

Storyboarding for Invention: Layering Modes for More Effective Transfer in a Multimodal Composition Classroom

Jon Balzotti

ABSTRACT: This article describes an innovative pedagogical technique for multimodal composition courses: the use of storyboarding as an invention tool across multiple composition platforms. Student response data and our textual analysis of their multimodal texts over a two-year period reveal some challenges when new media projects are taught alongside traditional essay writing. Our research also shows that basic writing students were more likely to see similarities between the two assignments when they were asked to use a similar process of invention. Utilizing composition concepts in tandem to compose two similar but different products (essay and video) that ostensibly reside in different spaces and times provides unique opportunities for teachers and students in the basic writing classroom to discuss conventional compositional moves—context, style, evidence, warrants—and to discuss argumentation more broadly. Reemphasizing the role of invention in multi-modal instruction as a critical component in the process of new media instruction may help students’ ability to transfer writing knowledge from one assignment to another.

KEYWORDS: multimodal; new media; invention; transfer; video; composition; storyboard; basic writing

Composition teachers today are more open to the notion of multiliteracies and more inclusive of assignments that teach communication modes that are audial, visual, spatial, architectural, and gestural, as well as linguistic (New London Group; Kress and Van Leeuwen; Kress). But mere exposure to and study of different literacy practices, such as those listed above, do not, by any means, ensure students learn how to use different modes productively nor how each might be blended together to create rhetorically effective products of communication. Kathleen Blake Yancey argues this point

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when she says students need greater familiarity with intertextuality; that is, they need to understand how to create “relationships between and among context, screen, image, the visual, the aural, the verbal, and with repetition and multiplicity as the common features” (95). Madeleine Sorapure agrees with Yancey that students must develop the ability to blend modes, but teachers must also realize that new media projects complicate an already difficult task of learning to write well. In the traditional writing classroom, she says, students are “worry[ing] only about working with text, and this is challenging enough.” In a multimodal classroom, “students are being asked not only to use several different individual modes, but also to bring these modes together in space and time” (4).

Part of the problem with integrating multimodal assignments in a writing class is the perceived distance between modes, a perception some students have that these assignments exist in separate times and in separate spaces (Sorapure 4). The challenge, then, is in trying to bridge this perceived gap by designing and implementing classroom strategies that help students develop modal relationships for a more coherent learning experience. Developing modal relationships in the writing classroom requires feedback and formative instruction, as Lisa Bickmore and Ron Christiansen state, “so students can try and try again” (240). If proficiency with different modes represents a key outcome of the new media composition classroom (Hull and Nelson), then instruction must provide students with opportunities to practice new media across a range of literacies.

Given many of these challenges and opportunities when teaching a multimodal curriculum, our writing program in conjunction with the university’s Upward Bound program¹ decided to offer a new course for basic writing students, Writing and Thinking (WRT) 1005, and to assess its impact on students’ learning. I describe some of the challenges we faced teaching film production in a writing course and how the use of storyboarding as a transfer tool helped students mediate perceived differences between their new media projects and their more traditional academic writing. Specifically, I report how three teachers introduced students to a wide range of new media projects and included with each of those assignments a storyboarding exercise. My goal is not to present a panoramic view of a particular invention technique but rather to reveal how invention can impact students’ ability to transfer experiential knowledge from traditional academic essay writing to a new media project, and vice versa, creating a conceptual link across a range of writing and new media assignments.

Storyboarding for Transfer

Firstly, a separation should be made between the conceptual skills of organization that the storyboard genre teaches and the larger outcome of transfer, which is defined by Christiane Donahue and Elizabeth Wardle as the ability to move or shift “knowledge, strategies, skills, or abilities developed in one context [for use] in another context.” They point to information from psychology that indicates transfer is a byproduct of individuals and context interacting, as “situated, socio-cultural and activity-based” (Donahue and Wardle). To explore the activities of teachers and students as they attempt to bridge the gap between modes, products, and processes, *transfer* is defined here as an activity related to sociocultural learning.

When one thinks of transferring literate practices, it is wise, as James Gee suggests, to note what “tools” are being used and into what discursive pedagogies these practices are embedded, as “literacy” has “no generalized meaning or function apart from the specific social activities which render it ‘useful’ and which it in turn shapes” (37). Transfer in terms of literate practice calls for shifting, as it is precisely movement and shift that allows literate practices to transfer and to transform, to change from one domain, activity, or purpose to another. In this sense, transfer allows us to think of literate practices as adaptable, able to move away from what has previously been fixed or conventionalized. Through these practices, transfer does not rely on a “singular, canonical” language-based approach (New London Group 3), such as the traditional academic essay. Indeed, Brian Street laments that a singular reliance on the formal literacy prototype we call academic writing has marginalized “other varieties” (326) of texts and asserts that attempts to regulate or mandate a prototype represents a type of ideological gatekeeping—a blockage or barrier rather than flow.

