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Synthesis: Multimodal Composition

The world is always moving further into the digital age, and English students need to learn these skills in their coursework to ensure success. Students are already engaging with multimodality outside of the classroom, but their skills need to be honed. Dr. Dànienne DeVoss and Dr. Melanie Gagich are professors in their respective universities' English departments. Both have written works on the theories of multimodal composition and the benefits of its use in the field of English in higher education. Both professors call for a changed view of multimodal composition since it tends to be an underutilized idea in English education. Educators increasing the usage of underused modes in college-level English programs will benefit students by creating an engaging environment that prepares them for the professional world, which has evolved into a massive digital literacy landscape that students must be ready to traverse.

DeVoss and Gagich offer insights into how educators can implement multimodality theory in their courses. DeVoss says "...our students and our peers, challenge definitions of writing, of composition, of multimodality, and of process. Our text(ualitie)s, and the materials, modalities, and bodies that occupy them, are alive, and they change (over) time, challenging us...to critique and revise our field" (Conclusions). Gagich says "The New London Group members were some of the first to argue that students should have opportunities to practice and learn multiple literacies in the classroom, while utilizing emerging technologies. This idea continues to be reflected in writing and literacy goals" (73). DeVoss and Gagich provide

complementary perspectives on the implementation of multimodality in education, highlighting both challenges and existing practices. DeVoss argues for a re-evaluation of how multimodality is taught, suggesting that current approaches may not fully capture the evolving nature of text and composition, which continually shift and adapt over time. In contrast, Gagich emphasizes that the principles of multimodality and multiple literacies are actively embedded in contemporary classrooms, reflecting the digital age's demands and the progressive goals of writing and literacy education. This contrast suggests that while multimodality is indeed present in educational settings, there may be a disconnect in recognizing and explicitly harnessing these practices. To bridge this gap, it is essential for educators to not only incorporate multimodal approaches but also make students more aware of their engagement with various modes. By deliberately incorporating projects that emphasize different modes—such as podcasts for aural communication or video essays for visual engagement—students can develop a more nuanced approach to their work. This targeted practice not only builds on their existing skills but also prepares them to address specific audiences more effectively. By doing so, they can reinforce students' abilities and ensure that their multimodal skills are both recognized and effectively utilized in their learning process.

Since students already work with multiple modes in the writing process, focusing on underused modes will be beneficial. DeVoss says, “While all thirteen of us compose within the same discipline, our processes are diverse and complex. We navigate the material and immaterial, the multilocal and digitally dispersed, across multiple spaces, places, and interfaces” (Conclusions). Gagich says, “I assure my students that although they may not be familiar with the concept of multimodality, it has a long history in composition” (66). Gagich continues by saying, “Combining each mode to create a clear communicative essay often involves the writing

process (i.e. invention, drafting, and revision), and a thoughtful writer will also consider how the final product does or does not address an audience” (72). As DeVoss points out, the composition process is complex and varied, navigating through different material and digital spaces, highlighting the diverse modes students already engage with. Gagich adds that while multimodality may be unfamiliar to some, its integration into composition practices is both historical and practical, involving careful consideration of how various modes contribute to effective communication. Students engage with multiple modes outside of the composition classroom on the daily.

Multimodality plays a crucial role in a student's professional development and collaboration by equipping them with diverse skills and tools to effectively communicate and work with others across various platforms and media. DeVoss says, “In addition to their multimodal properties, our processes are all also inherently collaborative, constant, and physical. Composing changes, moves, shifts, and evolves with our bodies and the tools we adopt/adapt” (Conclusions). Gagich says, “Perhaps the most significant reason for learning how to compose multi-modally is that it provides ‘real-life’ skills that can help prepare students for careers. The United States continues to experience a ‘digital age’ where employees are expected to have an understanding of how to use technology and communicate in various ways for various purposes” (73). Gagich continues to say, “Learning how to create a multimodal text will prepare you for the workforce by allowing you to embrace the skills you already have and learn how to target specific audiences for specific reasons using various modes of communication” (73). Multimodality is essential for students' professional growth and collaboration as it not only enhances their ability to communicate across diverse platforms but also fosters adaptability and teamwork. As DeVoss highlights, the process of composing multimodally is inherently

collaborative and dynamic, evolving alongside the tools and technologies we use. This continual adaptation mirrors the real-world work environment, where technology and communication methods are in a constant state of change. To complement this, Gagich emphasizes that mastering multimodal composition equips students with practical skills crucial to navigate the digital age. By learning to integrate various modes of communication, students not only build on their current abilities but also become adept at targeting specific audiences for different purposes, thereby enhancing their readiness for the modern workforce. Together, these insights reveal that multimodality is not just a method of communication but a vital component of professional competence and effective collaboration in today's evolving job market and digital age.

The integration of multimodality into higher education is more critical than ever to prepare students for the digital age. Both DeVoss and Gagich express the importance of adapting educational practices to include diverse modes of communication. DeVoss advocates for a reevaluation of how multimodality is taught, emphasizing the need for a more dynamic approach that reflects the evolving nature of digital and physical texts. In contrast, Gagich highlights that multimodal practices are already present in classrooms, yet there remains a need for greater awareness and deliberate application of these practices to fully prepare students for the professional world. I suggest, based on the ideas of Gagich and DeVoss, that while multimodality is embedded in current educational frameworks and everyday life, there is an opportunity to enhance its effectiveness. By focusing on underused modes and incorporating practical projects—such as podcasts and video essays—students can develop a more sophisticated understanding of communication that aligns with real-world demands. My own experience as an English student, even in this digital age, has not afforded much multimodality. Most of my composition and literature classes only focused on the linguistic mode. We did not

create presentations, videos, give speeches, etc. The classes I did use multimodality in were professional, business, and technical writing classes. After working in the professional world the multimodality I did learn has been required and highly useful. If I had more experience with the modes from all my English classes and not just a few, I would not have had to learn more multimodality on my own time. Literature and composition professors should have students create projects such as video essays to gain experience with the visual, linguistic, aural, spatial, and sometimes even gestural modes with a face camera if they do not already. This project should be supplemental and does not mean that professors and students should rid themselves of the traditional essay. Students will learn the modes and develop skills important to development. This targeted engagement not only refines students' existing skills but also equips them with the versatility needed to navigate a complex digital landscape. Ultimately, embracing and actively teaching multimodality is not merely an academic exercise but a crucial component of professional development that will ensure students are well-prepared to meet the diverse challenges and opportunities of the modern workforce.

Works Cited

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