedia Mindset as Resistance to a Single Standard and a Default Normal

Theresa Evans, Department of English, Miami University (Ohio), mevanstm3@miamioh.edu

Technical Communication & Social Justice, Vol 3, No. 1 (2025), pp. 75-89

Keywords: Composition Pedagogy, Course Modality, Media Ecologies, Transmedia Storytelling, Trans-reality Storytelling

Abstract: Jenkins's (2006) transmedia storytelling is a starting point for re-envisioning the writing course as a transmodal, translingual–and transmedia–ecological system. Blurring course modalities suggest the need to shift to a transmedia mindset for course delivery, regardless of official designation. Transmedia resistance aligns with four forms of translingual and trans-modal resistance described by Horner et al. (2015): the myth of perfect fluency, rejection of technologies, celebration of technologies, and lack of material resources. As transmedia experiences evolve into trans-reality worldbuilding across physical and virtual realities, standardized frameworks should evolve into a network of interactions grounded in pedagogy.

Orcid ID: Theresa Evans, 0000-0003-2130-8971

Author Bio: Theresa Evans is an Associate Teaching Professor in the Department of English at Miami University (Ohio), where she teaches professional and technical writing courses in face-to-face, online, and hybrid environments. An active member of the Global Society of Online Literacy Educators (GSOLE), she has served as conference co-chair since 2021.

© Theresa Evans, Technical Communication & Social Justice Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 75-89

Introduction

The after-effects of remote instruction during the pandemic have led some institutions to fetishize face-to-face classrooms over online and hybrid instruction – even while they also obsess over standardizing course design and monitoring students (and instructors) through learning management systems (LMS), testing systems, and plagiarism detectors. The contradiction often plays out as an expectation that instructors will prepare students for virtual collaboration, hybrid work environments, digital production of communication, and virtual presentation – followed by the demand that writing courses be delivered face to face. Another contradiction is to offer online courses to students, while demanding that instructors commute to campus offices to facilitate the virtual experience.

By "writing courses," I refer to all writing courses, not just courses in first-year composition or courses in technical and professional communication. By starting with the idea of courses as transdisciplinary, I am referencing the work of Gonzales et al. (2020), who argued that disciplines, in this case, technical and professional communication (TPC) and composition, "are defined not as pre-existing entities that relate to one another but rather are constantly being defined through their relationship with one another" (p. 434). Grabill (2020) noted, "We seem to believe that disciplinary or field names and identities explain things, but it seems that disciplines and fields need to be understood again and again" (p. 485). Likewise, as technology shifts, existing and emerging forms of course delivery are no longer self-evident and must be re-examined and redefined through their relationship with one another.

Advances in artificial intelligence do require us to pay more attention to how writing courses are composed and who does the composing; for example, we cannot always be certain that students in on-ground classes are composing in their own words or that the student listed on the online course roster is the individual completing the coursework. Likewise, students in courses using an LMS may confuse the automated system messages with the instructor's feedback, emails, or class announcements. Even worse, students in asynchronous online courses may not be certain whether the instructor responding to their work is a real person or a bot. We can no longer be certain that the rights and privacy of instructors and students are protected if new technologies increasingly allow for recording of classroom and screen activities–whether by institutions or students–without the knowledge or permission of those recorded.

I argue for the need to push back on the mindset that a writing course is a consumable, packaged good, that the delivery of a writing course can be standardized or clearly defined by a discrete medium, and that students channeled through an identical, linear obstacle course will somehow have identical learning experiences. Instead, we should promote a transmedia mindset that defines a writing course as a network of relations and a series of experiences.

A willingness to develop a transmedia mindset starts with understanding the meaning of *transmedia*, a term difficult to define. Moloney (2014) distinguished between *media form* and *media channel* to help clarify terms such as *multimedia*, *cross-media*, and *transmedia*: *Media form* refers to the multimodal languages used to tell a story; *media channel* refers to how stories are reproduced and distributed. Understanding the distinction between form and distribution makes it easier to understand the next layer of definitions that Moloney (2014) provided:

- *Multimedia*: One multimodal story delivered through one channel (e.g., a book or website)
- *Cross-media*: One multimodal story delivered across multiple channels (e.g., one news story reported via radio, television, social media, printed newspapers)
- *Transmedia*: Many multimodal stories delivered across multiple channels, stories which can stand alone and which also contribute to a richer, more expanded understanding of a topic (e.g., stories about a rock band told through recordings, live performances, reviews, music videos, podcast interviews, documentaries, memoirs, fan forums, and official websites).

Based on those definitions, a college writing course appears to fall under the transmedia definition, no matter its official course delivery designation. From a media-ecology perspective, the writing course exists as "a system consisting of human beings and the media and technology through which they interact and communicate with each other" (Robert K. Logan as cited in Islas & Bernal, 2016, p. 191). I conceptualize a writing course as composed of multiple stories from the instructor and many students, created through multiple modes, and reproduced and delivered through multiple media, which yet come together as a whole.

