Podcasting and Performativity: Multimodal Invention in an Advanced Writing Class

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This article points composition scholars toward two bodies of theory that are gaining attention in our discipline, performance studies and multimodal discourse theory. Each raises important questions about the ways we teach writing, the kinds of composition processes we value, and the means by which students construct authority in the university. The author argues that by combining performance studies and multimodal discourse theories with invention strategies early in the research writing process, instructors can enhance the effectiveness of students struggling to adopt an authoritative voice in research papers. Instructors can merge these approaches productively by assigning student-generated podcasts.

In an age of (multi)media, we can no longer ignore the embodied nature of discourse, and we are having to rethink almost every aspect of the teaching of writing, from ways of being in the classroom to the kinds of assignments students do and how those assignments are delivered and assessed. For us, the notion of performance is crucial to participating in this work.

> —Jenn Fishman et al., "Performing Writing, Performing Literacy" (229)

By broadening the choice of composing modalities, I argue we expand the field of play for students with different learning styles and different ways of reflecting on the world; we provide the opportunity for them to study, think critically about, and work with new communicative modes. Such a move not only offers us a chance to make instruction increasingly effective for those students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, but it also provides an opportunity to make our work increasingly relevant to a changing set of communicative needs in a globalized world.

> —Cynthia L. Selfe, "The Movement of Air, the Breath of Meaning" (644)

Most who have taught or taken a composition class would agree: the classroom is disorienting for everyone involved—students and instructors. We are trying to figure each other out, assessing our audience, stepping into new mental and physical space, performing in new ways. At the urban university where I teach a junior-level writing class, this disorientation is nuanced by each student who attends and each writing instructor who works to help students write more effectively as they negotiate their

way. My students' writing insecurities are like those of most college students in many ways. Like all students, theirs include a fear of taking independent risks in writing. My students' fears are reflected in research on traditional students at highly selective universities. Fishman et al. found that while students at Stanford University were risk-takers in their writing outside of class, their initial confidence as academic writers waned significantly by the end of the first year (231).[1] Of course, risks are required for academic productivity and creativity—whatever goals students and instructors may have for students' growth as writers. Writing is a transformative process in that it requires us to imagine our audiences and ourselves anew, and this productive and creative transformation is inherently risky, particularly when evaluated by an experienced audience. Bravery in writing, what I call risk-taking, has been attributed to past positive experiences (Fishman et al. 232).[2] I look for ways to encourage this risk-taking by drawing from my students' positive experiences and strengths, attempting to make their risky invention process more productive and their writing process more transformative. Students' positive experiences and strengths typically include a high level of ease and skill at talking in class about their research topics, demonstrating an engagement with research and analysis that is not reflected in the papers they write. Their strong analysis and research skills do not convince them that they can produce a successful academic research paper.

Recently, I decided to take a risk myself and try something new at the beginning of an advanced writing course: podcasting. While podcasting has become a popular project for students at the end of a semester, I wondered how it would work as a prelude to drafting rather than a presentation of their finished work. And as I sat in class listening to the podcasts my students eventually produced early that semester, I was surprised by what happened. Students jumped into the assignment, took creative risks—the kind they feared with writing assignments—and seemed to enjoy doing so. Not only did students enjoy the podcasting, but as they proceeded through the drafting process of their research papers, they formed useful workshop groups in which they became invested in their own and each other's work. Over the course of the class, they talked more freely about their writing, and they ultimately produced more authoritative, sophisticated writing, taking ownership over their academic voices and earning higher grades than students in the same course during prior semesters. Making the initial risk-taking production an aural performance rather than a paper draft seemed to benefit students. It was one of those moments writing instructors hope for. And it happened again the next semester.

