Reflection in Digital Spaces

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"Affordance" means you can do some things easily now, and you are more inclined to do those things than you were before simply because they are easier. ... Computers make it easier. So, the new things that ubiquitous computing makes easier may not in themselves be completely new. ... However, just because the new technology makes them easier to do, they become more obviously worth doing than they were in the past.

—Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis, Ubiquitous Learning

Well, Naomi (and other Sweetland Writing Pros). You have succeeded in brainwashing me. Here I am, sitting in the library diligently writing various papers until my computer runs out of batteries (currently at 9%—I have been here awhile), and I am writing self-reflective comments! I didn’t even realize what I was doing until I had written a couple and started to rearrange some paragraphs. And then I realized that I have been using reflective commenting quite a bit lately. At work, in my internship, when reviewing friends’ papers ... and it’s just so handy!

—Hannah Tasker, Sweetland Minor in Writing, student blog post

The Digital Difference

I will begin with what I take to be a truism in a book dedicated to reflection, namely, the benefits of reflective pedagogy have been pretty effectively established at this point—for student engagement, for development of student writing, and, as more and more research makes clear (including chapters in this book), for transfer of learning about writing to other contexts. But, if these rich educational experiences are possible in analog, print-based classrooms, what more do digital reflective spaces have to offer? How does reflection work—and does it work any differently—when it is electronically mediated? These are the questions I take up in this chapter. By way of a preliminary response, and following the line of thought sketched in the epigraph from Cope and Kalantzis (2009), recent digital technologies make student reflection on writing easier to do, and therefore more obviously worth doing, more frequently and in more diverse ways, than ever before. Here, I echo a point already made by L. Lennie Irvin in 2004: "Reflection is at the center of learning ... This learning cycle can happen in any context—electronic or not. However, the electronic learning environment magnifies the potentials for reflection’s role within this learning cycle" (under "Conclusion").

With ubiquitous computing and ubiquitous learning, there are indeed more texts and types of texts to reflect on, more ways to reflect on them, more possibilities for social and public reflection, and more opportunities for researchers—and students as self-researchers—to perform data-driven reflection on writing by using such features as versioning, histories, metadata, and the like to study in detail changes in writing over time. But Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis also note that "the new things that ubiquitous computing makes easier may not in themselves be completely new" (2009, 4), and, indeed, as some of the more recent literature on reflection points out, many of the genres of student reflection remain fairly stable in digital contexts, but their modes and media continue to change in ways that matter for reflective pedagogical practice. As I will suggest in this chapter, then, the integration of digital tools for reflection into writing classrooms offers, at a minimum, these affordances:

- Reflection is more easily ubiquitous, making the design of a reflective curriculum easier, and therefore a more obvious choice.
- The work of reflection can become more public and visible, allowing peers more easily to dialogue and collaborate and thus to learn from each other’s reflective practice.
- More parts of the writing process can become visible, retrievable, and accurately measurable, which allows both student learning and instructor and program assessment to become more data based.
- And, last but not least, reflection can be more fun to do because it more easily offers students the opportunity to be innovative, to take new ownership of the modes and forms of their reflections, and to share those forms with multiple audiences.

I will explore these claims, first, by way of a brief review of the literature on digital reflection in writing studies and, next, discussion of a range of student examples from a course I teach at the University of Michigan.

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In her seminal book Reflection in the Writing Classroom, Kathleen Blake Yancey (1998) builds on the work of Donald Schön (1987) to develop the idea of "the writing classroom as a reflective practicum," one where
"reflection is woven into the curriculum" (vi). Here, she sets the stage for the idea of what we might call ubiquitous reflection in an analog context and delineates the ways in which students' reflective practice can permeate a writing classroom during, between, and following compositional tasks via reflection-in-action, constructive reflection, and reflection-in-presentation (see 13-14 for Yancey's initial definitions). Reflective genres such as prewriting activities, writing journals or logs, process notes, writer's memos, and portfolio letters, among others, institute reflective work both around and between each distinct writing task. At these various moments of composition, according to Yancey, reflection constitutes a kind of self-dialogue that, over time, develops into a method for self-regulated learning: "In method, reflection is dialectical, putting multiple perspectives into play with each other in order to produce insight. Procedurally, reflection entails a looking forward to goals we might attain, as well as a casting backward to see where we have been. When we reflect, we thus project and review, often putting the projections and reviews in dialogue with each other, working dialectically as we seek to discover what we know, what we have learned, and what we might understand.... Moreover, we can use those processes to theorize understandings that will themselves be revised through reflection" (1998, 6; emphasis in original). Taken together, these dialectical practices of projecting and reviewing enrich what we might call, following Gregory Schraw (1998), an ongoing and recursive metacognitive cycle of planning, monitoring, and evaluation around the range of writing tasks students encounter. Indeed, Schraw, like other researchers of metacognition, regards this process of self-dialogue as "essential to successful learning" (125). As multiple studies have suggested, a reflective curriculum of this type scaffolds and promotes reflective self-dialogue, assisting students to develop a "theory" of understanding for their writing, however nascent, that offers them a sense of self-efficacy and developing expertise (see, for example, Bandura 1989; Conner 2007; Mezilish et al. 2013; Shulman 2000; Zimmerman and Moylan 2009).

Interestingly, the earliest literature to take up the then-new idea of digital reflection interrogated the character and function of digital reflection in a "networked" environment. In 2004, when Irvin published "Reflection in the Electronic Writing Classroom" (explicitly taking Yancey's book as prompt and interlocutor), he could cite only two other publications addressing the practice of digital reflection: Steve Watkins's (1996) "World Wide Web Authoring in the Portfolio-Assessed (Inter) Networked Composition Course" and Joel English's (1998) "MOO-Based Metacognition: Incorporating Online and Offline Reflection into the Writing Process." Though Watkins doesn't explicitly use the term dialogue, his argument for networked electronic portfolios centers on the role of hyperlinks in enabling the imagination of an "authentic" audience for the student's artifacts and reflective letter and a consequent move from reflective self-dialogue to a reflection "oriented...to outside audiences" (229). English, on the other hand, constructs his argument for MOO-based writing conferences specifically around their ability to foster and support "metacognitive dialogue" between and among instructors, tutors, and students (under "Discussion of the Annotated Logs"). Irvin picks up on this idea to claim that "in a traditional writing classroom the most important 'other' a student engages with is the teacher; however, the networked environment changes this teacher-centric dynamic" and leads to an "expanded social environment for reflection" (under "Reflection in the E-Writing Classroom").