A New Vision for the Writing Course

Jenkins's (2006) theory of transmedia storytelling is one starting point for the difficult task of re-envisioning the writing course as a transmedia composition. Although Jenkins's work focuses on building and expanding *fictional* worlds through multiple modalities across multiple media, the same concept is already at work in our classrooms and in our everyday lives: A transmedia experience engages the affordances of multiple modalities, allows for multiple points of entry through multiple media platforms, sustains multiple interrelated characters, and expands through unique "episodes" that must stand alone even as they contribute to the narrative as a whole (Jenkins, 2007). The writing course as a transmedia and trans-reality experience would be grounded in pedagogy and made up of material interactions and "bits and fragments extracted from the media flow" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 70).

Additional inspiration comes directly from the field of writing studies, especially discussions on transmodality and translinguality: Horner, Selfe and Lockridge (2015) framed multimodal composition and translingualism as composing practices that can help students explore the creation of meaning beyond standardized modalities and official languages. Likewise, Gonzales (2015), in her work on rhetorical genre studies, emphasized that "translingualism" is not focused on the linguistic background of students, but is instead "a framework for understanding the fluidity of modalities and languages," which can be used to understand how students draw on their linguistic experiences to compose texts (para. 8).

My suggestion of a new "mindset" relates to, or perhaps extends, Brunk-Chavez and Miller's (2009) concept of "culture of use" that describes how a new technology might connect an existing culture with a created culture and eventually subsume it. That is to say, a technology might integrate into institutional culture and pedagogical practice to the point where it becomes mandatory, and that technology might also integrate into the wider culture in ways we cannot predict (Brunk-Chavez & Miller, 2009). For example, the mobile phone transitioned from a

luxury to complement the land-line telephone into a complex interface with the world that has made a land-line telephone almost obsolete. The mobile phone has evolved from a mere personal device to an authorizing device for second-factor authentication and as a portal to the institution's LMS.

Conversations about translinguality and transmodality often focus on the student as composer; however, Martín et al. (2019) argued for paying more attention to instructors, in terms of understanding *how* they implement translingual approaches to digital composing, "specifically to the ways in which writing instructors negotiate and work with specific institutional and ideological contexts to embrace dynamic writing pedagogies" (p. 143). This same attention should be broadened to include transmedia approaches to course delivery, which is often a function of fluid and evolving responses to particular contexts of teaching and learning both within and beyond the physical classroom space.

Reflections on Past Material Media Interactions

I am old enough to recall the sweet scent of a damp, freshly mimeographed page, back when those blurry purple-text documents served as the print version of the "learning management system," delivering the syllabus, writing prompts, quizzes, and additional readings. Textbooks were king; lectures and activities were in person, possibly enhanced by enlarged text and images on an overhead projector or goose-bump-inducing chalk screeches on a blackboard. The rare slide presentation was delivered via a physical carousel that inevitably would fail to advance properly. Audio-visual media meant a film projector that would inevitably tangle up the film and shudder to a stop. Contact with professors was limited to in-person class time and office hours – and possibly a landline phone call. There were no personal computers or mobile devices; email and texts did not exist. A student who missed class might ask peers to share their spiral-bound handwritten notes.

Research for projects required going to the library, searching through the narrow wooden drawers of a card catalog or large bound directories of periodical literature and then locating whatever printed items were physically available on the shelves. Collaborative projects meant meeting in person outside of class. Communicating outside of in-person meetings was mediated through notes posted on dry-erase boards attached to dorm-room doors. Phone calls were another option, although less efficient, given that roommates could not be relied upon to forward messages, if anyone answered the phone at all. Voicemail did not exist. Typewriters were ubiquitous and word-processing programs were unavailable: Assignments not required to be typed on paper were handwritten on paper. Feedback on written assignments was always handwritten, often indecipherable, with no internet search engines available to help students find out what the instructor meant by "comma splice" if they were too embarrassed to ask. Exams were conducted via fill-in-the-dot multiple-choice forms, short answer responses written on mimeographed sheets, or essay responses written in blue books. Grades for exams were listed by social security number and posted on a bulletin board in the hallway outside the classroom. Student records were becoming computerized, but the grade reports were still sent out on paper, and departments still filed paper copies in metal filing cabinets.

When I reflect on that time period on the cusp of the digital revolution, I see everything from a new perspective: The experience of physical media during that era was also a transmedia experience: across handwritten and machine-produced text; across printed and light-projected images; across telephone and in-person conversations; across tape-recorded and broadcast media; across continuous and non-continuous electronic signals. Before digital hypertext, physical media formed an assemblage of texts used "to associatively store and retrieve memories through nonlinear trails" (Haas, 2007, p. 81). These physical nonlinear networks extended beyond Western systems: Haas (2007) explained that "wampum beads are technologies, just as sinew, hemp, and tree bark twine are – all of the technologies needed to craft wampum belt multimediated stories" (p. 94).