For example, one student, "V,"[3] chose to create his podcast under the guise of a radio talk show host interviewing a guest about his research topic Here's an excerpt of V's podcast script that demonstrates how he used the exercise to articulate a nascent research question:

AJ: *Welcome everyone. This is AJ, your talk show host for tonight. The presidential debates are heating up and free trade is one of the hottest topics right now. To discuss the issue, we have with us V, representative of investment corporations. Welcome to the show, Mr. V.*

V: *Thank you, AJ.*

AJ: *So, free trade has given corporations an unwarranted reason to outsource jobs in order to maximize their own profit, while our American workers are left unemployed. So why should we practice free trade?*

As writing and rhetoric instructors search for ways to meet the varying needs of student writers along the sequence of courses from first-year composition to senior-level courses and beyond, we are increasingly turning to multimodal learning and discourse as a way to place writing into a contemporary context outside of the academic setting. In her recent *CCC* article "The Movement of Air, the Breath of Meaning: Aurality and Multimodal Composing," Cynthia L. Selfe calls on compositionists to think beyond our historical academic focus on written communication over aural. This history, she argues, "functions to limit our professional understanding of composing as a multimodal rhetorical activity and deprives students of valuable semiotic resources for making meaning" (617). In this article I focus on the performative, semiotic element of aural composing, an element that I have found to benefit students early in their writing processes. Since the 1980s, composition scholars have understood via linguistics theory that the earlier dichotomy we constructed between speaking and writing was false (Selfe 628). Yet this informed understanding has not transformed classroom practices generally. Today, multimodal resources invite aurality into all educational spaces. Through multimodal performance, we find a means of mending the speaking/writing division that we have instituted in our pedagogical practices.

As a currently popular and widely advertised technology on many college campuses, podcasting offers the potential for exploring the aural mode of communication in service of the written. More specifically, podcasts offer important epistemological possibilities. One of the most useful possibilities for a writing class is that podcasts can help us address the rhetorical conventions of research-based learning and expression that we expect from student writers by connecting the writing process to performance. In his 2008 article "Performing/Teaching/Writing: Performance Studies in the Composition Classroom," Ryan Claycomb argues that while Composition Studies has begun to ask questions about how writing instructors can incorporate performance studies into our pedagogy, little work has been done on the subject. Performance studies draws from ideas about power, discourse, and public display that emerge from the theories of gender scholar Judith Butler, philosopher J.L. Austin, and literary critic Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick,

among others. As a relatively new area of study that incorporates and influences disciplines including theater, dance, philosophy, gender studies, and English, and overlaps with cultural studies more generally, performance studies can help us understand on a theoretical and practical level how and why to incorporate digital technology into a writing-focused class. A guiding question for our pedagogy should be: In what ways could (what I call) a performative epistemology help students better use invention to their advantage in their writing, and how might technology, such as podcasting, enable this kind of epistemology?

Compositionists have been exploring this question in a variety of ways. My conversations with other writing faculty increasingly turn to multimodal discourse, which sometimes includes podcasting as a venue for student presentations at the end of a semester by incorporating performative elements and multimodality as a culmination of the writing process. This approach is becoming a popular way for instructors across the disciplines to experiment with digital audio and visual technology in their courses (Tremel and Jesson). By contrast, what I offer here is an exploration of the role podcasts might play as an epistemological tool in the invention process: that is to say, an epistemology that is employed before students begin drafting and one that continues to enhance students' rhetorical awareness throughout the recursive research-writing process. I will explore the performative elements involved, arguing that performativity in this classroom context can help alleviate the counter-productive anxiety that many students feel at the beginning of a writing class, even though they may have strong aural communication and critical thinking skills. I have observed this effect over two semesters of teaching with podcasts in an urban university comprised primarily of racially, ethnically, and linguistically non-traditional students. As writing teachers turn to podcasting in their writing classes to present lectures or require students to produce podcasts at the end of a project in lieu of oral presentations, they might also consider using podcasts at the beginning of a writing assignment as an epistemological strategy.

Invention, a term I use in this article to describe the beginning stage of a student's writing process, is one of the five departments of rhetoric into which ancient rhetoricians divided common rhetorical practices. For practitioners such as Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintillian, invention was the means to discover possible arguments. Aristotle categorized lines of argument according to four common topics: whether something is possible/impossible, did/did not occur, will/will not occur in the future, or whether it is better/worse or greater/lesser than something else (Lindemann 42). He also listed a second group of twenty-eight topics for creating arguments, such as arguments from definition and from cause and effect. Today, compositionists have generally interpreted *invention* as prewriting, including such activities as brainstorming, clustering, freewriting, journaling, and using heuristics,

frameworks, and models for developing and organizing the arguments from which a writer will build an academic paper. However, these strategies can also be used at later stages in a writer's drafting process.