More recent literature builds on this discussion of the differences reflection in digitally mediated spaces may make for students' metacognitive processes of self-dialogue and their more social forms of reflection via the affordances of new digital tools. To take one example, as Julie Meloni notes in her August 18, 2009, Chronicle of Higher Education blog article on incorporating the versioning function in Google Docs into a portfolio-based writing class, "The Google Docs revision history allowed the students to pick specific points in their writing process and discuss the changes between these points, down to the most granular details. Although I told the students ahead of time that they would need to be aware of their writing and revision process in order to talk about it at the end of the course, students reported that the Google Docs revision history was a 'life-saver.'" Meloni highlights the nuanced, self-evaluative reflection-in-presentation work the revision history made possible, and the student enthusiasm quoted here perhaps pertains primarily to this unexpected access to their previous drafts. But Meloni also speaks to another affordance of reflection in digital spaces: this tool gives students unprecedented ease of information regarding their own writing histories, down to their minute-by-minute choices, should they want to engage in such detailed self-study. In this case, the use of a digital tool may significantly alter the reflective activity of casting backward to review what we know about our own writing development.

Other publications describe remedies of existing genres of reflection—writing logs become weblogs, say, or handwritten notes in the margins of a paper move into the electronic Comments (see, for example, Irvin 2004; LaVaque-Manty and Evans 2015; Mezilish et al. 2013; Welch 1998). These same digital tools and spaces—such as VoiceThread or
blogging platforms—also bring other voices into the process, turning reflection into a much more collaborative endeavor (in an update to the benefits noted by English in 1998 in regard to the MOO) and thus building on one of the central dimensions of Web 2.0 activity. Tools like Google Docs can support social reflection as well by facilitating collaborative writing and allowing collaborators to view each other’s revisions in the history and in fostering dialogue in the margins of the document via the Comments feature and push notifications to e-mail of any updates in the dialogue. Indeed, the ability to use digital forms of reflection for peer-to-peer social activities easily and regularly stimulates the important processes of affirmation and ideas testing that John Dewey (1916) and others have attributed to the work of reflection in community (see also Rodgers 2002; Vygotsky 1986). Still other remediations of reflective genres take greater leaps. For instance, Gail Hawisher et al. (2009) describe remediating a prompt used by Prior and Shipka (2003) that asked students “to draw images of their writing processes” (Hawisher et al. 2009, 255)—itself already a remediation of an alphabetic process note—by proposing that students “attempt to capture a representation of their writing processes on camera” (255). The authors were ruminating on the meaning making enabled by this medium that is not available in the prior media: the ability, for instance, to capture time-based phenomena, such as the rhythms of writing in our everyday lives, or the opportunity to add multimedia, such as soundtracks, that may convey richer information about our writing processes. As they note, “We show how digital media can offer new images of the dispersed character of writing and learning, not as punctual events but as emergent flows” (255).

Debra Journet et al. (2008) describe a similar experiment—producing a daily reflection in “any form: written, audio, video, still images” (under “The Reflection Assignment,” emphasis in original)—with interestingly similar results, reaching the conclusion that “what we discovered as we composed multimodal reflections was that modality changed the nature of reflection” (under “Home”; emphasis in original). In particular, reflecting in digital media altered these students’ own sense of their writing processes and of the generative role of reflective work in these processes. For instance, in an audio reflection, one student describes becoming more aware of the ways the recursiveness of his own writing process (signified by his unedited ums and ahhs as “signs of the reflective moment”) challenged his attempts at linearity and clarity of purpose (under “Audio Reflection”). Another student describes, by way of multiple drafts and “takes” of her narrated final video reflection, coming to understand reflective writing itself as a form of “practice” for composition that prepares and enables it (under “Reflecting Through Insecurity”).

Taken together, these examples of reflection—using digital tools, often on writing in digital spaces—suggest not only that the activities of reflection have changed, but that the availability and use of these tools can change students’ and instructors’ expectations of what it is possible to reflect upon, of the kinds of insights and meanings that may be achieved through reflection, and of the skills and competencies that may be acquired by engaging in reflection. A brief taxonomy of this changed landscape of reflective activity might note the following multiplication of possible scenarios for reflection:

1. There are new ways of reflecting (using digital tools) on traditional ways of writing (print-based products and processes)—for example, using a webcam to record a series of brief writing-log video entries on the process of writing an argumentative essay.

2. There are also traditional, print-based ways of reflecting on new digital ways of writing (new products and processes), such as multimodal texts—for example, writing a reflective process note about composing a webpage.

3. And then there are new ways of reflecting on new ways of writing—for example, using VoiceThread to engage in a group reflection on a video essay.

In all these scenarios, core aspects of reflection, as described by Yancey (1997), persist. Yet the core aspects of reflection are augmented in various ways as they are connected to the new demands and opportunities of working with digital tools in digital learning environments, thereby enabling ubiquitous digital reflection within a digital reflective praxis.

**Ubiquitous Digital Reflection**

But what exactly does ubiquitous digital reflection look like from the student’s perspective? In the following pages, I explore the ways students take up the invitation of ubiquitous digital reflection within a classroom setting and how this experience may carry over into other later endeavors. My primary focus will be a course that tried to enact a digital reflective praxis by weaving reflective activity into every aspect of its curriculum. The Gateway course to the Sweetland minor in writing program, like the program as a whole, is based upon supporting students from across the University of Michigan as they grapple with writing problems that engage them—in any mode and medium and in a variety of
rhetorical situations—and as, through this process, they develop a sense of writerly identity. Students work on three major writing projects—a project examining “Why I Write,” a repurposing of a previously composed argument for a new audience, and a subsequent remediation of this repurposed piece—and create an electronic portfolio.