All "standard" media forms emerged as new and often controversial forms of media, from the introduction of writing to the printing press to the typewriter to the photograph, telegraph, telephone, moving pictures, radio, television, then on to digital packets of data.

Rejection of Paradigm Shifts as the "New Normal"

I want to align writing instruction more explicitly with Jenkins's (2006) theory of convergence culture–collective intelligence through old and new media–which he argued "does not occur through media appliances, however sophisticated they may become," but rather through the brains of individuals interacting with each other:

> Each of us constructs our own personal mythology from bits and fragments extracted from the media flow and transformed into resources through which we make sense of our everyday lives. Because there is more information on any given topic than anyone can store in their head, there is an added incentive for us to talk among ourselves about the media we consume. (p. 4)

Given that the convergence happens through brains, not technology, we should resist the idea that a transmedia/trans-reality mindset is something new or that digital media has created or should create new standards of "normal." We should also recognize that "delivery" is an insufficient term to describe how instructors facilitate the student learning experience. Although delivery is a classical rhetorical concept, one of the five canons of rhetoric, as an institutional term the word suggests a one-way transaction with no input from students, minimal input from instructors, and a final end point or "outcome" that "proves" the transaction is complete. In his discussion about networked responses in digital environments, Rice (2009) stated, "Resolution is not the aim of the compositional process. Responses are the goal. As opposed to claims or definitive statements, responses make up the identity of the composition" (p. 312). If we look at a course as a compositional process, then resolution is not the goal, nor are specific measurable outcomes, despite their necessity for institutional record-keeping purposes. The goal is the interplay of responses, the push and pull of responses required by and also instigated by students. The end point is arbitrary and simply signals the end of the record-keeping process for a specific group of respondents. The end point provides an indication–not a definitive statement–of a student's learning at a particular moment, not the conclusion of that student's learning going forward. A constellation of interactions, experiences, and perceptions make up the whole, which allows teachers to accommodate the diverse communicative practices of their students.

On the other hand, a shift to transmedia course interactions is no guarantee of inclusiveness. Collins (2019) critiqued traditional restrictive conventions in social interactions that "not only fostered social inequalities, they marginalized individuals and groups that did not fit comfortably within race-only, gender-only mono-categorical frameworks" (p. 26). Similarly, Horner, Selfe, and Lockwood (2015), concerned that changes in linguistic practice or modalities might simply mean a shift to a new rigid set of standards, stated, "We resist, in short, any understanding that statistically standard language practices are singular either in their linguistic or modal forms, and we resist the understanding that statistically standard is the linguistic or modal equivalent of normal. This ideological formation is two sided and doubly dangerous" (p. 10). Milu (2021), in her discussion of raciolinguistics, noted that speakers' relationships with languages function in shifting translingual contexts that cannot be categorized consistently; for example a Black student whose ancestors arrived to the Americas on a slave ship may not have the same relationship with English as a Black student whose parents arrived in the U.S. from Rwanda in the 21st century. English has been a colonizing language for many African Americans, whereas for Rwandans, English is considered neutral, and French is the language, "which carries colonial, racialization, and genocidal ideology" (Milu, 2021, p. 431). Milu's (2021) translingual approach to writing "rejects monolingual assumptions that emphasize standardized, static, and discrete approaches to language" (p. 438). A transmedia approach to writing and writing instruction should similarly reject assumptions about the superiority or inferiority of particular media and avoid standardized, static, and discrete approaches to media use.

Lived experience is also transmedia. Collins (2019) stated, "The experiences that a human being has within the social world through transactions with others constitute the substance that a person uses to make sense of the social and natural worlds. Social meanings are negotiated in the space of transaction" (p. 172). If students in a writing class are constructing their own personal mythology and also contributing to the narratives of other students, then the overarching narrative of the course itself will be somewhat fluid and evolving. Any aspect of collective intelligence that stays with any student after the course ends will be incorporated into that student's own fluid and evolving narrative. In my view, the role of the instructor is to create opportunities for the convergence of minds, which speaks to the social construction of knowledge, rather than the delivery of course content designed to enforce predetermined outcomes for all students. For example, Berlin (1987), in his discussion of epistemic rhetoric, stated, "Truth is never simply 'out there' in the material world or the social realm, or simply 'in here' in a private and personal world. It emerges only as the three–the material, the social, and the personal–interact, and the agent of mediation is language" (p. 17). Similarly, Jones (2020) stated that "lived experience constructs our realities" (p. 519) as she argued for narrative inquiry, a research methodology composed of three commonplaces: place, temporality, and sociality. She noted that these commonplaces center some students, but the commonplaces are always shifting, creating in-between spaces of inclusive possibility for the marginalized that are "ambiguous, malleable, and moveable, rather than static and stayed" (Jones, 2020, p. 520). A transmedia mindset can encourage that shift of commonplaces, while taking care not to reify any particular commonplace as the "new normal."