With the idea of ideological gatekeeping in mind, we can begin to understand why, as Donahue and Wardle note, some scholars question the very idea of attempting transfer via the conventionalized or formalized practice of academic writing. Additionally, Jenny Edbauer elaborates that “when positioning of any kind comes a determining first, movement comes a problematic second. . . . Movement is entirely subordinated to the positions it connects” (21). In other words, conventional academic writing alone restricts some students’ ability to transfer knowledge from the known to the unknown. Favoring the idea of exchange and movement, better transfer is possible when we employ a broader notion of what gets transferred or exchanged and how invention, as in the use of storyboarding, can be used to

facilitate transfer of literate competence, as in the case of new media projects transferring to and from traditional academic essay writing.

Stephanie Boone and her co-authors argue that for transfer to be effective, students need to make connections between classroom writing and other writing: that is, writing in all its complexity, writing that necessitates communicating with multiple audiences in multiple modes and contexts (see also Eich; Bjork and Richardson-Klavehn). Donahue and Wardle assemble key points on transfer on their Teaching Composition listserv post, noting transfer is heightened when:

- “first and following tasks are similar” (Bransford, Brown, and Cocking)
- “similarities [between contexts/situations] are made explicit” (Tuomi-Gröhn and Engeström call it “expansive learning”)
- “material is taught through analogy or contrast” (Bransford, Brown, and Cocking)
- the learning environment is supportive of “collaboration, discussion,” and appropriate “risk-taking” (Guile and Young)
- learners “have opportunities to share and be inspired by a common motive for undertaking a specific learning task” (Guile and Young), and
- students “[see] texts as accomplishing social actions” through a “‘complex of activities’ rather than as a set of generalizable skills” (Donahue and Wardle)

Because multimodalities focus on literacies beyond traditional boundaries and draw from modes of representation beyond written and oral language, they present students with an opportunity for transfer. Storyboarding can provide basic writers a low stakes environment where they can experiment with different modes and different ways of communicating meaning.

Perhaps the most valuable lesson drawn from our observation of students using storyboarding in the basic writing class is the emphasis placed on sequencing and play, a discursive practice that stresses change and creativity. Jody Shipka asserts that students are better able to transfer experiential knowledge when they develop “rhetorical, material, and methodological flexibility,” a flexibility best learned through play in the invention stage of the composition process (285). Further, she argues that such an approach requires students to learn by doing, by *playing* with different methods and materials while composing communication (291). Katherine Ahern has

pointed out that when her students use intermediary writing to describe music, an exercise she calls “tuning,” the intercessory step actually changes the listening experience, creating a collaborative learning environment where students *play* with the musical sounds and their “cultural and contextual association[s]” (84). This process of tuning, or playing, in the writing classroom represents a workable solution to what Lillian Bridwell-Bowles describes as our tendency to teach fill-in-the-blank academic essay writing assignments (56). The focus on play during the invention stage gives basic writers the space, opportunity, and freedom to experiment with different approaches as they work to define their communication goals.

Storyboarding for Discovery

The most recognizable feature of the storyboard genre is of course its use of sequential images. But for the comic writer and scholar Will Eisner, sequential art actually begins and ends with writing. In his book *Comics and Sequential Art*, Eisner explains that the first step for the sequential artist is to use writing to discover an idea. The discovery helps the artist make critical decisions later in the storyboard process, as she creates and arranges the images for each panel. According to Eisner, after the images are arranged, the author again uses writing to create dialogue and descriptions. In the three-step storyboard invention process, images and text become “irrevocably interwoven” into a fabric made by the different modes of communication (122).

Inherent in the storyboard genre, then, is a practice of weaving modes together and developing modal relationships. Eisner explains this act as welding together images and sound:

An image once drawn becomes a precise statement that brooks little or no further interpretation. When the two are mixed, the words become welded to the image and no longer serve to describe but rather to provide sound, dialogue and connective passages (122).

Writing becomes sound, dialogue, and connective passages when the storyboard writer deploys words “to expand or develop the concept of the story” (123). Each mode, he says, “pledges allegiance to the whole” and the writing acts within the whole to connect the visual material of the sequence (123). In Eisner’s view, sequential art creates a more “precise statement” of an idea, because writing alone only directs the reader’s imagination, but image and writing together continue to focus the author’s ideas and present the reader with a more accurate, cohesive depiction of the author’s imagination (122).