The course has as one of its central learning goals that students “become flexible and creative writers across a range of rhetorical situations as they develop an electronic portfolio that demonstrates self-reflection and writing development” (Sweetland Center for Writing 2013). In pursuit of these goals, reflection is not simply “threaded through” the curriculum (to borrow a metaphor from Yancey [1998, 17]), an accompaniment to the three major writing projects, but in a very real sense it is the curriculum; it constitutes the warp and woof of the course. From analyses of their "go-to" sentence styles in previous writing assignments to interviews with their classmates exploring important writing experiences, from the major writing project examining "Why I Write" to planning activities, self-reflective marginal comments, and self-evaluations accompanying their Repurposing and Remediation projects; from the construction of their electronic portfolio with a reflective introduction and contextual reflections for each artifact to the blog on which all of this work is presented, shared, and dissected; and in both analog and digital media, students in the Gateway course are always reflecting on something. One Gateway student, sums this experience up in a December 4, 2013, post to the Sweetland Miner in Writing Blog: “Because of the way we have to reflect on our writing processes... I can honestly say I've thought and written about my writing process more in the past three months than I have in the entirety of my life, without question.”

The ubiquity of this reflection, however, comes not only from its frequency, but also from the fact that much of this reflective work is not necessarily identified explicitly as such but simply comprises the low-stakes writing of the class. Of course, several of the activities that surround the major projects are explicitly named reflections, such as the self-reflective comments students are asked to insert in the margins of primarily alphabetic texts (or in other ways in texts that don't have margins, strictly speaking) that identify areas of challenge or pride or that ask questions about a particular moment in the text, or, again, in the shorter contextualizing reflections students are asked to include in their electronic portfolios that accompany particular artifacts and provide some insight into their role in the portfolio. But, at the same time, a blog prompt may simply invite students to describe an experience trying out a new digital application, they wish to employ for their Remediation project or to share some images from their planning storyboard. Here, the reflection takes place along the way, so to speak, in the act of describing, analyzing, and drawing some conclusions but not because students have been instructed to engage in some specialized activity labeled reflection. As a result, many students in the course stop seeing reflection as something separate from and additional to their writing (and perhaps, therefore, as onerous). This point about the seamless integration of reflection is highlighted by a student's commenting on the blog post cited in the previous paragraph: “Your point about reflection is definitely interesting. I hadn't really given thought to how much we do it in this class, but there's definitely a ton with the exercises we did before each project and all the reflective writing for the e-portfolio. It's definitely made me think about the choices I make during my writing process and my overall evolution as a writer.”

In recounting his memories of reflective writing in the course, this student identifies the capital-R reflection he performed but not the low-stakes reflective activities—like his own blog posts on "Scriptwriting Surprises" about his analyses of the genre of podcasting scripts as he created his own podcast; or "Admitting Defeat and Starting Anew," about deciding to use an HTML template for his ePortfolio rather than coding it entirely by hand; or "Writing FAST," about altering his writing and revision process out of necessity during the semester and finding it works better for him. As this student exemplifies, then, the Gateway students understand their reflection on the blog differently from their reflection in other spaces; here, they are blogging. That is, they are engaging in a personally meaningful act of expressive communication directed at a genuine audience of their peers. And their peers respond, creating dialogue and potential collaboration. That they are also analyzing their own experience in order to share it with others is something they have learned from Andrew Sullivan (2008) and other writers on blogging to be a central feature of the genre; consequently, in this digital space, students can feel proud of their reflective writing (as demonstrated in a blog post title from this same student: "Finding My Blogging Voice... and Making It Look Good"). It is not a dead-end, school genre of writing, written only to satisfy a requirement, as less fully integrated reflective activities can feel to students.

The full integration of reflective activity I have described in the Gateway course is completely facilitated by the various digital tools and environments students use, from word-processing software to blogging platforms to audio, video, and image-editing applications to website platforms, and more. Further, student investment in these digital reflective activities is bound up with their sense that, through reflection, they are grappling with new challenges and situations introduced by the digital
writing and rhetorical tasks they are taking up in the course as well as in gaining a sense of their own development as writers—and maybe more to the point, they are gaining digital skills and experiences they understand to have legs beyond the course and outside of school altogether in internships and jobs. Ubiquitous digital reflection, then, may also help circumvent what we might call “reflection barnout” resulting from the “mis-educative” experience of reflecting as a routinized activity, unconnected to genuine problem solving or meaning making (see Dewey 1916; Rodgers 2002). Scott analyzes this “mis-educative” phenomenon in connection to institutional ideologies and pressures within large-scale portfolio assessment programs that turn reflective letters into a “bureaucratic exercise” that leaves students “unengaged and resentful” and even “consciously dishonest” (Scott 2005, 26–27). But even in the practices of an individual classroom, if reflective writing is perceived as routine, it may not lead students to engage the metacognitive cycle of learning so as to enable development of a “theory” of self-understanding for their writing (Schraw 1998; Yancey 1998).

Anything that can help avoid the stilted, artificial “conversion narratives” about their own writing development students often produce under such inauthentic pressures is a good thing in my book. But behind that, as this chapter’s second epigraph attests—from another Sweetland minor in Writing student blogger, this time posting to the blog in the semester following her Gateway course—when reflection is so woven into the writing curriculum that it becomes habit, students begin to reflect voluntarily, sometimes without “even realizing what [they are] doing,” until they pause and take a look and notice they are creating, via self-reflective comments, an electronic self-dialogue in the margins of their documents. In other words, with ubiquitous digital reflection, students like this one can become self-sponsored reflective practitioners of writing.