Multiple Forms of Resistance to a Transmedia Mindset

Still, getting beyond the tendency to establish rigid categories is a challenge. Horner, Selfe, and Lockridge (2015) identified four forms of resistance to composition pedagogies that attempt to work across language and modalities: The myth of perfect fluency, a debilitating belief that expertise is the expectation; rejection, the belief that translinguality and transmodality are fads; celebration, the uncritical embrace of anything that goes against mono-language and conventional modalities; and lack of material resources for translingual and transmodal composing (pp. 28-30). Transmedia composition pedagogies can create similar forms of resistance.

The Myth of Perfect Fluency in Forms of Course Delivery

Horner et al. (2015) argued that "the first form of resistance... is that prompted by a debilitating, if false, sense that what is being demanded is a new and complete fluency with multiple languages and modalities" (p. 28). Similarly, instructors may resist new technologies used for course facilitation, not wanting to relinquish the confidence of expertise in the familiar. On the other hand, students also must negotiate unfamiliar technologies. Sullivan (2019) argued that “technical struggles, malfunctions, and impasses may renew a sense of medium as material, intensify embodied affect, and prompt instructors to consider how we can more ethically relate to our tools and to students through attention to structures of power and oppression” (p. 48). By experiencing embarrassment and frustration ourselves, we are better able to understand and assist the struggles of our students as they compose across languages, modalities, and media. By making explicit our own willingness to demonstrate this learning process, interrogate technologies, and develop alternative strategies, while remaining boldly unapologetic in the face of “failure,” we are also teaching our students how to compose confidently with a transmedia mindset.

Rejection of New Forms of Media for Course Delivery

Even if expertise is attainable with enough time and practice on a particular media platform, instructors have to consider how much expertise is desirable and what forms of expertise are worth developing. Competence is as fleeting as new technologies, so an expert today will not always be expert. Horner et al. (2015) suggested that fetishizing of new technologies might cause teachers "to reject them as fads, impractical and irrelevant to the ordinary needs of ordinary students" (p. 28). New technologies may not seem useful, or they might not be around long enough to justify the investment of time and energy to learn how to use them. Rejection might also echo disappointment in synchronous online instruction that tried to mimic the face-to-face classroom, which led to post-pandemic claims that students prefer on-ground classes or that the pandemic taught us that online classes are bad for students. Cynthia Selfe interrogated the idea that people resist learning new forms of technology because they are always learning news forms of technology; she argued the problem lies with "conservative forms that privilege certain media over others without acknowledging the power relations and reasons for doing so" (Horner et al., 2015, p. 25). If institutions are either promoting or condemning a particular form of media, we have to consider what's at stake. For example, remote instruction threatened institutional identities and also threatened funding models that relied on physical campus spaces. Technology becomes a double-edged sword: If the majority of students are *not* on campus, who otherwise

would be (as in the case of the pandemic), then the digital disruption becomes dangerous to the bottom line.

Celebration of New Forms of Media for Course Delivery

A common attitude towards new technologies "is to embrace and even celebrate them at the theoretical level while ignoring actual work with them in practice" (Horner et al., 2015, p. 28). A celebration of new forms of media often comes with a belief that the latest new thing can solve a problem without considering what new problems it might create in practice (high cost, lost privacy, high learning curve, loss of control, extra labor). Celebration might play out as technology decisions made without faculty input or an expectation that technology alone can transform learning, "whereby use of a specific medium is thought in itself to produce specific effects, rather than a specific social practice with a medium producing certain effects" (Horner et al., 2015, p. 21). Celebration places more focus on functional technology training than critical and rhetorical pedagogy, with instructors sometimes losing control over design and delivery of the course to outside teams that are uninformed about writing pedagogy. In a world of continual technological obsolescence, Snart (2015) emphasized the need to let pedagogy guide rather than let technology rule: "Technology is ephemeral. What is here one semester is gone the next" (p. 128). A particular technology platform should not be the focus of the course, even if, like the LMS, it is the dominant technology used to store the content of the course and to facilitate interactions among participants. Media are facilitating infrastructures that can emerge, evolve, and disappear.