Podcasting is another tool that can help students to articulate and organize a paper topic as part of an invention process. And as with those strategies listed above, it could also be used during later stages of a student's writing process. Podcasting differs from written and visual methods of invention that I have listed above because it requires students to articulate their topic aloud, but more importantly, it is a public performance not solely for the writer and instructor's eyes. Role-playing exercises bear more resemblance to my podcasting activity in form and function; however, live role-playing does not allow students to re-record a performance until they deem it presentable for an audience. This process of re-recording the podcast, I argue, was especially important for my students, as it allowed them to think through the exercise and individually revise their performance as many times as they wanted to (for example, if they found that their presentation exceeded the time limit), and then to share their performance with students to receive feedback. Recording the podcast in solitude or with one partner also gave students more time and the creative autonomy to construct an authoritative persona, an element of the activity that I will visit later in this article.

I want to emphasize at the outset that I came to this teaching experience as an instructor who is not entirely at ease with technology, who did not own an mp3 player while I was learning to use mp3 files (podcasts) in the writing courses I taught, and who did not know how to create a podcast prior to the first semester I taught using them. I find podcasting to be an accessible pedagogical tool for writing instructors and students with a basic familiarity of online teaching environments like Blackboard.

Podcasting as a Performative Epistemology in the Writing Class

Much of the disorienting challenge of a writing classroom lies in its requirements as a performative space that is most often treated as natural in the moment: we perform as instructors, enacting the discourse of authority and student-teacher relationships; students perform as such, enacting their personae as learners, subordinates, subversives, and much less frequently, authorities (these are merely some of the many performances involved in any classroom); yet, we don't often recognize or confess these identities as performances. Such performance creates and validates a relationship among participants in the classroom, reifying through institutionalized ritual a discourse of power between teachers as authorities and students as recipients of knowledge. The paradox of this relationship is exposed when students are

asked to perform as authoritative academic writers, a paradox that David Bartholomae made familiar in "Inventing the University": paraphrasing David Olsen, Bartholomae writes that

> the writer must learn that his authority is not established through his presence but through his absence—through his ability, that is, to speak as a god-like source beyond the limitations of any particular social or historical moment; to speak by means of the wisdom of convention through the oversounds of official or authoritative utterance, as the voice of logic or the voice of the community. (609)

Experienced writers know that they attain authority through rhetorical cues and conventions that adhere to contextual expectations. Student writers learn these cues at the same time that they perform their subordinate positions as students most literally through their physical presence as students. Peter McLaren pins down this nuanced, contradictory process more specifically as "enfleshment," a process of repetition, ritual, and habit that add up to a "dominant system of *lived* practices" (86). As Claycomb explains, through these practices, "teachers and students physically internalize the dominant power structures in the classroom" (6). Race, class, sexuality, and language become another layer that further defines the embodied roles students and instructors imagine and perform. Performing authority in writing under such conditions is made difficult because of the habitual performances in the physical classroom.

Selfe focuses on the role of speaking in this physical space, arguing that "the enactment of authority, power, and status in composition classes is expressed, in part, through aurality: how much one is allowed to talk and under what circumstances" (634). She historicizes the act of "silent writing, reading, and observation," by noting that it "became normalized [by the nineteenth century] and, importantly, linked to both class and race. [. . .] It was through such changes," she writes, "that writing became the focus of a specialized academic education delivered primarily to, and by, privileged white males" (623). Along with this shift, this silent authority of privileged white males characterized academic writing.

Often, students' insecurities manifest as a fear of taking the risk that is involved in beginning a lengthy research paper, and the invention process may not do enough to mitigate this fear. Such a process is enacted more easily when students have the belief that they can reach the end goal. Pretending to have authority through aural performance of a role is one way that my students developed this belief, shifting, to some degree, the power dynamics in the classroom by shifting the perception of who holds authority over subject matter. This shift works because we transformed the physical space of the classroom when everyone, including the instructor, became an audience for a student performance. Such embodiment of authority, what

Fishman et al. call "the act of embodying writing through voice, gesture, and movement," is part of an act of literacy (226). In the context of my advanced composition class, literacy meant the ability to analyze a sophisticated debate and make nuanced commentary about the role of argument, using a voice of academic authority.

