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One way of thinking about Rich Rice and Kirk St. Amant’s book, Thinking Globally, Composing Locally, is as an argument: while today’s global citizens are linked to their audiences more closely than ever due to technological progress and development, the relationship between local and global contains an increasing number of complexities that communicators must thoughtfully consider in order to produce rhetorically effective and culturally sensitive communication that leads to positive action. Composing, particularly online, necessitates crossing many boundaries that are racial, ethnic, political, economic, and geographical, among others. Rice and St. Amant structure this collection of essays effectively by identifying three primary categories comprising the process of digital composing between local and global communities and individuals: contacting, conveying, and connecting. The book provides scholars and teachers with new approaches and ideas for implementing a broader understanding of how students can navigate and negotiate their role rhetorically in a growing global network.

Regardless of geographical distance, digital tools and networks produce cultural proximity. Josephine Walwema, in her chapter, “Digital Notebooks: Composing with Open Access,” writes, “The global proliferation of online media and Internet access enables individuals from different cultures and nations to interact in different ways” (15). The first section of the collection, contacting, describes means of accessing global audiences whose different cultures imply divergent needs, preferences, and values. There are of course many digital platforms a teacher might use to facilitate contact between students and these “real-world” global audiences. Section one identifies a number of them, including digital notebooks, experience maps, ePortfolios, and online forums and message boards. Of course, the fact of a program’s or tool’s existence does not obligate an instructor to use it, even if others do, but what this section does well is illustrate how the range of alternatives available provides a number of access points for meaningful communication between cultures.

If a writing or communication instructor wants to help students position themselves as contributors in a global society, there are plenty of tools available that promote critical thinking, reflection, and linguistic control. For example, Cynthia Davidson, in her chapter, “Reconstructing Ethos as Dwelling Place: On the Bridge of Twenty-First Century Writing Practices,” argues that the networked and fragmented nature of ePortfolios can be one such avenue for
augmenting greater rhetorical awareness and cultural situatedness while also promoting articulation of and reflection on individual identity. Davidson writes, “ePortfolios are hybridizations of culture viewed through the lens of an individual’s experiences as represented by or her artifacts, the reflections on them, and the connections that she or he makes between them” (82). Such tools can support students as they participate in intercultural collaboration and develop greater awareness of their linguistic resources as a set of choices they can deploy to accomplish tasks and negotiate divides among communities of practice.

Rice and St. Amant’s book reminds the reader that, even though these tools or points of intercultural access are as valuable as they are ubiquitous, nothing can substitute for sound principles of communication applied within the restrictions of the affordances those tools make available. They write, “Just because one can contact a given audience does not necessarily mean that audiences will understand the ideas conveyed or the writer’s purpose for sharing that information” (8). Ideally, communication, well-planned and -executed, proceeds smoothly from one party to another. Message sent, message received, message understood. On the other hand, Rice and St. Amant, using the analogy of an ice rink that appears flat but actually “is covered by a wide array of dips and pivots and cracks and bumps,” argue that intercultural communication—and communication in general—can be fraught with “friction points” that can exert a significant influence on “how smoothly or how quickly or directly information can move from point to point in global cyberspace” (6). For communicators attempting to convey a message to a global audience, the rhetorical situation is complex, comprising factors that can disrupt how a message is understood or determine whether an audience understands it at all. Such friction points are common. They often occur when a composer fails to take into consideration technological, economic, geographical, historical, cultural, or political difference. The composition or communication classroom, at least one organized with a global framework, should provide students with reliable principles of intercultural communication and awareness of potential friction points caused by false assumptions as well as strategies for identifying resolutions when communicative friction inevitably occurs.

The collection culminates in a section about the need for contacting an audience. Rice and St. Amant define contact as an exchange or action on the part of the audience (8). Feedback, too, as Vassiliki Kourbani argues in the chapter “Writing Center Asynchronous/Synchronous Feedback,” can be a form of contacting (233). If a communicator has successfully utilized a digital tool and either avoided or navigated potential friction points of an intercultural interaction, the result should be some kind of meaningful action on the part of the audience. In a writing center, this action could take the form of revi-
sion, while in other situations or settings it could manifest in the shape of humanitarian campaigns and even political revolution. In her chapter, “Clicks, Tweets, Links, and Other Global Actions: The Nature of Distributed Agency in Digital Environments,” Lavinia Hirsu describes digital literacy and intercultural communication in the context of social activism and social media, arguing that “digital environments call for continuous worldwide participation, and model of intercultural communication need to capture dynamic exchanges that reduce the distance between cultural experiences and multiply the site of agency and rhetorical action” (258). If students should question the purpose of learning to communicate cross-culturally and their roles as communicators in a networked, digital world using the multimodal affordances of whatever their program, tool, or app of choice happens to be, the answer may vary in specifics, but should invariably involve contact.

Rice and St. Amant’s collection of essays is a valuable resource for composition and technical communication instructors interested in exploring new ways of connecting their students with global audiences and promoting intercultural exchange and understanding. At a time when some argue for a political isolationism that is at odds with social and global realities and well-being, this book aims to facilitate the development of relationships and reduce friction, via effective communication, among local and global partners.

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