Continuing the Conversation: Empowering Students through Self-Reflective Multimodal Assignments

Answering the call put out by Selber over ten years ago in “Multiliteracies for a Digital Age” to help students develop their multiliteracies has led instructors to embrace the use of multimodal assignments. However, these assignments must go beyond the functional in order to develop students’ critical and rhetorical literacies.

Yancey (1998) views reflection in writing as a growth of consciousness, and a means of going “beyond the text to include a sense of the ongoing conversations that texts enter into” (p. 5). Reflections have more value than simply pushing students to develop metacognitive skills, and assess their literacies critically. Separately, we have many scholars that research the benefits of instructors incorporating multimodal compositions into their curriculum to develop students’ multiliteracies.

However, there is not a lot of research on developing metacognitive skills through the incorporation of digital multimodal reflections in composition classrooms. With this practice students can compose their reflections using multiple modes, which gives them more options to communicate their understanding of an assignment, think back on their process, and continue to develop their literacies on a critical and rhetorical level.

The benefits of this technique are the further development of multiliteracies in a practical way that engages students through a low-stakes assignment using media forms they are familiar with, This assignment allows them to reflect on their learning in a creative way through action-based activities. Thus, students develop multimodal literacies beyond the functional by completing an assignment that requires them to choose images, or animations, and/or create their own memes, or gifs that communicate their thoughts or understanding of an assignment while they reflect on their process. The focus in these low-stakes digital multimodal assignments is the process, and not the product.

This paper answers the call of Selber by introducing the micro multimodal, or micromodal, self-reflection assignment. This micromodal assignment focuses on the process, and not the product, because the product is a short digital multimodal composition. This allows for scaffolding for a larger assignment, and for instructors not familiar with other multimodal formats, such as the video essay, to begin teaching multimodal assignments on a small scale as they become more familiar with the process, and the technology.

These assignments are posted on a student’s individual blog on the microblogging site Tumblr. The use of Tumblr as the platform for these assignments allows for students to view each other’s work, and use existing media to create new meaning as they complete the reflection assignment. Students have the option to compose these reflections using existing media, or they can make their own memes, and gifs, and short videos. This freedom gives students agency to choose which mode best communicates their process of completing an assignment, and the publication of content in social media strengthens a collaborative effort.

The relevance of the micromodal self-reflective assignment to composition studies centers around the low-stakes for both the students and instructors. For students, it gives them agency to express their thought process, and help them develop better study skills through metacognition while improving their multiliteracies with media they are familiar with, and using more than alphabetic text. Instructors with experience teaching larger digital multimodal compositions can benefit from incorporating this assignment as a low-stakes assignment that allows for scaffolding to a larger assignment, and for instructors not experienced with teaching digital multimodal composition this assignment gives them the opportunity to venture into the world of digital multimodal composition on a small scale.