College writing classes often overlook modes and qualities of expression such as theatricality that could lead to critical literacy, including deep rhetorical awareness of audience (Claycomb 5). They are, perhaps, practicing this deep rhetorical awareness in their extra-academic lives. As Meredith Love noted recently in her article on performativity, students are increasingly becoming aware of performance as a part of everyday activities. However, Kopelson laments, "Performativity remains most conspicuously absent, perhaps, from composition scholarship that is expressly pedagogical in focus" (qtd. in Love 15). Such performance could potentiate critical pedagogy. "Indeed," writes Ryan Claycomb,

> when we integrate elements of embodied performance into a Freirian problem-posing framework, a pedagogy that might otherwise conceive of critique in abstract terms takes significant steps toward a praxis that moves beyond the classroom space and into the lived experience of students and teachers. (2)

By drawing from students' lived experiences using performance, an activity such as podcasting allows students to enact an authoritative voice that potentially carries over into the performance of writing. While students adopted an authoritative voice as part of a role, they also became authorities—they came to understand that being an authority involves imagining one's self as an authority, whether they are communicating in writing or aurally, whether through prepared presentations or in more casual discussions about their topic during workshops or conferences with me. They came to know more about their topics than any other class member, including me, and we became an auxiliary part of this authority when we listened collectively to the podcasts, performing as an audience. Through their performance of an authoritative role, students were able to practice asserting themselves actively in the class. Rather than perpetuating the traditional discursive exchange between the students and the instructor, the podcasting performance disrupted the space of the class and made us all audience members. Along with this shift in authority, there was also an element of creative ownership, or perhaps even subversion, which took place during the podcasting assignment. If you look at the assignment description in the Appendix, you'll see that I asked students to begin their podcasts with the phrase "this just in . . ." However, many students (including V) chose to begin their podcasts differently. They interpreted the performance in new, productive ways, assuming creative authority over their projects.

Performance allows one to pass through a variety of roles. This act of inhabiting new spaces in the context of a writing class can allow students to "try on" authority in a productive way, as in the context of the podcasting assignment. And through doing so, students learn to use ethos to imagine their relationship to their audience and to appreciate the construction of knowledge through writing in new ways. In this sense, we can think of performance in relation to writing assignments as a performative epistemology. Schechner argues that performance requires us to "consider things as provisional, in-process, existing and changing over time, in rehearsal, as it were" (qtd. in Love 14). In the context of writing, students who use performance as part of the writing process come to understand their ethos as provisional, in process, and in rehearsal, a continual "trying on" and enacting. I don't mean to suggest that identity is absolutely fluid or that a writer can transcend socially-constructed and materially-experienced identities, but because identity isn't fixed, students can explore the authority that is available to them when they assume a new role.

In the podcast assignment, students were directed to perform a role that I defined, but they had the freedom to develop that role. Because students could re-record their podcasts as many times as they wanted before we listened to them as a class, they could experiment with different voices and rhetorical effects until they were happy with the recording. While some students chose to talk as if they were giving a report rather than taking on a more obviously dramatic role, the act of recording the performance multiple times in multiple ways brought to the surface the construction of an authoritative identity that students were undertaking. Other students, such as V whose script I quoted above, chose to include multiple roles in their podcasts. Because the first assignment required students to investigate the arguments made on multiple sides of an issue, role playing with more than one character allowed students to speak as authorities from different perspectives. For example, one pair of students produced a podcast about the issue of gun control: one of the students played the role of a newsperson who recounted the arguments by gun-control advocates, and the other student played the role of someone with an anti-gun-control perspective. By depicting a heated debate between the two, the authors were required to create an authoritative voice from two perspectives. When students construct multiple voices of authority, they learn not only can they perform an authoritative voice in an academic context but that any authoritative academic voice is part of a conversation and can be contended with; it is rhetorical.