The Lack of Material Resources for Course Delivery

Instructor resistance is often a reaction to institutional resistance to providing adequate resources for engaging with new practices, a resistance that reinforces the lack of respect for faculty expertise and labor. Horner et al. (2015) argued that various forms of resistance to technology "are not simply beliefs to be shucked off but shifts in material social practice that require hardware, say, but also time, effort, training, and so on" (p. 22). Mandating change without supporting the desired change with hardware, software, training, time, and institutional support, compounds instructors' fear of failure and judgment, rather than encouraging innovation and risk-taking. Wooten et al. (2022) found that the evaluation system for non-tenure-track instructors is one of the systemic barriers to innovation, i.e., institutions expect instructors to experiment with new technologies and then punish them if the experiments do not work.

Although the CCCC Statement on Preparing Teachers of College Writing (2015) recommended that faculty should proactively seek technology professional development, Mina (2022) argued that "placing the responsibility squarely on the faculty alone is neither fair nor practical because of the varied factors that may affect their choice: teaching loads, job security, access to resources, and availability and affordability of local PD programs, to name a few" (TPD Opportunities: Required vs. Recommended section, para. 2). Often, faculty professional development seems more focused on institutional liability than improving faculty expertise, i.e., surface-level training about making courses accessible without providing the time, tools, or hands-on experience necessary to do this work. Mina (2022) advocated that institutions expand how they define student access to technology infrastructure to include *teacher access* to the

theory, tools, training, and time needed to develop expertise: "Investing in one without investing in the other raises questions about higher education's commitment to social justice and equity issues" (Bringing It All Together, para. 2)

From Transmedia to Trans-reality Ecologies

Banks (2018) argued that resistance to a transmediated approach to composition, i.e., accepting the fluidity of modalities and languages, stems from the tendency to transfer print logics into the digital realm: Banks (2018) suggested the reason "scholars sometimes struggle to theorize the *trans* in transmedia composition is a disciplinary focus on print-media rhetorics such as unity, coherence, and organization as the *sine qua non* of all compositional practice" (p. 341). Even in course delivery, unity, coherence, and organization are expected; like the tendency to transfer print logics into the digital realm, resistance to a transmedia mindset stems from the tendency to transfer the logics of the physical classroom into the virtual realm.

Banks (2018) further suggested another source of resistance might be confusion about what transmedia means, given the tendency to associate "new" forms of media with digital modalities, rather than the range of online and offline interactions. Milekic (2007) noted that the body itself is the first interface, with our interactions, "guided by our goals (intentions), carried out through actions, and repeated or corrected based on perception of the consequences of actions (observations)" (p. 2). This recognition of offline interactions has extended the concept of transmedia storytelling to one of *trans-reality*, a gaming-industry concept that further pushes back against the idea that a narrative can ever be fully enacted in either physical or virtual spaces. Lindley (2005) defines trans-reality games as "having multiple perceptual game spaces of which one is the physical world and the others are computer-synthesized, or virtual worlds" (p. 397). Rosool et al. (2021) argued that trans-reality storytelling updates transmedia storytelling to account for "technologies and platforms that create immersive experiences which span across and through many realities associated with immersive productions, especially Augmented, Virtual, and Mixed Reality experiences" (p. 651). Trans-reality storytelling creates "an overall higher fidelity, more deeply engaging, extended, sustainable, and coherent narrative" (Rasool et al., 2021, p. 651). For our purposes, a face-to-face writing course is, at minimum, a mixed-reality experience, one that sometimes engages all the senses, sometimes only the visual and auditory senses. Even an online course can be a trans-reality experience, if students perform field research, compose with physical materials, work on service-learning projects, or collaborate offline with classmates on team projects. Trans-reality can also describe immersive experiences in places like museums and amusement parks, where the physical senses are evoked by the digitized virtual world or enhanced by perception and apperception–or fooled by perceptual illusions–in the physical world. Trans-reality can also describe a cyborg experience, where the individual is melding with technology to the point where this mediated experience becomes part of their identity (as with driving a car or wearing prescription glasses). Trans-reality experiences can affect how an individual perceives sensations and how interacting individuals interpret them to create what a particular *culture* considers reality.

An instructor who views the course as a transmedia or trans-reality composition will use a range of modalities for presentation and interaction between and among instructor and students. Such shifts in media create shifts in perceptions, as in Burke's (1966) theory of the terministic screen,

which he defined as "a screen composed of terms through which humans perceive the world, and that direct attention away from some interpretations and toward others." (p. 45), noting that this selection of terms results in both a reflection and a deflection of reality. Although Burke was referring more explicitly to language as a type of screen, this concept reminds us that our bodies are interfaces with the world, as are the digital screens through which we often perceive the world, and those interfaces direct attention away from some interactions and toward others, whether we are interacting in person or through screen-based digital technologies. Selber's (2004) focus on affordances and constraints is also a useful guiding principle for selecting, analyzing, and employing instructional media, whether digital and non-digital platforms or synthetic and human interactions.