Interviews conducted with students from several sections of the Gateway course in the semesters subsequent to their taking it bear out this idea. Students reported overwhelmingly that they found the course’s number and variety of reflective activities “productive,” “useful,” and “valuable.” Further, in response to the question “Are you still using reflection in your current writing?” a majority described both continuing their reflective practices in one form or another and also internalizing them, as suggested in the epigraph. For instance, as one student remarked, “Yeah, just reflecting on . . . how I want it to say and what I want it to say. Then examine it. Does this actually do what I want to do? . . . My whole process of writing now is kind of self-reflective, in maybe not such an explicit way as we did in the course.” And another:

“I think doing it [reflecting] out loud [i.e., in writing] like that makes me do it in my head now all the time, like why am I making this choice and then what is my choice saying?” These students are clearly engaging in the self-dialogue fundamental to effective metacognition, and in so doing, I argue, they describe a genuine transfer of reflective learning: they apply ubiquitous reflective strategies to new writing situations, and, further, they employ a metacognitive language of projection and review to describe their ongoing reflective practice. This connection of conscious, scaffolded, and retective reflective practice to student transfer of learning is consistent with what is reported in other studies (see, for example, Clark and Hernandez 2011; Jarratt et al. 2009; Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak 2014) and is the subject of ongoing research.

THE DIGITAL REFLECTIVE WRITING PRACTICUM

At this point it makes sense to turn to some student artifacts to illustrate some of the reflective work I have discussed. All of the artifacts presented below, produced by students in sections of the Gateway course for the Sweetland minor in writing program, were selected because they are typical of student work for the course, both in quality and in the range of genres of digital reflection represented, and I offer examples from the full cycle of metacognitive work—planning, monitoring, and evaluation—students engaged in.

Planning

Students in the Gateway course undertake a range of planning and discovery activities for their major writing projects throughout the semester in a variety of modes and media: interviews with their classmates, pen-and-paper storyboarding, low-stakes writing in Word documents and on the class blog, and more. Students also share their planning work on the blog as a way of presenting their project ideas and receiving additional feedback and comments from their classmates (beyond their more extensive writing workshops). These three blog posts show students presenting the storyboards they drew for their Remediation projects in response to this brief prompt: “This week, post some images from your storyboard to the blog and comment on them.” We can see these students reflecting on the medium of the storyboard (markers, colored pencils, butcher paper) as well as that of their Remediation platform (Mosaic, Tumblr, Twitter); we see their varied responses to the helpfulness of the storyboard form as a prewriting activity—it aided one student.
My Drawn Out Storyboard

I just figured out how to get this drawing to be the right size. In here, that was a small tech challenge in itself. But this is my storyboard, which is very subject to change. I learned that you have to ask yourself a lot of questions to simply create the storyboard, so I'm glad it forced me to think through the details more thoroughly. I hope I will have the proper amount of time to create this video and make it the way I am imagining it, but if I do not, it will definitely be a simpler version of this. I need to spend some more time coming up with good questions and considering how I will phrase the argument, but it should be fun.

Some questions I am currently considering are: "What do you think the overall message in pop music is?" "Do you think the message in Pop Music matters?" "What Pop song do you like most?" "What do you think the message is?" and more. I am hoping to show that Pop Music does have a message and if people are aware of it, then what do they think of it? Songs have different messages of course, but there are definitely some common styles and patterns that are used to make Pop Music that creates some overarching messages. I am a Communications major so I am interested in this.

Figure 9.1. Student blog post reflecting on usefulness of storyboard for video planning.

in thinking through the details of the project of making a movie (see fig. 9.1 and Appendix 9.1); it led another to a realization about the limitations of her initial choice of platform for the Remediation (see fig. 9.2 and Appendix 9.2); to a third, it seemed less applicable to a Remediation platform that isn’t intrinsically narrative (see fig. 9.3 and Appendix 9.3).

We see these students talking through their storyboard images with their classmates and receiving comments and further advice that affirm their Remediation ideas and in some cases indicate peer learning or "inspiration" already from these initial plans (see fig. 9.4 and Appendix 9.4). A key benefit of the digital platform for this sort of planning exercise is the opportunity for students to externalize a set of ideas and share it with an interested audience, to turn "writer-based prose" into "reader-based prose" (to borrow Flower’s [1979] terms). These students accomplish this move with varying degrees of polish and detail; sometimes the key ideas come out in the Comments section in an exchange with a peer or in the thoughtful rephrasing and extension of an idea other readers give them. In allowing the publication of the storyboard in the first place, the digital space makes this dialogic reflection possible, and, additionally, preserves the exchange for later reference and further reflection.

Monitoring

For every draft of each major writing project, students are asked to include self-reflective monitoring comments—using the Comments tool in their word processing or PDF-creation program for alphabetic and multimodal print documents11 or tools like VoiceThread or a screencasting
My First Storyboard

For my remediating project, I plan on taking the advice and information I have learned through my repurposing project (i.e., a magazine spread on being a young professional) and turning it into an anonymous advice Twitter. I have experienced many of these as an avid Twitter user and find them a successful medium for getting information across to girls of my age.

Creating a storyboard for this kind of project is a little bit difficult. Tweets don’t exactly tell a story, rather a string of 140 character blurbs that all apply to the same topic. Argues about our Figure 9.3. Student blog post reflecting on limitations of storyboard planning for nonnarrative projects.

program for websites or time-based digital media projects—that indicate bottlenecks, breakthroughs, or anything else they wish to draw to their readers’ attention. The prompt for these comments was developed out of a study of metacognitive strategies in upper-level writing-in-the-disciplines courses (see Appendix 9.5 for the full prompt). Students practice using these comments all semester and receive feedback on the form of the comment as well as its specific content, helping to scaffold their use of comments and leading students to become more precise and push deeper in their queries and observations.