Other scholars have developed a more rhetorical perspective of sequential art. In his book *Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud extends Eisner's idea of sequential art by focusing on the concept of "deliberate sequencing" and defining sequential art as an act of communication with a particular goal (8). Ben McCorkle suggests that sequential art is actually better termed "sequential rhetoric," the deliberative sequencing of ideas for rhetorical effect. Both McCloud and McCorkle highlight sequential art as goal-driven communication that accomplishes the writer's objective. For writing teachers, however, Dale Jacobs' description offers something else entirely. Echoing Shipka's flexibility and invention, he offers sequential art as a "site of imaginative interplay" (182). What Jacobs adds to the conversation about sequential art is an intellectual space for considering storyboarding as a site for invention and exploration in the basic writing classroom (182), a space where students may experiment and discover different ways to conceptualize an idea.

Students often see the storyboard exercise as merely an arrangement of visual pictures, and so they struggle to see its value for their writing. Many students in the 1005 class initially resisted teachers' efforts to use storyboarding as an intermediary step, a place to organize their composition. When asked by the teacher to work on their storyboard, some students said the storyboard seemed like busy work, distracting them from finishing their project. The students' view of storyboarding did not consider the invention strategy as a site for thinking, exploring, and discovery—a place to "play" with different modes, to conceptualize their ideas, or to transform fragmentation into a unified whole.

In a typical storyboard exercise the first year of our pilot, our teachers began by assigning a larger task and asking the students to organize some of their ideas on the storyboard. These larger assignments varied; for example, one assignment might have been to create a video documentary, and students needed to think through the genre expectations before arranging different parts of their video essay on the storyboard sequence. Paired with the video assignment, only a few students struggled to understand the usefulness or value of their storyboard exercise. But when asked to create a storyboard for the written argumentative essay, many students struggled to see the need for this intermediary task. To address this problem, we set three goals for the following year:

1. Provide more opportunity for students to experiment and play with the storyboards

2. Model for students how the storyboard can weave modes together for rhetorical effect
3. Demonstrate to students how the storyboard shows a similar process of invention between traditional and new media assignments

Since one of the primary goals for the course was to help students develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between new media assignments and traditional academic essay writing, teachers were asked to use more class time to show how storyboarding could be used for both visual and written assignments, for example, to effectively experiment with different ideas, create relationships among the different parts of the composition, and to visualize their argument as a whole. The exercise was therefore adapted by teachers from a simple organizational tool into a tool for transfer.

To help students see the potential of storyboarding for writers, each of the three instructors in the 1005 course used professional examples like Figure 1 to explain how writers develop an idea by weaving language, images, and icons. The following example was used by some teachers to show

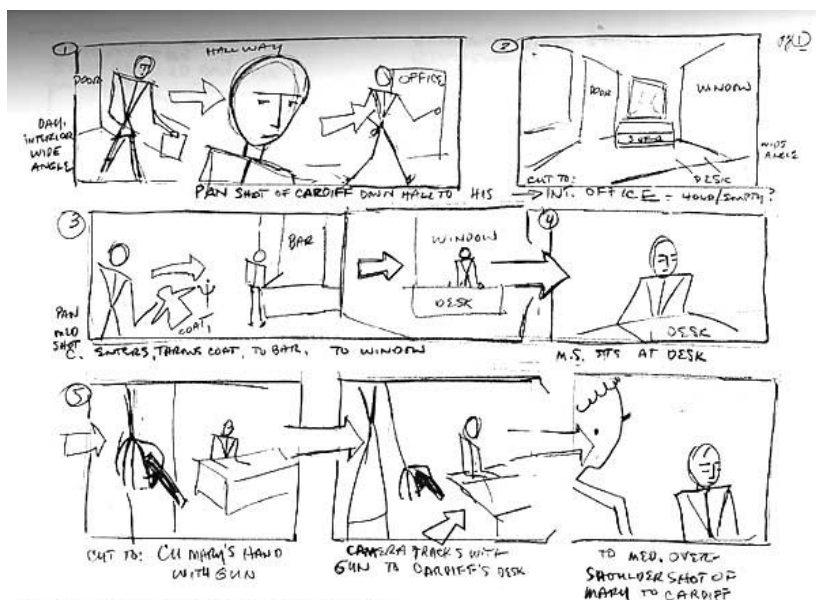


Figure 3-5 Venus Mountain stick figure interpretation. Reprinted with permission.

Figure 1. Venus Mountain Stick Figure Interpretation. *Comics and Sequential Art* (Eisner 2004).

three distinct modes of communication all effectively communicating the professional writer's vision for a scene in the film *Venus Mountain*.