A Reconsideration of "Course Delivery"

Despite the advent of digital technologies, Cynthia Selfe argued that "not all multimodal composing *needs* to be digital" (Horner et al., 2015, p. 32). Likewise, Banks (2018) pointed to Jenkins's observations of old print genres being used with new forms of media in new and interesting ways, which Jenkins referred to as "convergence culture": "the *flow* of content across multiple platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and *migratory* behavior of a media audience who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want" (as cited in Banks, 2018, p. 345). Facilitating migratory behavior requires a narrative of suspense that withholds and releases key information at critical moments, inspires active information-seeking, and provides migratory cues to additional information, e.g., in the form of embedded links from one medium to another (van Leeuwerden, 2015). These strategies could be adapted for writing courses to inspire student curiosity, encourage trust in fellow travelers, and help them navigate the course. Raybourne (2014) noted that transmedia learning makes students the protagonist of their own story, defining transmedia learning as "the scalable system of messages that represents a narrative or core experience that unfolds from the use of multiple media" (p. 472).

A transmedia approach to course delivery would extend what Selber (2004) defined as digital "multiliteracies" – functional, critical, and rhetorical literacies–to include non-digital media. For example, Gollihue (2019) explored non-digital making spaces, specifically agricultural production, to understand "the ways everyday people, animals, and things are always and already making in highly complex and relational ways" (p. 22). Shipka (2016) suggested, "what we need to pursue are more robust concepts of materiality and nonhuman involvement and agency, something that would, in turn, allow us to redefine translingual and multimodal collaborations" (p. 254), a prescient view that seems to have anticipated the arrival of chatbots. A transmedia mindset aligns our course composing and teaching interactions with all the day-to-day interactions we and our students engage in. We can build on the modalities and media platforms we are already using and be more aware of how different modalities do different things and add to the emerging story in different ways. Shipka (2016) contended that "it is not enough to simply work toward changing dispositions….we need also to commit fully to altering our pedagogical and research practices–to consider how concretely engaging with different modes, genres, materials, cultural practices, communicative technologies, and language varieties impacts our abilities to make and negotiate meaning" (p. 251). We change our dispositions through the embodied acts of composing, not the finished products.

A course described or categorized by its "mode of delivery" hints at the perception of course as a distinct, fixed commodity and is often what leads to the perception that a face-to-face course can simply be repackaged for alternate delivery–and when that doesn't work, the mode of delivery is at fault.

On the other hand, characterizing *any* course that uses an LMS as teaching online can create a "blurring of modalities," confusing pedagogical objectives with that system of delivery (Snart et al., 2024). This blurring can be generated by institutional policies requiring the use of the LMS or by ineffective pedagogies that do not carefully consider medium of delivery when planning assignments and activities. The modalities have already blurred to the point where an in-person class meeting and a synchronous virtual meeting may be two different events or one event that mixes the two. If activities can be completed virtually through the LMS, then we are forced to reconsider what class meetings should look like in a physical space versus a virtual space, and what kinds of interactions those spaces are best set up to achieve.

A course can be delivered through automated, asynchronous, and synchronous interactions; through physical and virtual spaces; through physical and virtual media; and across long distances or within the same physical space. Maybe we can get away from referring to course facilitation as "delivery" in discrete modalities and consider in what ways courses are already transmedia and how the facilitation of a course and the interactions of students create its narrative. Likewise, we might pay more attention to how we compose our overarching meta narrative through pedagogy that considers the constraints and affordances of policies, technologies, physical worlds, virtual worlds, audiences, and time. Each course is its own story with interacting participants and fits into a wider meta-narrative of writing courses.

In keeping with the idea that language, modalities, and media are fluid and evolving, instructors with a transmedia mindset will consider the affordances and constraints of digital and nondigital media in advance of a course start state, with the understanding that media may need to be adjusted to accommodate student needs and respond to external events. Selber (2004) argued that, in addition to being effective users and informed questioners of technology, students must also be reflective producers. This argument applies to instructors as well. Instructors must be reflective about course composition, not just effective users and informed questioners of the mandated and self-selected technologies they use. Yet, in a survey of 146 writing instructors, Mina (2019) found that only 23 percent appeared to be critical users, those who highlighted "the role of instruction and communicating their choices and decisions to students" (p. 12). Mina (2019) argued that "emphasizing the importance of the role of instruction and open communication with students is likely to make teachers critically ponder their choices and decisions of using technology because they will have to explain these choices to students" (p. 12). Instructors must be reflective producers of the courses they compose, whether course composition is defined as instructional design, the facilitation of a pre-designed course, or both.