Overview of the Context, the Assignment, and the Process

For writing students at the urban university where I teach, upper-division writing courses are challenging in my teaching experience. For example, in

a 300-level, rhetoric-based advanced writing class I have taught for several semesters, medium-length research paper assignments often prompt reactions such as increased student silence in the class meetings following my initial discussion of the assignment or numerous questions from students in class and during my office hours about superficial mechanical features of the writing task rather than more substantial questions about invention and content. I guide students to use ancient rhetorical models to analyze current political debates and to construct their own writing about these debates. While my students nearly universally produce better papers in the end than they initially believe they are capable of, I am always in search of ways to make invention more useful and to help students approach their writing with more confidence rather than focusing prematurely on the daunting final research product. In an experiment toward this end, I used podcasting at the beginning of this course in two recent semesters. By prompting students to create their own podcasts at the beginning of the semester, the assignment helped mitigate much of the uneasiness with creating authority that in past semesters prevented students from producing useful early drafts of their research papers.

The assignment (see the Appendix) required students to work together in teams of two to produce a short, five-minute mp3 file[4] that would educate the class about a current controversial news issue they planned to write about over the course of the semester. The description stipulated that the podcast should take the format of a news presentation similar to a news broadcast we might hear on the radio. In order to help students assume the identity of a broadcast persona, students were prompted to begin the podcast with the phrase, "This just in . . ."

Students began by working with a partner to decide whose topics they would use for this activity. Then, they worked together to write a script for their podcast. The script was to be no more than two typed, double-spaced pages so that students did not exceed the five-minute time limit. They could break the script into two equal parts that each wrote separately, or they could write the script together. Some students chose to break the time up so that each produced a separate two-and-a-half-minute podcast on their own topic, but they worked as a team to share ideas and to help each other with the podcast recording process.

I advised students that the content of their podcasts should give the audience (the class and professor) an overview of the issue and encouraged them to include one or two particularly interesting examples or details. The assignment prompted them to think about how they would like to organize the script, as well as who would read it aloud for the podcast, an individual student or a combination of both partners. I encouraged them to be creative and have fun; while not required to include sound effects, some students chose to use editing programs such as Garage Band to weave sound bites and other effects into their performances.

As I explained in the assignment description, the main purpose of the assignment was for students to begin to clarify and narrow the topic of their first paper very early in the writing process. Because students continued with the same topic through two medium-length, scaffolded research papers in this course, narrowing their topics early was an important component of producing successful analytical writing. However, the process of narrowing the topic was a learning goal in itself and not merely a means to an end. Rather than an activity in isolation, the podcast performance was designed to help the class think communally about what kind of topic would work for a research paper and why. The brevity of the assignment encouraged students to narrow the topic to a manageable scope. Students were graded only on producing the podcast and not on whether they had a viable research topic, so the assignment was fairly low-stakes at 5% of the course grade. However, because the podcasts were played for the class, the element of conscious public performance inherent in the assignment encouraged students to take it seriously. The main motivation for completing the podcast was participating in the community of the class and getting feedback on the assignment.

In the full transcript of V's podcast below, you can see how he approached the assignment (V enlisted a friend from outside the class to play the role of "AJ the Host").

AJ: *Welcome everyone. This is AJ, your talk show host for tonight. The presidential debates are heating up, and free trade is one of the hottest topics right now. To discuss the issue, we have with us V, representative of investment corporations. Welcome to the show, Mr. V.*

V: *Thank you, AJ.*

AJ: *So, free trade has given corporations an unwarranted reason to outsource jobs in order to maximize their own profit, while our American workers are left unemployed. So why should we practice free trade?*

V: *Well, AJ, that's not exactly true. People say Americans are losing jobs. But the fact is that the unemployment rate has been stable. Outsourcing resulting from free trade means we have lower-cost imports and it's lowered costs for goods. And this is good for consumers, which means we have a higher standard of living, which is directly related to a growing economy and increasing per-capita GDP. Free trade works both ways, you see. Statistics show that we give up a few jobs, but in return are getting an increased number of jobs that are paying higher in our country. AJ, it's all about learning new skills and just joining the job market. Job retraining is the way to deal with it.*

AJ: *Uh, you said job retraining?*

V: *Yes!*

AJ: *Okay, then let's look at this clip from CNN about a certain Sona Shaw, whose brother, in fact, is unemployed.*

[AJ plays a clip of a woman explaining that she and her brother, both with degrees in engineering from excellent schools, are unemployed. She makes the argument that there is no lack of skills in the United States that would justify sending jobs overseas.]

