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Module 5 Primary Post

(Part 1) The Hicks text p.128-134 set forth a number of questions--Select any two of these questions to answer regarding students, subjects, or spaces. (You don't have to answer two from each two category, two across all categories.) Please type the question you are answering as well as your answer.

I found the questions in posted in the Hicks text as very interesting and important on many levels. My responses to two of them are listed below:

As a reader of digital texts--web pages, videos, audio, images--what qualities do you most appreciate? What elements of craft do you try to emulate in your own digital reading (such as bookmarking, tagging, annotating, and sharing) and writing (such as using multimedia and hyperlinks)?

I appreciate when digital writers have made the text easy to read and pleasing to look at. I have worked in my school as a yearbook editor and have read the book The Non-Designer's Design Book as a resource for my personal web site building projects. I like sites that have a professional-look and follow rules of good design. I am more likely to spend more time on a polished web site than one that appears amateurish. I appreciate sites where the writer provides related articles or links to specifics resources mentioned within the text. I am more likely to return to sites that are updated and have new content on a regular basis.

As a reader, I have become a fan of online bookmarking tools, like *Diigo*. I have *Diigo* installed on my laptop and mobile devices so I can bookmark sites of interest and value for later retrieval or sharing. *Diigo* also allows me to highlight and annotate web pages, which has been valuable for sharing professional resources at school. Our middle school has been researching 1:1 programs and mobile devices for almost a year and *Diigo* is a site we used to share our research and comment on the benefits and challenges of various platforms, devices, and technology models we have been studying.

In what ways do students understand their rights as producers and distributors of digital texts? To what extent do they critically think about fair use as well as how to employ copyright-free or copyright-friendly materials as appropriate?

I don't think students often think about these issues. After taking TE 831 (Teaching School Subject Matter with Technology), I began to realize that my students were not aware of copyright issues and licenses. They were aware of plagiarism and that they couldn't copy someone else's words, but citing sources was still a new concept. In particular, I realized my students had no awareness of fair use in relation to images or music they might use in school projects. To be honest, I was not aware of many of the issues before I took the course. Since then, when assigning projects where students will use multimedia elements, I require them to only choose content with Creative Commons licenses. I just introduced this to my 5th graders this week and like last year, they had never heard of Creative Commons. I asked them how many of them had used Google to find a picture for a project and printed it out. Most had. I asked them if they realized that most images they find that way are probably copyrighted, and of course, most said they did not. One of my students asked, "If it's copyrighted, why is it on Google?" It was a good question and I had to explain that Google doesn't distinguish whether

something is copyrighted or not. It is a search engine and its only job is to catalog content that exists online. We as users need to decide how we can correctly use the content we find. It was definitely a new concept for them. As far as students thinking about their *own* rights, I haven't gotten to that discussion yet, but I think it is an important one. As we encourage our students to move past being consumers and to become producers of content, they will need to make decisions about how they wish to share the content they produce and how they want others to use it.

(Part 2) Using ideas from the assessment chapter, the whole text and/or the readings, revisit one of your previous posts from this semester and describe how digital writing could play a part in what you've mentioned before. It may be your ideas on how to save time or to better communicate about writing with colleagues from Module Two; it may be digital writing's place in part of the genre instructional cycle, it may be instructional ideas you want to try from the expository module; it may be one of Fletcher's strategies you want to try.

In my primary post for Module 2, I discussed my school's 6th grade writing curriculum and that providing more authentic experiences was a weakness I saw in our program. I said, "Areas that I feel need improvement are providing more "real" or "authentic" avenues for writing, providing wider audiences for work than just classmates and parents, and helping students determine areas for improvement and revision versus following teacher-recommended changes." The Zemelman text mentions that best practices are for student writing to be authentic in order to make it more meaningful. I feel digital writing is an excellent way to add that dimension to student work. As Hicks mentions in Chapter 6, when students write in digital environments it allows others besides the teacher to view their work and ideas and "No longer is writing about just trying to please the teacher as as to earn an "A." It is an act of identity formation."

I've seen how sharing writing in a digital medium can encourage students to think beyond the teacher as their only audience. This trimester we are reading *The Cay* by Theodore Taylor and my students are keeping a character journal in which they recount events from the perspective of the main character Phillip. In the past, the journals were written in their notebooks and occasionally students would be able to read their entry to the class. The majority of the writing was not viewed by anyone beside the teacher though. About four years ago, my colleague and I decided to make the journal a blog. Students would view a prompt created by the teacher to guide them on each entry, but they would write their journal entries online and they would be visible to the entire class. We first used Blogger, but last year switched to Kidblog which worked much better for this project. Using Kidblog allowed each student to keep their own individual blog instead of just posting comments to a teacher-created post. This allows students to view their journal entries as a unified work, much like the original journals, but also allow others--teachers and students--to comment to them directly on their writing. I am finding this added element of authentic audience to be a motivating factor for students. They also are curious about what others are writing and are eager to offer constructive advice and praise.

Pick out an idea you've already had, and write 600 words or so on how you'd adapt or "re-mode" that idea for a context that makes use of digital writing (be it blogs, Google Docs or other collaborative word processors, wikis, social networks, photo essays, digital stories, portfolios, or something else). You may consider writing about how you'd prepare students to use the technology, what learning objectives would be important to you, how you would observe student progress (See Merchant, 2005), how you would assess formatively and summatively, how this would further your entire writing instruction agenda for your students.

In considering an idea that I'd like to adapt to digital writing, I think that I have already made good

progress with my 5th grade students. With Google Docs, this year I have introduced the concept of a Reader's Notebook through my teaching project, and as I mentioned above, I've adapted a journal project we do with the novel The Cay to use a blog. I am not teaching 6th grade this year, but expect to next year and think I would like to adapt our writing program to make use of Google Docs to create online portfolios.

As I mentioned in earlier posts, our 6th grade curriculum is writing-intensive, as opposed to the reading-intensive 5th grade program. The goal of the writing program is for students to build a portfolio of pieces of various genres and at the end of the year to share them with parents in a student-led writing conference. Students write a cover letter called the "Letter to the Reader" which discusses the growth they have made as a writer and highlights their strengths and weaknesses and identifies goals for further growth.

Currently, students type their assignments, but everything lives as a piece of paper in a manilla folder kept by the teacher. I would love to use Google Docs for student writing and take advantage of the revision history and commenting features for providing formative assessment and feedback. Students do several revisions of major pieces, such as their personal narratives, suspense stories, and persuasive essays. By using the revision history, the teacher could provide feedback on changes made in each draft. In addition, using this feature could also give students information to include in the reflections they complete after each assignment. By looking at their own revision history, it might help them reflect on how the writing process developed for them and also call attention to strengths and challenges.

The other element that using Google Docs could accomplish is to make the portfolio a permanent artifact of student work that can follow them beyond 6th grade. Currently, at the end of the year the writing portfolios are passed on to the 7th grade teacher who usually gives them to the students to take home. If the work was kept digitally, it could be reviewed by students, parents and teachers throughout students' school careers and perhaps become something that is built upon in successive years. Rather than existing as a single snapshot of one year's growth, it could become part of a portfolio that spans several years.

Lastly, creating the portfolios as digital works would also open new opportunities for publishing. Instead of writing for the limited audiences of the teacher and parent, students would be able to share their work with others in the school community and perhaps even beyond. As I mentioned earlier, providing an authentic audience for writing is a powerful motivator and I think it would help students to choose topics that are meaningful to them and aim to produce work that is a reflection of their best effort and abilities.