

*Transfer Across Media: Using Digital Video in the Teaching of Writing*, by Crystal Van Kooten. Computers and Composition Digital Press, 2020, n.p. (digital publication).

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Argument, rhetorical strategies, and secondary research are some of the skills that first year composition students are expected to learn in their writing classes. And, though writing instructors understand that academic writing can be relevant for students's future professions, the dynamics of the transfer of writing knowledge beyond writing classes is often less clear to both instructors and students. The eBook, *Transfer Across Media*, makes the connection between learning and application visible and evident, and it helps teachers and researchers identify the moments when transfer of writing skills across contexts, professions, and platforms is happening (or may happen). What is more, the book establishes a video methodology for studying writing and multimodal transfer.

In short, the students in *Transfer Across Media* create multimodal projects and then share the experiences with Van Kooten in her interviews. In doing so, students reflect on the experience as both the producer and the consumer of the digital tools and platforms. The goal of this interaction is to study how digital composition gives the creator, the audience, and the stakeholders a deep understanding of the transfer of writing knowledge. To study such meaning-making (through images and sounds, etc.) in students' digital projects, Van Kooten's second chapter invokes a robust body of scholarship in the field of rhetoric and composition to build a new method and methodology (which, helpfully, includes a detailed description of how she collected and coded the data). In chapter 3, Van Kooten uses Stuart Selber's three parameters of digital literacy (functional, critical, and rhetorical) to understand how multimodal productions by students help in "composition, reflection, and envisioning possibilities for future transfer across media" (Van Kooten).

Van Kooten defines transfer across media as a "process of considering, (re) using or choosing not to use, applying, and adapting compositional knowledge through various digital and non-digital technologies and within the surrounding practices and norms of the compositional context." In addition to the transfer of print literacies into multimodal contexts, Van Kooten explores the rich possibilities of students transferring multimodal composition skills beyond the classroom. For instance, one of her student participants, Evan, attempts to publish his project "College Collage," making the classwork mean more than just a class grade. Readers of Van Kooten's book will be interested

in how deeply students considered the impact of the traditional rhetorical skills in future professional activities.

By conducting an in-depth study of the digital video composing experiences of eighteen students and instructors who participated in this study, Van Kooten argues that the act of video creation provides useful opportunities for transfer across media through multimodal production. Van Kooten records “multimodal snapshots of student experiences and their learning” to analyze and reveal how the transfer was being enacted by students. In reporting on the data, Van Kooten adopts an ecological metaphor—as described by Kristie S. Fleckenstein et al. in “The Importance of Harmony: An Ecological Metaphor for Writing Research”—to demonstrate that analysis of transfer across multiple platforms provides a rounded understanding of composition for students.

The snippets from interviews with students is a valuable experience for a reader of this eBook because this is unlike reading an interview transcript followed by an analysis. Throughout the book, the interviewees contribute richly to the interpretation of their own words, and Van Kooten matches this informative, conversational tone in the paper even when she analyzes student’s texts and theories. The harmony between Van Kooten’s own writing and the actual conversation in the videos is seamless.

For instance, in an interview with participating students, Van Kooten asks them to identify what learning from the current composition course could be potentially transferred or if they see the transfer happening. Two of the students smiled and admitted that they discussed the concept of transfer several times in the course. However, not many of them were able to identify where transfer was happening. Some students said that they will find the knowledge of the MLA style useful in other courses; others referenced writing strategies and engaging collaborative moments from the course. Students identified these as practices that will require them to restructure the learned skills to suit the new context, thereby demonstrating meta-awareness.

In addition, the student-interviewees make a number of interesting observations and revelations. They admit that video-making is tougher than they had expected. They discuss their own video creation process, and, while doing so, allude to the processes of other students. Some students exchange stories regarding the creative process of their peers, occasional interventions, and unplanned collaborations. These are moments where students engage in collaborative knowledge-making and are able to locate the moments rhetorical literacy taking place during the composition process. Another student said that the concepts that he collected in this course will remain relevant to him in his college writing as well as his career writing after graduation. For another student, the experience of the assignment instilled an interest in joining Disney;

she mentions that the process of composition was “magical” and that the scaffolded assignment scheme taught students to compose the paper without stress.

Several students also provide actual example of potential transfer of writing learning, as with one who says that, during the making of her video, she was “sketching how [she] wanted everything to look.” The students thus connect invention and arrangement processes—which writing teachers might otherwise associate more closely with written texts—and provide evidence for how these canons can be used to created using visuals. The study also demonstrates, then, that students’ critical faculties are responsive not only to their own multimodal work, but also to the multimodal work of others. Engaging in digital learning does not simply involve using the computer as a tool for composition. Instead, students are exposed to all three forms of literacy, functional, critical, and rhetorical (Selber 24). They use technology while constantly critiquing and discovering the social aspects of collaborative digital learning. They recognize the interaction with the digital tools as a rhetorical act that provides the scope for persuasive social interactivity within the groups. As part of a complex ecology of producer and consumer, students learn to be effective communicators in a structured digital environment.

Van Kooten also writes that several students faced technological issues in completing their digital productions. Several students looked for solutions to their issues on the Internet; another got help from a fellow classmate; and a third turned to a professor. Not all students succeeded in overcoming the technological challenges, but their attempts to problem solve were valuable moments. In the end, this troubleshooting knowledge may itself may be transferable within their course activities and beyond.

Toward the end of the eBook, Van Kooten provides feedback from instructors who participated in the study. The instructors provide justification for using video composition as a way to teach students how to transfer the functional, critical, and rhetorical literacies. They also share tips about how to enhance the learning experience for students. Van Kooten argues that a multisensory learning method can be effective in teaching composition through videos. Students interact with not only the tangible machine but also the sights and sounds produced by the machine. She ends by quoting a student who describes a successful transfer as a situation in which students are performing the act of transferring learning and skills across modes and contexts without thinking about it. This can happen when students have absorbed the practice and are recontextualizing the skills that seem to come to them naturally and efficiently.

Transferability of learning is fundamental in first year composition pedagogy, and this eBook adds multimodality to that equation (with an understanding that the infusion of technology is integral in college education). However,

the success of transferability is measurable only when we can see it actually being performed in a different context.

Although the project is sincere and ambitious, the argument regarding transferability is limited to the students' articulation of the understanding of the possibility of transferability in future. For example, Van Kooten asks participating instructors, "Are there any concepts or terms from the video/multimedia assignment or from the class overall that you think will stick with you over time?" The possibility of failure of transferability is left unexplored, except in open-ended speculative questions such as this: "Could you tell me about a student who did not appear to demonstrate learning during the audio-visual composing unit? In your view, why do you think this student did not demonstrate learning?" Some of the questions and responses might seem speculative. As a reader, I would be interested in reading a follow-up study where the same students are interviewed after a few years to demonstrate the success of the transferability of the literacies gained through the pedagogical approach outlined in *Transfer Across Media*. If there were failures, what could be possible revisions to this approach.

In any case, the eBook demonstrates the value of including videos in composition classrooms, shows how students are challenged to become critically aware and engaged with the interaction with the digital tools that they are using to compose, and lays out a new methodology for studying transfer in such contexts.

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### **Works Cited**

- Fleckenstein, Kristie S., et al. "The Importance of Harmony: An Ecological Metaphor for Writing Research." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 60, no. 2, 2008, pp. 388-419.
- Selber, Stuart A. *Multiliteracies for a Digital Age*. Southern Illinois UP, 2004.