AJ: *Well, geez, what are her choices now?*

V: *Uh, well, uh, uhhh. . .*

AJ: *Okay, well, let's move on. You also said free trade works both ways, but NAFTA's been in effect fourteen years and it's pretty obvious that it hasn't been benefitting us. Our half-a-trillion-dollar trade deficit is proof of that.* [Phone rings.]

AJ: *What, what is that?*

V: *Umm, sorry AJ, excuse me.*

AJ: *Are you serious, you, you're gonna answer that?*

V: *Yeah, it's very important, AJ. It's my boss.*

AJ: *We're on live right now!*

V: [answers phone] *Hello? Yeah, I'm on the show right now. What?! Are you serious? No, no you can't be serious. Hello? Hello?*

AJ: *What's wrong?*

V: *Um, I just got a call from my boss. He just told me that I got laid off. And a guy from India who will replace me will call to join the debate!*

AJ: *Oh, wow, uh, well I, uh, it's time for a short break, I guess. And I'll be back, if I still have my job.*

In this podcast, V has written a script in which he is an authority on the issue of free trade. He draws from his preliminary reading on issues of free trade and outsourcing of jobs and also on his personal experience in his workplace and with knowing people who have lost jobs due to outsourcing. He introduces the topic of free trade and has the host AJ ask questions about whether the United States should practice free trade. Through his character V, he represents the argument that free trade is creating more high-paying jobs in this country, while AJ implicitly argues that free trade is taking away jobs. Through this performative exchange, V embodies the research question of

whether free trade is creating more or fewer jobs in the United States. Other sub-topics he mentions include NAFTA, the deficit, and the GDP.

After V played his podcast for the class, we discussed the research question that could emerge. We quickly realized that his topic is too broad for a medium-length research paper and that it would be helpful for him to narrow his question. We collectively brainstormed by asking V questions about what he had learned in his reading. In these conversations, V remained the expert, having read more than the rest of the class on his topic. He explained later that he initially understood his topic as free trade, but after our class discussion, he decided that his research question was more specific: whether the benefits of outsourcing jobs outweigh the costs. While he would need to modify his topic still a bit more as he learned more about the debate, he came away from the podcasting assignment with a specific research question that lead him to a focused research paper.

While this public vetting of research topics created communal goals early in the semester, it also gave students a chance to see each other's invention processes as they unfolded. No student struggled in isolation with a topic that didn't work. And while the process of narrowing the topic was indeed work, it was also fun for students/authorities and me the instructor/learner to engage in this communal goal. Perhaps more importantly, as students adopted an authoritative persona and maintained it through their post-podcast discussions and paper workshops, they began to see surface conventions of their papers (the elements students in past semesters had fixed on) as rhetorical choices associated with the persona they would develop in their academic writing.

Results

While I don't make absolute claims about the effects of student-generated podcasting, I have noticed some consistent changes in my advanced writing students' performances both in the classroom and in their writing. I think that these patterns indicate that it would be worthwhile for instructors to experiment with podcasting if they are noticing that their students have difficulty creating authority and engaging productively in their writing processes.

The assignment created a community in the classroom early on that evolved into productive workshop groups for the semester. Students became familiar and comfortable with each other early on, and this comfort manifested itself in more engaged writing groups in which students became invested in each other's progress and success over the course of the semester. (In fact, I often could not easily get students to stop workshopping at the end of class.) Perhaps most importantly, students sought feedback from each other rather than hesitantly sharing their writing because it was required. I saw students plan to e-mail each other outside of class to comment on ad-

ditional drafts and sometimes form informal writing pairs. While students didn't maintain the same workshopping groups throughout the semester, they got used to presenting their work to one another and to thinking of the work of the class as communal.