A Network of Interactions Across Physical and Virtual Environments

Students and instructors change; the world does not stand still. The course as composition, a world-building in which each modality enhances and builds upon the meta story and involves

knowledge-building and participation from its audience, cannot repeat the same exact narrative from one semester to the next. A transmedia mindset works across language, genres, modalities, and media to provide a new course experience, not just to repeat it. Likewise, a trans-reality mindset works across physical and virtual spaces to provide a deeper, more engaging experience. Horner et al. (2015) argued that no single experience is sufficient to facilitate understanding of the topic; e.g., Cynthia Selfe specifically noted different ways to engage with an opera, including watching a live or filmed performance, listening to the soundtrack, looking at images of the staged production, attempting to play a musical score from the opera, and reading reviews of performances.

Likewise, no single medium or modality is entirely sufficient for facilitating a writing course: Students can attend a lecture or participate in classroom activities through in-person class meetings, synchronous Zoom meetings, video recordings, audio recordings, alphabetic and visual messages and documents, slide-deck presentation. Each of these forms of engagement provide “different experiences and understandings; each requires multiple kinds of training, understandings, labor, and skill both to produce and interpret” (Horner et al., 2015, p. 25). These forms also must merge with the whole. The rejection of media as fluid reinforces what Horner et al. (2015) called an “‘additive’ or ornamental disposition” (p. 17). For example, a face-to-face course that features the occasional online assignment or Zoom meeting does not become “hybrid.” Snart (2015) argued “A hybrid is its own unique kind of course. It is not face-to-face learning with a piece missing–not a deficit model” (p. 100). Our goal should be integration, not exchange. Maybe the concept of migratory behavior can help us understand what integration might look like; i.e., migratory cues in transmedia storytelling motivate readers and facilitate the spread of content across multiple platforms (van Leeuwerden, 2015). These migratory cues for where to find information and where to foster interactions might play out through course navigational patterns, timing of push notifications, and strategies for presenting and linking information.

Conclusion

A transmedia mindset is more than a new way of looking at entertainment; it’s how we engage with the world today, how we tell our own stories, and how we perceive–and create–our own realities. Although the future of higher education is uncertain, Institutions and administrators can be more supportive of instructors who are wrestling with these changes. They can start by understanding resistance as a sign that they need to do more to support their instructors. They can overcome the myth of perfect fluency with policies that reward experiment–and failure–as a learning process. They can put rejectors and celebrators in conversation with each other to critically analyze and evaluate new technologies. Finally, they can provide more resources to instructors, especially time needed to adjust and to experiment with new ways of interacting with students.

What institutions cannot – and should not – do is attempt to design and standardize a transmedia pedagogical structure that will control what instructors and students can do, rather than allow instructors to develop their own pedagogy to facilitate students’ participation and learning. For their part, instructors need to understand the affordances and constraints of media platforms to

help them make more effective use of those platforms, especially if circumstances prevent them from choosing preferred technologies in a higher education landscape of reduced resources and restrictive mandates. We all need to understand the potential and challenges of human-computer interactions, a convergence of brains that increasingly includes artificial intelligence. This understanding is difficult to achieve unless we are able to approach media and realities from a new perspective, what anthropologists refer to as making the strange familiar and the familiar strange. I am suggesting that we need to first accept, and then find ways to develop, a new kind of mindset that allows more room for observing and listening and hands-on composing. We need to create a disposition toward the writing course as a transmedia and trans-reality experience, grounded in pedagogy, and made up of material interactions and “bits and fragments extracted from the media flow” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 70). We need to create transmedia and trans-reality composing ecologies that allow those seemingly disparate parts to somehow cohere into an overarching narrative of a writing course.

References

Banks, W. (2018). Beyond modality: Rethinking transmedia composition through a queer/trans digital rhetoric. In J. Alexander & J. Rhodes (Eds), *Routledge Handbook of Digital Writing and Rhetoric* (pp. 341–351). Routledge.

Berlin, J. A. (1987). *Rhetoric and reality: Writing instruction in American colleges, 1900–1985.* Conference on College Composition and Communication.

Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice* (R. Nice, Trans). Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1972).

Brunk-Chavez, B. & Miller, S. J. (2009). The hybrid academy: Building and sustaining a culture of use. In D. N. DeVoss, H. A. McKee, & R. Selfe (Eds.), *Technological ecologies and sustainability.* Computers and Composition Digital Press. http://ccdigitalpress.org/tes

Burke, K. (1966). *Language as symbolic action: Essays on life, literature, and method.* University of California Press.

Collins, P. H. (2019). *Intersectionality as critical social theory*. Duke University Press.

Conference on College Composition and Communication (2015). *CCCC Statement on Preparing Teachers of College Writing.* http://www.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/statementonprep.

Gollihue, K. N. (2019). Re-making the makerspace: Body, power, and identity in critical making practices, *Computers and Composition, 53*, 21–33. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2019.05.002

Gonzales, L. (2015). Multimodality, translingualism, and rhetorical genre studies. *Composition Forum*, *31*. https://compositionforum.com/issue/31/multimodality.php

Gonzales, L., Shrivers-McNair, A., & Bawarshi, A. (2020). Transdisciplinary intra-actions. *College English*, *82*(5), 432–442.