As the examples included here suggest, students’ self-reflective monitoring comments—which function as a kind of embedded reflection—in-action—provide an excellent means of creating a reflective dialogue in the margins between writer and reader (whether instructor or peers). Readers get a “back story” on the writer’s paper, enabling responses that speak directly and efficiently to the writer’s central questions and concerns. Further, over time, these small acts of self-monitoring become integrated into students’ composing processes—become a kind of self-dialogue as well—such that in the act of noticing and formulating a comment, students often become able to supply their own response and enact an appropriate revision. One of the Sweetland Minor in Writing student-interview respondents explains the process in this way: “You insert little comments. If you, as a writer, have a question or you’re not sure about something, you’d say, ‘I wasn’t sure if this was

3 thoughts on “My First Storyboard”

November 4, 2013 at 9:53 pm

It looks like you have a pretty good plan for creating a successful Twitter! I like how you addressed the less obvious things that can influence the success of a Twitter, like the description, background, and twitopic. Do you plan on updating the Twitter even after the semester is over? It would be interesting to see its progress months/years from now.

Excited to see your final product!

Log in to Reply

November 5, 2013 at 12:55 am

Dang, your storyboard looks really good! I really like how you are branding YP and plan to provide lots of links/pictures/etc in your tweets. This is definitely a unique and interesting project to be working on, and I can’t wait to see more in class!

Log in to Reply

November 8, 2013 at 8:08 pm

This is such a cool idea! As Sophia said, your storyboard does a great job of showing all the different components that make a Twitter successful. I also like how your project has the potential to be very interactive. Since the discussion of Web 2.0 in the Lev Manovich reading, I have been looking for ways to make my own remediation project more open to the public, probably through social media. Your storyboard reminds me that social media success takes more than simply posting a few photos or links. You have to join conversations that are already happening and actively invite others to check out your brand or thoughts. Thank you for the inspiration, and I can’t wait to see how your project turns out!

Figure 9.4. Students’ reflective dialogue in comments on blog post.
the best argument here. I really like that. I think that really strengthened my writing, because it made me ask questions. Then sometimes after just seeing that question, I was able to answer it on my own, and then sometimes the teacher or students would answer those questions.

The two excerpted examples of self-reflective monitoring comments I've included here are drawn from the major Repurposing project, in which students are asked to select "a piece of writing you've already completed on a topic that's dear to your heart and/or mind, a topic you'll want to continue living with this semester" and "repurpose it for a new audience and with a new or extended argument." Both students are grappling with repurposing an academic argument into one directed at a popular audience (fig. 9.5 and Appendix 9.6) show how a kinesthetics research paper on the effects of exercise on the development of Alzheimer's disease was repurposed as a Time magazine article, and Appendix 9.7 shows how political science and philosophy research papers on global feminism and universal human rights were repurposed as a Foreign Policy journal article). These students' comments speak to struggles with balancing their depth of subject knowledge against what might be expected from their audience, striking an appropriate tone for the target publication venue and refining their argument to convey the complexity of their ideas appropriately. My responses aim to address their question or concern directly and to strike a balance between offering a readily response of impressions and more specific advice for revision.

Evaluation

As they did for all of their final project drafts during the semester, alongside the polished draft of the Remediation project students were asked to submit a reflection accounting for their response to feedback on the earlier drafts. They were also asked to comment specifically (1) on the extent to which they were able to reach their ideal version of the project, given the constraints and learning curve of the medium or platform in which they chose to work, and (2) on the "behind-the-scenes" rhetorical choices they made working within this medium/platform, a reflective activity not unlike Michael Neal's "rhetorical rationale" (this volume). Students could use any medium they chose for this reflection, and most used print. But some students chose to make videos instead for a variety of reasons—because they had made videos for projects in the class and felt comfortable with the medium, because videos afforded the ability to narrate their process dynamically, because videos can convey affect in ways print cannot always (as Elizabeth Clark notes, this volume), and because videos can approximate a reader's experience of a project (navigating a website, say) in a way print text cannot easily.

The video reflection presented here (see fig. 9.6) was composed by a student for whom the Remediation project video was her first foray into video making. For her Repurposing project, this student had chosen to rework an analysis of a girls' health website into an APA-style research paper, and she remixed this paper into a video, "Female Body Image and Sexuality." She incorporated survey data and interview footage she collected as research for the two projects. Her video reflection is essentially a frame-by-frame screencast commentary—from within the "back end" or workspace of the iMovie software program—on her choices and her revisions as she pulled all these elements together and moved closer to the version of the project she had in mind. Among many topics addressed in the fifteen-minute video, this student talks in detail about how she learned to use the iMovie software and the video tutorials that helped her; she responds to feedback I had given her in a one-to-one conference, concerning transitions, for instance, and also discusses the rhetorical choices behind certain transition effects she ended up using; she discusses her aesthetic and organizational choices in the service of impact of argument, parallelism, and uniformity of effect; and she closes by noting her satisfaction at having taken on the challenge of the project.

Video reflections can take a range of forms, from the "talking head" speaking to the camera, to more narrative forms documenting and portraying writing processes (as in some examples by Howisler et al. 2009), to more experimental and impressionistic collages (as in some
examples from Journet et al. (2008). This student’s choice to offer a frame-by-frame reflective narration on the video was completely her own and is unlike any other video reflection I’ve encountered. In a sense, this video commentary has much in common with—is perhaps a kind of remediation of—self-reflective marginal comments in that it takes the viewer into the text of the video production itself to engage in fine-grained annotation. It is also reminiscent of the work Meloni (2008) describes her students doing with the Google Docs revision history in that the iMovie software workspace, captured in a screencast, offers unprecedented access to moment-by-moment rhetorical choices. It is a very long video—almost three times the length of the original 6:18-minute video on which it comments (http://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/handle/2027.42/113196)—and one could offer a critique here that it essentially constitutes a narration rather than an edited composition in itself; yet (for this viewer), it is a fascinating look at a student’s account of her rhetorical processes in creating a complex composition and, in that way, beautifully fulfills the reflective genre of the (video) process note.