The goal of listening to the podcasts in class was for students to help one another form viable research topics. To meet this goal, students needed to become invested in each other's success. The fact that they did invest in one another—that they collaborated—was, I believe, due to the performative nature of the assignment. Fishman et al. argue that because of the immediate nature of performance, it "encourages active participation and collaboration, and thus it models many of the qualities we value most in real-time new media writing" (226). I would add that it also mirrors some of the qualities that we generally value in writing: seeking feedback and considering one's audience as part of constructing one's authority and persona. As perspectives on performance studies from anthropology have highlighted, performance offers "alternative ways for imagining and enacting social relationships" (Fishman et al. 227). As students are reimagining their relationships to texts, they are also reimagining their relationships to the classroom. They came to see the workshop as a tool for constructing an identity in their writing rather than an exercise that they needed to complete.

Podcasting also enabled my students and me to see each assignment as part of a larger discursive project involving inquiry, discussion, research, drafting, and revising. It was a key part of scaffolding the major assignments for the course. The podcast assignment followed an annotated bibliography assignment and preceded the drafting of the first research paper. Students were first instructed to create an annotated bibliography of at least seven sources, covering a range of books, articles available through academic databases, and authoritative websites. I gave them the podcast assignment at the same time as the annotated bibliography assignment, explaining that the research they did for the annotated bibliography would be used later for the podcast assignment. In other words, producing a successful podcast depended upon producing a useful annotated bibliography because they needed the information gathered for the bibliography to write the script for the podcast.

The podcast assignment provided a rhetorical element to the annotated bibliography assignment that would not otherwise have existed. Students knew that the information they gathered for the annotated bibliography would later be presented to an audience of their peers as part of the script. They had to gain enough background on their potential paper topic to write a news story on the issue. They knew that the information had to be cohesive and tell a story about the issue—qualities that also help create an effective bibliography. Had the annotated bibliography not been linked to the performance of the podcast, students would have no impetus to imagine an audience broader than me, the grader. But because the drafting of

the annotated bibliography overlapped with the podcasting process, the two assignments complemented each other by creating an investment in rhetorical awareness that students applied to both assignments. Students were able to imagine their peers as an audience more concretely than they might imagine the audience of the annotated bibliography if the end result was only a grade from me. The annotated bibliographies that they produced were markedly more cohesive, thorough, and useful than those produced by students in earlier semesters.

The podcast itself, of course, presented the clearest rhetorical situation. Because students knew that they would be presenting a recorded audio file to their peers, they had an immediate impetus to consider how best to communicate with that audience. As it turned out, they knew how to persuade each other better than I did. Students identified pathos, ethos, and logos during their invention processes without us yet having discussed these categories as part of an ancient concept of persuasion. They indirectly considered elements of classical invention that we would later learn directly, including definition, division, and comparison. They considered how to appeal to their audience, and decided how much to explain about the arguments they summarized. They arranged the information they gathered so that the shape of the debate was clear. With almost no exceptions, students wanted to have their podcasts well-received by their peers as indicated through their questions to me in class and over e-mail, through the time they invested in the assignment, and in their eagerness to hear class members' responses to their podcasts.

Surely, many factors were in play in addition to this assignment that led to my students' increased confidence during the semesters when I've used podcasting. I will need to research beyond three semesters in order to understand more specifically how podcasting worked synthetically with the other elements of the course. However, I do believe that podcasting has opened a window in my pedagogy by allowing student performance to be enacted through a digital audio medium.

Podcasting and Multimodal Discourse

Despite the primacy that composition classrooms typically give to writing while ignoring composing skills involved in multimodal communication, today's students are skilled at manipulating language in a wide range of media outside of the academy. This phenomenon has been recognized by Fishman et al. in their research through the Stanford Study of Writing, and by Cynthia L. Selfe in her research on multimodal composing. Also following this trend, a 2005 study by the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) described young people's lives as "media saturated." Studies such as the KFF's have been used to argue

that incorporating technology more fully into teaching will provide a better real-world education for students (Jensen 19-20).