Grabill, J. T. (2020). There are no disciplines here: The causes of who we are and what we do. *College English*, *82*(5), 484–491.

Haas, A. M. (2007). Wampum as hypertext: An American Indian intellectual tradition of multimedia theory and practice. *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, *19*(4), 77–100. DOI: https//doi.org/10.1353/ail.2008.0005

Horner, B., Selfe, C., & Lockridge, T. (2015). Translinguality, transmodality, and difference: Exploring dispositions and change in language and learning. *Intermezzo, by Enculturation*.

Jones, N. N. (2020). Coalitional learning in the contact zones: Inclusion and narrative inquiry in technical communication and composition studies. *College English*, *82*(5), 515–526.

Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.

Jenkins, H. (2007, March 21). Transmedia storytelling 101. Retrieved February 5, 2023 from Pop Junction. http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2007/03/transmedia_storytelling_101.html

Islas, O. & Bernal, J. D. (2016). Media ecology: A complex and systemic metadiscipline. *Philosophies*, 1, 190–198. https://www.mdpi.com/2409-9287/1/3/190

Lindley, C. A. (2005). Game space design foundations for trans-reality games. *ACE '05: Proceedings of the 2005 ACM SIGCHI International conference on advances in computer entertainment technology*. June 2005, Pages 397–404. https://doi.org/10.1145/1178477.1178569

Martín, C. S., Hirsu, L., Gonzales, L., & Alvarez, S. P. (2019). Pedagogies of digital composing through a translingual approach. *Computers and Composition,* 52, 142–157.

Milekic, S. (2007). Toward tangible virtualities: Tangialities. In F. Cameron & S. Kenderdine (Eds.), *Theorizing digital cultural heritage: A critical discourse.* The MIT Press. https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/6751.003.0024

Milu, E. (2021). Diversity of raciolinguistic experiences in the writing classroom: An argument for a transnational black language pedagogy. *College English*, *83*(6): 415–441.

Mina, L. W. (2019). Analyzing and theorizing writing teachers' approaches to using new media technologies. *Computers and Composition, 42*, 1–16.

Mina, L. W. (2022). Technology professional development of writing faculty: The expectations and the needs. *Composition Forum,* 43. https://compositionforum.com/issue/43/professional-development.php

Moloney, K. (2014, April 21). Multimedia, crossmedia, transmedia…What's in a name? Retrieved, February 11, 2024 from Transmedia Journalism. https://transmediajournalism.org/2014/04/21/multimedia-crossmedia-transmedia-whats-in-a-name/

Rasool, J., Molka-Danielsen, J., & Smith, C. H. (2021). Transitioning from transmedia to transreality storyboarding to improve the co-creation of the experience space. *Proceedings of the 54th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences 2021*. https://hdl.handle.net/10125/70690

Raybourn, E. M. (2014). A new paradigm for serious games: Transmedia learning for more effective training and education. *Journal of Computational Sciences, 5*, 471–481.

Rice, R. (2009). Networked exchanges, identity, writing. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, *23*(3), 294–317.

Selber, S. A. (2004). *Multiliteracies for a Digital Age*. Southern Illinois University Press.

Shipka, J. (2016). Transmodality in/and Processes of Making: Changing Dispositions and Practice. *College English*, *78*(3), 250–257.

Snart, J. (2015). Hybrid and fully online OWI. In B. L. Hewett & K.E DePew (Eds.), *Foundational practices of online writing instruction.* https://doi.org/10.37514/PER-B.2015.0650.2.02

Snart, J., Borgman, J., Harris, H. S., Whetstone, J., Stillman-Webb, N., Mahaffey, C., Cunningham, J. M., Hilliard, L., McArdle, C., Stewart, M., & Warnock, S. (2024). OWI: A future of challenge and possibility. *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy, 28(2).* https://Kairos.technorhetoric.net/28.2/interviews/snart-et-al/index.html

Sullivan, R. (2019). Troubling structures: A material-embodied pedagogy of technical difficulty. *Computers and Composition, 53,* 47–59. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2019.05.004

van Leeuwerden, T. (2015). Transmedia Storytelling: The Benefits of Participatory Consistency and the Hidden Markov Model. Thesis, NHTV Breda University of Applied Science. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292976022_Transmedia_Storyteling_The_benefits_of_Participative_Consistency_and_the_Hidden_Markov_Model

Wooten, C. A., Fitzpatrick, B, Fernandez, L, Goldenthal, A. M., & Matthews, J. (2022). Drowning a little bit all the time: The intersections of labor constraints and professional development in hybrid contingent faculty experiences. *Academic Labor: Research and Artistry*, 6.3. https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/alra/vol6/iss1/3