Reflective Essay

As part of the digital electronic portfolio they create for the Sweetland Minor in Writing Gateway course that collects their work in the course and assigns them with constructing and presenting a provisional writerly self-identity, students include a reflective essay presenting their process of working through their Repurposing project and its subsequent Remediation. A brief prompt (part of a larger prompt for the portfolio as a whole) directs students to compose “a reflective essay on our big two-part project that leads your reader through the steps from ‘source’ text to ‘re-purposing’ essay to ‘re-_mediation’ project—it should say something about your motivations and your choices and also include links to your ‘source’ and ‘model’ texts.” This essay requires students to make a number of moves quickly: charting the pathway of texts from point A to point B and so on, making these texts (and, if they choose, also their drafts) available to the reader, accounting for the choices made and the understanding gained in the process of remaking an idea in new genres and media in a style that invites readers in and makes them care about this process. It’s a complex rhetorical situation in any event, made more so by its being embedded in the high-stakes assessment scenario of a final course portfolio that counts for a quarter of the course grade.

I juxtapose two examples of this reflective essay to demonstrate different possibilities for taking up the prompt and to highlight some subtle intertextual connections between them. Josh, who hand coded his site, makes expert use of thumbnail screenshots, hyperlinks, text interspersed with images, and arrows and other diacritical markers that indicate connectivity and movement and foreground the visual rhetoric of his own work of repurposing and remediating (see fig. 9.7 and Appendix 9.9). His linear top-to-bottom format narrates the temporal progression of his conceptual relation to the topic of zombies over a few semesters and specifically his “exploration of the undead and the cultural implications of our culture’s obsession over them.” It also narrates and demonstrates changes in his relation to the modes and media in which it is possible to explore the topic, as we see in the shift from traditional alphabetic essay to multimodal magazine article to website.

Beixi takes a different approach, essentially creating a minisite within a website that illustrates not only the evolution from Repurposing to Remediation but also the evolution of each of those projects in itself (see fig. 9.8 and Appendix 9.9). In its use of arrows to point the way from topic to topic, her reflection in some ways draws inspiration from Josh’s—a very real possibility in that Josh’s reflective essay is published on a publicly accessible website (it is housed in the ePortfolio showcase on the Sweetland Minor in Writing blog [http://writingminorsweetland.lsa.umich.edu/eportfolio/]) and was used as a model of this reflective genre in Beixi’s Gateway class two years later, which allowed Beixi
throughout the project was showing a keen interest in adapting the digital space of the public website. The shift in Beixi’s essay, from the single large arrows pointing downward we see in Josh’s, to clusters of arrows pointing first right and then left, signify in some sense the complex hyperlinking of her minisite. Buttons naming the source texts (Memoirs), repurposed texts (Short Stories), and remediaded text (Ann Arbor Awesome) lead us to webpages that present those artifacts along with brief contextual reflections for each item. The text of the reflective essay itself also includes hyperlinks to each individual artifact, and sidebar columns include links to drafts of the

to view it, reflect upon it, and learn from it on her own time. This asynchronous form of peer-to-peer learning extends the model of dialogic reflection afforded by the digital space of the public website. The shift in Beixi’s essay, from the single large arrows pointing downward we see in Josh’s, to clusters of arrows pointing first right and then left, signify in some sense the complex hyperlinking of her minisite. Buttons naming the source texts (Memoirs), repurposed texts (Short Stories), and remediaded text (Ann Arbor Awesome) lead us to webpages that present those artifacts along with brief contextual reflections for each item. The text of the reflective essay itself also includes hyperlinks to each individual artifact, and sidebar columns include links to drafts of the

Figure 9.7. Student reflective essay portraying linear temporal development of repurposing and remediating projects.

Figure 9.8. Student reflective essay portraying networked development of repurposing and remediating projects.

Repurposing project short stories as well as brief reflections on topics related to the development of the Remediation project: the choice of a platform, rhetorical choices behind the image captions in the final version of the project, and ways she understood her writing style to change over the project’s creation.

These reflective essays, which constitute a kind of middle ground between the writerly identity-building work of constructive reflection, made public and explicit, and reflection-in-presentation offer a rich sense of how students take up real choices among complex rhetorical situations and the investments they have in both subject (or content) and medium. In so doing, they enact a remediation of the essay form. Josh describes knowing from the outset that he wanted to make a website about zombies, but then feeling frustrated when constraints on his composing process did not allow him to achieve his aim as he had envisioned it, despite his previous experience building websites; he also describes his excitement at deepening his work with the topic by
incorporating the visual rhetoric of his magazine article. Beixi, on the other hand, describes wanting to try out a genre she had never explored in order to return to some ideas about growing up she wanted to think through more fully and the challenges this genre posed for her, particularly in regard to craft; she also describes the leap in collaborating with a classmate to create the Am I Awesome website (http://beixi.wix.com/livelaughloveshare!listen/c3e1), a process that combined a wide range of analog and digital media, from in-person interviews and digital photography to writing and website building. The rich multimodal and multimedia dimensions of these two reflective essays are central to the conceptual, aesthetic, and metacognitive work they do—for their writers and readers alike—work that fully depends upon the affordances of the digital spaces in which they live.

DIGITAL REFLECTION AND DIGITAL RHETORIC PEDAGOGY

In response, then, to the questions with which I began—how does digital reflection work and how does it differ from nondigital reflection?—the literature and the examples I’ve presented suggest that digital spaces present both new challenges and new opportunities. We see these challenges and opportunities

- in the relative "ease" (to return to Cope and Kalantzis’s [2009] term) of designing a reflective curriculum using digital tools and thereby cultivating students’ capacity to become reflective practitioners of writing;
- in the new and varied forms of dialogic reflection and collaborative possibilities these tools make possible;
- in the increased visibility of aspects of writing development and writing processes enabled by these tools that can alter our sense of what we’re doing when we write; and
- in the creativity, engagement, and sense of ownership of their reflective writing students exhibit when given the freedom to explore these tools and use them to make authentic composing choices.