Much like comics, the visual scene of this storyboard uses panels to communicate a series of actions—Mary holding a gun or Cardiff sitting at his desk. The sequencing of visual images as panels organizes actions, but also provides nuance by revealing characters' gestures, facial expressions, and body language. The images reveal what Eisner calls the “silent interactions” (57) of storyboard characters. Cardiff, unaware of Mary's threat, sits quietly at his desk. The sequence of images communicates a writer's style while incorporating other modes to communicate a clear intention and a vision for the film—modes working together. While some of these sketches are simple and straightforward, others require more work to decode. When image and language are combined, meaning becomes far less ambiguous as the storyboard becomes an intermediary space of sequential rhetoric. Panel 5, for example, uses a caption to tell the reader that the figure holding some kind of object is “Mary” and that the object in her hand is a “gun.” Words and phrases, such as “pan shot” and “day, interior wide angle,” communicate how the scene looks, how it should feel. As a tool for the writer, language also names characters and objects. It tells the who, what, where, when, and why of a scene. This idea of clarifying the message helps students see the reader-writer contract and how the different modes in the storyboard impacts the writer's job of communicating complexities of ideas to the reader. Language and image weave a unique modal relationship within the storyboard genre and can lead students to see how to express their ideas in a rhetorically effective manner.

The third mode in the storyboard is less obvious than image or language. The storyboard icon, in this case the writer's use of arrows, indicates movement in the panel. In some cases, a particular object must travel from one location to another. A coat might be flung onto a coat rack or a character might walk down a hallway. In either case, the arrows serve to indicate what can't be expressed by either the simple sketch of the scene or through the writer's use of language. And while icons appear less in this storyboard than other signs, regardless of frequency they add an important layer, not ornamental but necessary: they tell the reader how things *move*.

Writing and Thinking (WRT) 1005

Given the restricted access to higher education for first-generation and low-income students, along with the many challenges of progressing and

doing well, the Upward Bound program partnered with University Writing to offer a new course for basic writers and to assess its impact on preparing students for their first-year writing course. The new course was called Academic Writing and Thinking (WRT) 1005, and as implied by its name, the course tried to create a productive exchange between familiar and unfamiliar literacies. The summer course included biweekly argumentative essays asking students to read carefully and develop a two- to three-page written response. In addition, students worked to develop a twelve-minute video documentary. The students could choose any topic for their documentary and were required at different times during the semester to write an in-class reflection on their experience writing and creating the film. One question related to what specific connections they could see, if any, between writing and their new media project.

In the first year, fifty students were required to storyboard only their videotext and not their written essays. As I already noted, after speaking with instructors of the course, our research team found that students questioned the new media project in their writing class. For the second year, we asked teachers to invite students to storyboard both the new media project and the written assignments. As researchers, we wanted to know—if storyboarding could be used successfully as an organizational tool for filmic text, could it also be used for written essays and would that affect students' perception of the two seemingly disparate assignments? It is important to note that the amount of time the instructors invested in teaching video in the classroom increased from the first year to the second year, and led more students to see connections between composing a videotext and composing an essay. Collectively, these students' responses build a case for increased time for multimodal learning and for rethinking invention as a site of interaction among modes in the multimodal classroom.

Participants and Study Protocol

Beginning in their freshman or sophomore year of high school, students enrolled in the Upward Bound program spend time after school and on weekends preparing for college. Before these students begin their first semester of college, they participate in a summer jump-start program designed to prepare them for general education requirements at the university. For the duration of the summer, Upward Bound students reside in dorms on campus and complete homework sessions and attend group events with on-site team leaders.

Fifty students enrolled in WRT 1005 and were told on the first day of class that they would learn to employ academic discourse conventions along with film and digital technologies—using such tools as camcorders, cameras, and video editing software to create their own short films. Both types of literate practices, the written and the multimodal practices, would provide students a range of opportunities to practice composition in an academic context.

The six-week, three-credit summer course was organized to include both traditional academic writing and a new media project. This meant that students were asked to write weekly argumentative essays responding to the reading in class while also working to create a documentary on an idea inspired by their time in class. The research team also asked students to write two in-class reflections, one at the midterm and one at the end term, describing their experience in the course. One question asked the students what specific connections they could see, if any, between writing and video production.

In the first year of the study, students were required to storyboard their videotext and not their written essays. After the course had concluded, some of the students in their final interview said that they saw the two activities as separate, and some went so far as to question the teacher's decision to include video production in a writing class. These responses led us to re-emphasize the storyboard's potential as a mode of invention and critical thinking. In the second year, instructors were asked to include the storyboarding exercise for both the traditional academic essay writing and the new media project.