Yet, access to technology varies considerably from one academic institution to the next. At urban institutions with a non-traditional population, students have differential access to and experience with technology and media resources. While some professors move toward podcasting lectures on the premise that students are already familiar with mp3 files from experience at home and in social settings, this assumption does not hold universally. For example, a significant portion of my students were not familiar with mp3 files: while they may have listened to music in the form of an mp3 file, they were less inclined to know what an mp3 file was or to have recorded one themselves. Thus, an argument could be made that podcasting requires some students to learn new technology rather than capitalizing on technology they are already using outside the classroom. Additionally, any instructor using audio technology should be cognizant of the different learning styles and abilities. This assignment would not work the same way, for example, with deaf students. An instructor might consider an alternative (possibly a video with sign language) performative assignment during the invention process for students with alternative needs. Projects designed to incorporate technology into classes should be viewed, therefore, with an eye toward such issues of access and toward questions about the ultimate goal of using such technology.

At the same time as I point to these issues of access, I argue that multi-modal composing can be a creative, effective part of the invention process for students at urban and traditional universities—and not only because it incorporates technology students are already using in their extracurricular lives (in fact, they may not be using the specific technologies that I am interested in experimenting with in my classes). Such technology is useful because it incorporates performance, a tangibly rhetorical approach to expression that can be useful during the invention process in writing. At its most effective, this performative epistemology enables students to embody an authority that transfers into their writing. The experience can lead writers to take more risks during the invention process and become more confident about their abilities to perform research and engage in the revision of their ideas. All of these benefits can ultimately make the writing process more successful for students.

Notes

1 In the first two years of the Stanford Study of Writing, Fishman et al. found that "nearly three quarters of the study's participants had had a high or very high degree of self-confidence in their writing abilities. However, [. . .] fewer than 10 percent of students maintained very high confidence in themselves as writers during that time" (231).

2 The association between positive experiences and the ability to take on writing tasks has also been discussed in self-efficacy research, though not specifically in terms of risk-taking. Self-efficacy, first studied by Albert Bandura, is the belief in one's ability to complete the tasks called for in order to achieve specific goals. Frank Pajares has applied Bandura's theory to academic writing contexts.

3 I have used a pseudonym for this student in this article. I have also obtained IRB approval for this study through Hunter College, CUNY's Institutional Review Board, and have followed informed consent protocol with all student participants.

4 In my assignment and in the article, I followed the popular convention of using the term "podcast" to refer to the mp3 audio files that my students recorded using a software program called Wimba Podcaster. While students in my course could download and play the mp3 files through an iPod or other mp3 player, we listened to the files through a computer in the classroom.

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Appendix: Assignment

Podcasting Assignment: "This just in. . ."

Purpose: The purpose of this assignment is for you to work on clarifying and narrowing the topic of your first paper. Narrowing your topic early will help you produce a successful analysis paper in the end. Through this activity, you will work with your classmates to clarify your topic and to get feedback on ways to narrow the topic further, if necessary.

Assignment: Your assignment is to work together in teams of two to produce a short (less than 5-minute) audio podcast (mp3 file) that educates the class about the issue you will write about for your first paper. The podcast should take the format of a news presentation similar to a news broadcast you might hear on the radio, and should begin with the phrase, "This just in. . ."

Begin by working with your partner to choose a topic. While you and your partner may write about separate topics, decide as a team which of your topics you will use for this activity. Then, work together to write a script for your podcast. Your script should be no more than two typed, double-spaced pages so that you don't exceed the five-minute time limit. You can break the script into two equal parts that you each write separately, or you can both write the script together.

Your purpose is to give your audience (the class and your professor) an overview of the issue; you may wish to include one or two particularly interesting examples or details about the issue. Think about how you would like to organize the script, as well as who will read the script (you, your partner, or a combination). You may also choose to include sound effects. Be creative and have fun!

You will play your finished podcast for the class. After we hear each podcast, the class will discuss it and make suggestions for narrowing the topic, if necessary.

Schedule: Presentation in library—week 2
Presentation on podcasting—week 2
Script-writing time in class—week 2
Scripts due (I'll look over them)—week 3
Podcasting takes place—week 3
We listen to podcasts—week 4

Grade: This assignment is worth 5 points of your informal assignment grade.