But beyond these student experiences of reflection in digital spaces, of course, as Vancie reminds us, “teachers are also reflective practitioners” (Vancie 1998, 15). I want to conclude, then, by taking a look at how teaching ubiquitous digital reflection may have effects on instructors’ own reflective and pedagogical practices. Does pedagogy work differently in digital reflective spaces, and does reflection work differently in digital pedagogical spaces (such as a Google Doc or student website)? Just as we’ve saw that there are multiple possible scenarios combining digital and print-based tools for writing and for reflection, there are also various ways of incorporating digital reflection into writing classrooms. Indeed, some instructors may wish to introduce their students to multimodal composition in a primarily low-stakes way and so may use forms of digital reflection in curricula based around analog forms of major writing assignments. In this way, then, the use of tools for digital reflection need not entail a more general digital pedagogy.

Yet, I want to suggest that there are significant benefits to teaching digital forms of reflection in classrooms where students are also engaging in other genres of multimodal and multimedia composition. And beyond that, once we have taken the plunge, so to speak, into teaching certain digital genres, it can be hard to resist transforming the writing classroom into a fully digitally mediated space. Journet et al. (2008) describe their efforts “to move the [multimodal reflective] work [they] were doing into [their] own undergraduate teaching” and their sense that their teacher experiences of the affordances and constraints of reflecting in digital spaces ended up facilitating deeper insight into their students’ digital and analog print-based writing experiences, in terms of students’ apprehension and resistance to reflection but also opportunities for "play" and new composer/audience relations (under “Home”; see also Rogers, Trauman, and Krieman 2010). In part, it may be the case that teaching and cultivating student reflection with digital tools and in digital environments may feel different because there are so many elements to be figured out—more variables to juggle and more permutations possible in all aspects of the rhetorical situation for a particular piece of writing. In these scenarios, the instructor does not have all the answers and may play the role of codiscoverer. Indeed, instructors may themselves be reflecting in ways more urgent and deep than usual on the pros and cons of their pedagogical choices with the tools at their own disposal.

In my own experiences with teaching in the digital reflective practice of the Sweetland Minor in Writing Gateway course, I have found that students’ explorations of (and growing confidence and expertise in) digital rhetoric in their major writing projects (particularly the Remediation and ePortfolio) and on their blogs creates a kind of synergy with their uses of digital tools for purposes of reflection, leading to digital reflections that are unexpectedly innovative, nuanced, and thoughtfully conceived. Here, then, working with students as they discover the rhetorical affordances and constraints of various digital tools for their writing, as part of digital rhetoric pedagogy, supports as well the development of a digital reflective curriculum. On the other hand,
I have found that my students’ digitally mediated reflections on their own and their classmates’ writing have also changed the ways I respond to their writing, such that much of my own commentary and feedback has become multimodal—almost as a means of keeping up with them. One example of this change can be found in the dialogue initiated by my students’ self-reflective monitoring comments, but I have also found myself needing tools like VoiceThread and screencasting software to respond to my students’ videos, podcasts, websites, and the like. Most recently, I have screencast my one-to-one conferences with my students; we sit at my computer and they lead me through the questions and comments they have about their multimodal compositions in progress. After the conference, I send them the link to the video so they have a record of our conversation, in what might be a kind of time-based remediation of the alphabetic record English (1998) describes students taking away from their conversations in the MOO.

Teacher and student, then, we both become aware that there is now much more to reflect on, that our digital composing work has us crossing into new and unexpected compositional and rhetorical spaces, and that there is therefore real exigency and scope for our work of reflection. At the same time, we both understand that our digital tools for reflection are themselves part of these spaces and that in wielding these tools with increasing precision and knowledge, we may glean important new insights into the significance for writing, learning, and teaching of a reflective curriculum.

Notes

2. The literature on the role of metacognition in self-regulation of learning is vast. Some key texts include Flavell 1976; Palincsar and Brown 1984; and Dunlosky and Metcalfe 2009. See also Matthew Kaplan et al. 2013 for an overview of strategies for teaching metacognition across the disciplines.

3. According to the program website, “Students in the Minor experiment with writing in numerous ways, including (but definitely not limited to) multimodal projects, traditional papers, professional writing, and creative work. They can make use of what they have learned in their major and other courses within their writing projects for the minor, as well as explore new ways of writing that they might not otherwise encounter” (under “Minor in Writing,” University of Michigan Sweetland Center for Writing, https://lsa.umich.edu/sweetland/undergraduates/ minor-in-writing). Sweetland Minor in Writing students are required to post to this blog (http:// writingminor.sweetland.lsa.umich.edu/ ) during enrollment in their gateway and capstone courses for the minor program and are invited to post in the semesters in between and subsequent to their completion of the program.


7. Tony Fucito (1987) notes an interesting similarity in The Journal Book, describing an analog form that has much in common with the blog genre in what he lists as its language features, cognitive activities, and formal features that facilitate students’ free rein in expression and conceptual exploration (see, e.g., 2–3). One key feature this form lacks in relation to the blog, however, is its built-in availability to other readers and its promotion of easy dialogic reflection.

8. The student blog posts mentioned in this paragraph all appear on the Sweetland Minor in Writing Blog and can be found on Joseph Ostrow’s author page: http:// writingminor.sweetland.lsa.umich.edu/author/jostro/.

9. Kathleen Blake Yancey, Stephen McEloy, and Elizabeth Powers note this problem, too, writing, “There is a line of research, small but growing, suggesting that asking students to perform [reflection] ... (as 'proving' they have learned) might in their view be counterproductive because in such a context, ironically, they can be required to dissemble in order to succeed, with the result that portfolio-as-site-for-authentic-assessment becomes another platform for the game of grades” (Yancey, McEloy, and Powers 2015, under “The Take-Away”).

10. These interviews comprise one dataset from an ongoing longitudinal study of student writing development conducted by the Sweetland Center for Writing at the University of Michigan, on which I am a co-investigator. I cite only a tiny fragment of interview language coded as Reflection. I am grateful to the study research team for permission to make use of this material here.

11. The Insert Comment tool in the student’s word-processing platform is so commonplace as to be almost “low-tech,” but it does provide a digital space, which enables a level of detail in both student comment and instructor or peer response, as the examples suggest, that would be quite difficult to achieve with handwriting in the margins.