The classroom-based fieldwork analyzed for this article includes participant observation and field notes; video recording of class time and homework activities; video-recorded individual interviews with students, instructors, program staff, and tutors; focus groups; and document collection, including written and digital student compositions. The research team gathered the qualitative data over the course of three years, with primary emphasis placed on data collected during the six-week summer courses, designed to help students make the transition from high school to college curricula. We collected pre- and post-interviews conducted with 30 students who participated in the study. In the interviews, we asked students to discuss their experiences in the course in general and with storyboarding in particular. Post-interviews asked students to talk about their experiences in their new writing course, focusing on any activities that they believed had supported their efforts to write better. The interviews helped us identify different themes in the students' experiences within and across these courses. As noted, students also

wrote midterm and final reflections in their six-week summer course with Upward Bound. Researchers sat in the back to observe many of the classes and also collected student reflections. Taken together, these data allowed us to note and compare a variety of impacts and to confirm patterns across data sources (Hammersley and Atkinson; Maxwell).

Growth through Storyboarding: Victoria²

In this section, I offer two typical student examples of storyboarding created in the second year of the study. As one of the researchers for this study, I collected student work throughout the semester and after each student completed their final film project. The two storyboards were chosen by our team as representative of larger trends in the two courses. The storyboards, whether expressed in alphabetic or pictorial mode, were a major part of the students' composition processes. Figure 2, for example, is emblematic of many of the students' preferences when storyboarding the written essays. The decision to use text over images was common and did not reflect any instruction given by the teacher. The storyboards for the film were less uniform and in many cases the students used different text-to-image ratios.

For the first storyboard writing task, Victoria and her class were asked by their teacher to read and respond to Amy Tan's essay, "Mother Tongue." Tan's essay explores the different "Englishes" Tan used as an adolescent and how those languages shaped her identity. Before writing their essays, Victoria and her classmates were asked to explore their ideas. Some of the students used images in their storyboard, but most relied on alphabetic text. Victoria's example shows the class's preference when sequencing their ideas for an academic paper. This preference for alphabetic writing in the storyboard surprised us as researchers, as we expected to see students use more images to visualize their ideas.

Without being directed, Victoria lists the generic moves of the academic essay on the left side of the storyboard: intro, body, and conclusion. While her storyboard uses text to represent her ideas, the panels rely on the chronology of typical academic essays. However, the storyboard allowed Victoria to play with the ordering and content in the "intro," as her erased text indicates that her first introduction was revised; and when asked, she explained that she moved that content to the body of the essay. She decided that her ideas about writing and reading should come after she had introduced Tan's essay to the reader. The storyboard gave Victoria time and space to think about her reader's needs and how best to frame her argument.

~~Storyboard~~
7/20/10

Writing 1005
DUE: Wed July 21st

STORYBOARDS

INTRO	Background Info on Amy Tansinn, her culture & her self.	Briefly explain Broken English Amy's story	Q: Amount of language you know does # not show how intelligent a person is
	"The fact that people in dept store, banks, restaurants, not provide fair service." (JUDGEMENTAL)	Text to self "My mothers limited English but large capacity to learn & retain knowledge"	Just because someone didn't succeed didn't mean that they didn't try
#1	FACTS - Students: how home lang affects proper English (immigrant households)	READING/WRTING vs Math / Science why do they move from lit. to logic.	They understand math & science but not literature Doesn't mean they're not intelligent
#2	Amy's passion / love for language. Her mother's words (Background info)	Briefly quote the things she portrayed through her language "visualize, passion, imagezzy, etc..."	Do something for this community that is not available to them.
#3	Start by restating question in answer form.	Briefly summarize/ elaborate on what was mentioned in text to move onto closing statement	Closing: End with Question you began with but "I tweaked" a little
CONCLUDE			

Figure 2. Victoria's Storyboard for Her Essay.

Of course, this practicing with chronology seems rather insignificant until Victoria's essay storyboard is compared to her film storyboard.

The two storyboard activities were spaced three weeks apart. Victoria and her classmates were told they could use whatever storyboard platform was most useful. This time her instructor gave the class a general overview, explaining different camera shots, angles, and important techniques for blending different modalities in film.

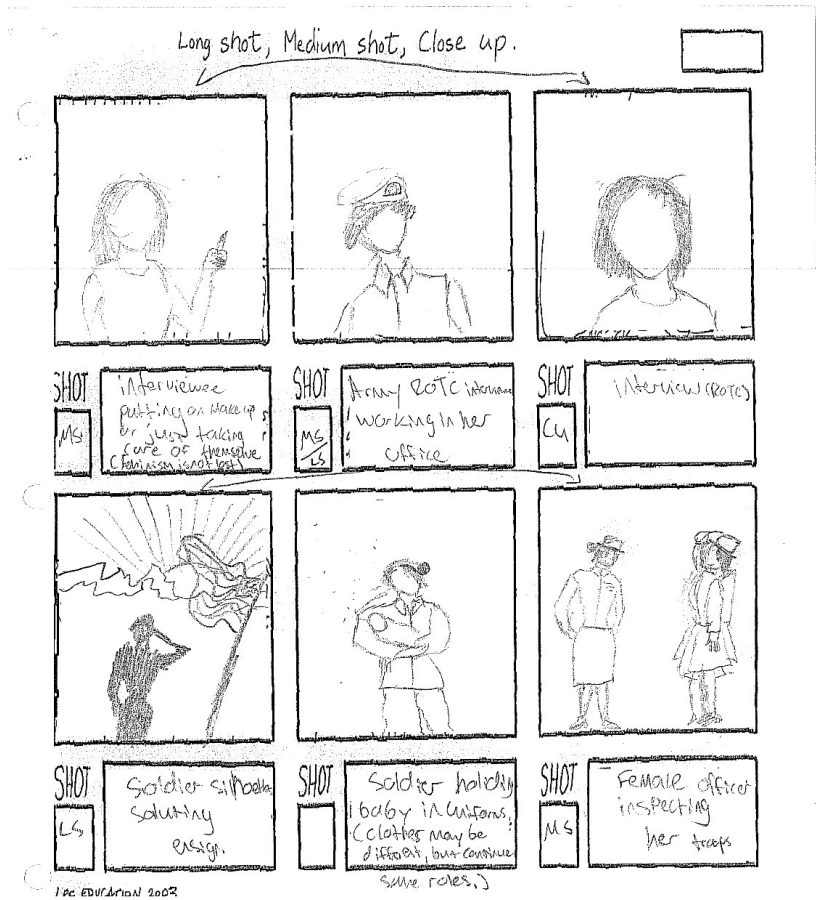


Figure 3. Victoria's Storyboard for Her Film Assignment.

Victoria's film project focused on female cadets in the army: their experiences both as new recruits and as students at the university. She conducted a series of interviews with four female cadets and one male recruiter on campus. She asked her female participants to talk about moments they felt part of the group and times they felt like outsiders. She asked, what was most difficult about being a woman in the military? She worked specifically with young new recruits, hoping to learn something about the transitional period of basic training and active military service. As researchers, we were impressed at her passion for the project and interest in the subject. Victoria told us in an exit interview that she had never worked so hard on an assignment for school.

In the storyboard above, Victoria again begins by introducing her subject and preparing her reader for her argument. She uses recognizable symbols of patriotism and domesticity to communicate her central argument that many female cadets in the army feel struggle with their military identity and social pressures related to female domesticity. Panels 4 and 5 show two very different social obligations, though they come from the same interviewee. Throughout her documentary, Victoria highlights the patriarchal and patriotic culture of military service and the difficulty many of her interviewees faced as they negotiated what it means to be a soldier and a woman in the military. Victoria's storyboard is part of a larger series of storyboards, some depicting images of the film, others filled with messages and quotations. Throughout the storyboard writing process, we observed Victoria using an intermediary writing task to *play* with ideas about women, identity, and patriotism. She used the storyboard to find ways of expressing her findings from the interviews, and played with different visual symbols, audio narration, and written words on the screen. We watched as Victoria wove the different elements of her composition together to create a rhetorically powerful visual experience for the audience.

Finding Connections: Emilia and Lucas

Many students, like Victoria, used the storyboard to play with different ideas and to create powerful arguments through film. But the overall goal of WRT 1005 was to help students see a similar process of composition between the traditional essay and the new-media project. Therefore, teachers were asked in the second year to emphasize the invention process and to encourage students to think about connections they saw between assignments. Our research team found that students with very different writing difficulties found the storyboard helpful during the discovery stage of their writing. Two students in the study, Emilia and Lucas, demonstrate unique responses to the intermediary writing task and show how storyboarding helped to facilitate multimodal transfer.

For an early writing assignment, Emilia's teacher asked her to respond to Sherman Alexie's essay, "Superman and Me." Emilia received a poor grade for her writing, and the teacher commented that Emilia had presented mostly personal observations and feelings on a general subject, but that she had not engaged with the reading through critical response. Her second essay received similar comments. However, on her third attempt, when she was asked to storyboard the essay, she saw a marked improvement in her grade

and her instructor's comments were much more positive. Her instructor mentioned that the third essay had a more "deliberate approach to her subject," was more "focused" and used "excellent examples" to make her point. While some of Emilia's progress was expected, as she continued to practice writing in a writing course, Emilia also included in her written essays examples from her video project, and revealed how her storyboard and video project became a source of ideas for her essay writing. The repeated instances in which Emilia used the storyboard and her video project as a way to maintain focus in her essays demonstrated a synchronicity that showed a connection between new media production and the challenge of learning the academic essay.