12. I have been asking my students to insert self-reflective comments in the margins of their working and final drafts regularly since 2008, when I and colleagues from UM’s Center for Research on Learning and Teaching proposed their use as one intervention in this study, titled “The Impact of Metacognitive Strategies within Writing in the Disciplines,” funded by the Spencer and Tangle Foundations. The study found overwhelmingly that students and instructors are engaged by and learn from use of these comments: “Our analysis suggests that the [self-reflective] monitoring comments had the largest impact. They were the most highly rated of our interventions, both by instructors and by students. In fact, between 85% and 95% of students agreed or strongly agreed that the monitoring comments were useful” (Meizlish et al. 2013, 11; see also LaVagne-Manty and Evans 2013, particularly their discussion of the dialogic function of these comments, 135–86 and 139–35).

13. Elizabeth Clark also notes a similar effect in her comments: “Minor in Writing students are required to post to this blog (http:// writingminor.sweetland.lsa.umich.edu/ ) during enrollment in their gateway and capstone courses for the minor program and are invited to post in the semesters in between and subsequent to their completion of the program.

14. See Yancey et al. 2013 for a critique of excessive length in video reflections as well as important questions regarding establishment of the genre conventions for video and audio reflections (199–200).

15. This chapter was completed prior to the publication of On Multimodality: New Media in Composition Studies by Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes. Nonetheless, I want to acknowledge their important contributions to a new theory of “the essay” and to multimodal, multimedia compositional world as well as their criticism of the field of composition studies’ “fetishization” of this form (Alexander and Rhodes 2014, 43).
APPENDIX 9.1.

My Drawn Out Storyboard


I just figured out how to get this drawing to be the right size in here, that was a small tech challenge in itself. But this is my storyboard, which is very subject to change. I learned that you have to ask yourself a lot of questions to simply create the storyboard, so I'm glad it forced me to think through the details more thoroughly. I hope I will have the proper amount of time to create this video and make it the way I am imagining it, but if I do not, it will definitely be a simpler version of this. I need to spend some more time coming up with good questions and considering how I will phrase the argument, but it should be fun.

Some questions I am currently considering are, "What do you think the overall message in pop music is?", "Do you think the message in Pop Music matters?", "What Pop song do you like most?", "What do you think the message is?" and more. I am hoping to show that Pop Music does have a message and if people are aware of it, then what do they think of it? Songs have different messages of course, but there are definitely some common styles and patterns that are used to make Pop Music that creates some overarching messages. I am a Communications major so I am interested in this ha.

APPENDIX 9.2.

Storyboarding Part 2

November 7, 2013 (http://writingminor.sweetland.iss.umd.edu/2013/11/storyboarding-part-2/)

I wrote before about loving the storyboard experience (mostly after the fact) of the e-portfolio, so I was actually looking forward to storyboarding my Re-Mediation project. For this project, I was going to create a collection of animated GIFs, on the topic of gender socialization.

I planned to make a BuzzFeed-type article about breaking gender stereotypes, with most of the information presented visually through animated photos or video clips. Creating my storyboard was pretty straightforward – I typed a list of what images or
My First Storyboard

November 4, 2013

For my remediation project, I plan on taking the advice and information I have learned through my repurposing project (a magazine spread on being a young professional) and turning it into an anonymous advice twitter. I have experience many of these as an avid twitter user and find them a successful medium for getting information across to girls of my age.

3 thoughts on "My First Storyboard"

It looks like you have a pretty good plan for creating a successful twitter! I like how you addressed the less obvious things that can influence the success of a twitter, like the description, background, and twitpic. Do you plan on updating the twitter even after the semester is over? It would be interesting to see its progress months/years from now.

Excited to see your final product.

Dang, your storyboard looks really good! I really like how you are branding YP and plan to provide lots of links/pictures/etc. in your tweets. This is definitely a unique and interesting project to be working on, and I can't wait to see more in class.

Reply to this comment/review
APPENDIX 9.5.

Appendix 1: Meeting Self-Reflective Comments in Busy Drafts Monday.

Appendix 2: Student Self-Reflective Monitoring Journal asking questions about organization and clarity.

APPENDIX 9.6.

Appendix 3: Thematic Analysis of Aperture's "The Meaning of the Table" an Incomplete Novel by Kurt Vonnegut.

APPENDIX 9.7.


Student is the association between IQ and brain volume and why it matters to make these results legible clear? I don't think I did a good job of explaining the correlation, but again, I do not know how much to assume a reader knows. I feel like I should explain things more thoroughly.

NS: This section feels too academic, really. In some ways, I wonder if you need it, or if you could paraphrase the key idea more quickly? I'm not clearly getting the correlation you want to convey... How do you model articles handle this kind of thing?
From Memoirs to Blogs

The major project for our Writing 200 seminar was a multi-part project that asked us to work with a source piece, and then submit a haiku, short story, and full-length story. My source writing was a series of memoirs written during Sophomore year of college that reflected on running through life and my living in the moment.

The first part of my project focused on incorporating these dialogues into works presented in a different light. I chose to turn my memoir into two short stories that would make my story more tangible. By reading it in the style with characters other than the narrator, I hoped to bring these stories out to allow people to relate what the emotions would be to others.

The second part of my project was called interaction, using a different medium to illustrate our writing. For this part, I worked with Sandy Safran and she developed a blog for the class. The goal of this blog was to visit strangers on the street and ask them to tell us questions to see if we could be more creative.

From this project, I saw so many changes in my perspective, writing, and to have one reflect on itself. It helped me understand different humans, and have used all of this to create and communicating with writing. Through ups and downs, successes and challenges, it has been a journey from memoirs to blogs.

Memories

On this project, I saw so many changes in my perspective, writing, and to have one reflect on itself. It helped me understand different humans, and have used all of this to create and communicating with writing. Through ups and downs, successes and challenges, it has been a journey from memoirs to blogs.

Reprinting

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