Emilia's essay writing continued to improve as she outlined her essays in the storyboard and as she continued to draw from her film project assignment. Her classmate, Lucas, however, struggled to respond to the teacher's request that he develop more cohesive paragraphs and respond more directly to the class readings. While his film was one of the most complex and successful in the class, he continued to struggle to understand the academic essay genre. He struggled to see a larger pattern for the essay, to find a central claim, and to marshal evidence in support of that claim. However, his film project received one of the highest grades in the class. He told his teacher he had been working all semester to retain a certain "feel" for the film, one that stayed true to the film's topic and argument. After the class had concluded, he also said that his success with the film assignment gave him motivation to continue to develop as a writer. Of course, students often bring with them different levels of expertise in writing, just as they bring greater degrees of familiarity with technology and visual design. But Lucas' experience reveals how confidence gained in one assignment might provide help in another, especially if students are taught to see a similarity across different modes and types of assignments.

Recasting Invention as Transfer

Collectively, the students' work in WRT 1005 builds an optimistic perspective on both invention and transfer. Invention matters, and a large number of the students found the activity of storyboarding, whether low- or high-tech, to be a great help to their writing as they organized ideas into a sequence, considered the rhetorical effect on audience, and negotiated the difficult task of blending modes. We also noted in our in-class observations that the repetition of the composition process and the layering of alphabetic

and video assignments created rich classroom discussion about how to make an argument in both writing and videotexts. When we asked the students in WRT 1005 to reflect on their storyboarding and to tell us if they noticed any similarities in the different types of assignments they were doing in the course, the students said that the exercise helped them see a similar process of making arguments. I have included a few of Victoria's responses from the second year of the study to illustrate some of the themes revealed by students' responses. Following, Victoria writes about having to storyboard her alphabetic essay. Specifically, she describes how the storyboarding technique helped her find a thesis and eventually her argument:

I struggled to come up with an idea but worst of all how to put it all together. Until one day in class our writing professor showed me the relationship between writing an essay and composing a film, it was the same thing! I literally was amazed but I was also amazed at the fact that I hadn't noticed it before.

Victoria's enthusiasm stemmed from a class period where her instructor asked the students to compose storyboards for their written essay and to compare that storyboard with one they had created for their video project. In her first interview, Victoria mentioned her frustration at having to compose a video in a writing class. Why was she "wasting time creating a video instead of learning how to write for college"? After the storyboarding exercise, where Victoria was asked to storyboard her written essay, Victoria explained that the relationship between the two assignments was now much clearer to her. In her third interview, Victoria reported that she began to see a marked improvement in her writing, and according to the instructor, she "showed a greater command of the argument and a much more focused thesis statement." In the final reflective essay, Victoria was asked to explore any connection she might see between her weekly argumentative essays and her film. Victoria responded by noting her increased familiarity with some of the concepts related to academic writing discussed in class.

If you were to look up the definition of "composition" in any dictionary, it would only give you a short answer such as, "the act of combining parts or elements to form a whole." Now if you were to ask me what the definition of composition was, I'd probably give you the same answer. Just until recently, I didn't know what this word meant. But even after reading the definition, I didn't fully understand what it had to do with writing, that is until I thought

about my writing and filming process. Writing and filming are two ideas that are obvious and not so obvious at the same time. What I mean by this is that it is obvious that you have to write something in order to come up with a film but what is not so apparent is that filming is like writing an essay. You need a good opening statement, background info, a thesis, and a few examples to support your idea, and end with a powerful conclusion.

Not surprisingly, Victoria, like many of the students in the class, reached for concepts and terms discussed by the teacher when comparing her new media project and her essay assignment. Isaac, a student who struggled with organization, echoed Victoria's positive experience with the storyboard activity, commenting on the similarity he noticed in the two approaches to making an argument. He writes in his reflection: "As I had explained earlier, I have learned that film and writing just go hand-in-hand like peanut butter and jelly. They are actually two forms of the same process: drafts, editing, revising, final drafts." The analogy between peanut butter and jelly and writing and filming was a bit unique. But both Isaac's and Victoria's responses suggest that the fundamentals of meaning making were made clearer when the students were asked to draw on their experience with both assignments and see differences and similarities. Unsurprisingly, many students used composition concepts discussed in class—draft, revising, editing, and thesis—in their written responses to talk about similarities between video and essay writing. From a writing instruction standpoint, greater connectivity between assignments suggests a scaffolding technique that may improve the writing process for basic writers. Recasting the writing process to include processes of invention that help students make connections among assignments of different modes constitutes an important step towards greater transfer in the writing classroom.

Making Connections through Storyboarding

To reiterate, one of our goals was to observe the experience of these student "filmmakers" to determine the kinds of transfer that many students actively involved in storyboarding can generate in a multimodal first-year composition class. Scholars in basic writing suggest that instructors need to make connections between modes more transparent and more accessible to students. Invention strategies, such as storyboarding, link modes to repeatable compositional activities and can demonstrate to students the

interconnectedness of different modes of communication, fostering the transfer of writing knowledge.

While a majority of students indicated they came to the course with a basic understanding of many of the concepts we discussed in the basic writing course—such as audience, thesis, argument, writing process—we observed an increased familiarity with those terms as they used them with more frequency in their reflection and were able to apply those concepts to two seemingly different assignments. Thus, the link provided by storyboarding may help some students overcome preconceived notions that the new media project and the traditional academic essay are unrelated activities, but, more importantly, this invention exercise may also help them deepen their understanding of composition concepts. By comparing and contrasting Emilia's and Lucas' experiences with both forms of composing, we see how two students developed unique understandings of writing and of their capacity to use multiple modes for a blended approach to communication.

Emilia's and Lucas' experiences demonstrate many of the benefits of storyboarding. We observed that, like many of the students in the class, these students appeared more able to *see* the argument they were trying to make. And as Victoria began to use storyboarding as an invention technique, she also made better connections among her ideas and a more focused response to the reading. Interestingly, both Emilia and Lucas started to make more consistent arguments from their films to their written essays. Students who used storyboarding as an invention exercise learned to employ *literacies* in more and flexible ways: solving problems, exploring ideas, making arguments based on rhetorical situation or need and supporting ideas with evidence. Teachers also learned from their students, and saw the value of intermediary writing tasks as they observed their students working to connect ideas between modes. Now in its sixth year, WRT 1005 continues to be an important bridge between the Upward Bound program and our first-year writing course.

If we are to answer the call of composition scholars who argue that the classroom must keep pace with the changing nature of communication, then scholarly projects that seek to understand and address students' conceptualization of what academic writing requires might provide data that can lead to greater synchronization of compositional modes. The storyboarding technique is one example of an intermediary space where students can see similar processes of invention across modes of communication. In addition, the technique may increase the likelihood that students will internalize rhetorical concepts, because composition in many modes offers students op-

portunities to compare the deployment of those abstract concepts in at least two spaces. Utilizing composing processes in tandem—towards similar but different products, essay and video, and which ostensibly reside in different spaces and times—provides unique opportunities for teachers and students to discuss conventional compositional moves and discuss argumentation more broadly.

There is a caveat to this generally positive argument for storyboarding in the composition classroom: these assignments are time consuming and sometimes include a degree of student resistance to using a nonstandard technique for composing. But, as Sara Chaney suggests, resistance in the basic writing class can become a “catalyst” to success (25), and I would add that intermediary writing tasks can help students cope with divergent expectations of what should or should not be part of a writing class. Our research with Upward Bound students and storyboarding suggests that expanding students’ literate actions to visual modes of invention is likely to enhance transfer knowledge as basic writers work hard to create informed arguments in a multimodal classroom. Contemporary technologies afford new ways of imagining compositional invention. If we believe that different viewpoints are “inseparable from their distinctive modes of representation,” then we also must begin to seek “alternatives” (Weaver 62, 50) for standard essay writing and to use modes in tandem as we approach any literate activity. Storyboarding contributes to our knowledge of experiences beyond conventionalized essayistic possibility and supports students’ transfer of sophisticated literate practices.

Notes

1. The Upward Bound program was established nationally in 1965 as one of the Federal TRIO programs funded by the U.S. Department of Education. A focus of the program, as listed in the mission statement, is “to identify qualified individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, to prepare them for a program of postsecondary education, [and] to provide support services for such students who are pursuing programs of postsecondary education.” Prior to the development of the WRT 1005 course, The Upward Bound Program reported that a large number of its students struggled to pass their first-year writing course. Many students repeated the first-year writing course. Both Upward Bound and Writing Program administrators felt these students needed additional prepara-

tion for academic writing. The goal of WRT 1005 is to ease the transition between home literacies and university academic literacies.

2. All names of teachers and students used in this article are pseudonyms.
3. Participant consent to reproduce student work was gathered through consent forms approved by the university institutional review board.
4. Thanks to both Sundry Watanabe and Christine Searle for their contributions to the research team.

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