

ABSTRACT

Title: Escaping Flatland

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Statement of the Problem

Computer-assisted writing based solely on literacy's print origins is too limiting; we must more clearly conceptualize electronic composition as dialogic composition, a combining of word and image.

Methods

This dissertation reports on action research conducted during the Spring semester of 2000 in an English 383T Science Writing class. It is a qualitative study of data collected from student generated text including informal and formal compositions, think aloud activities and online portfolio entries; observation video and audiotapes; student intern generated field notes from observations and interviews; student writer reflections; and teacher generated field notes on observations, conferences and interviews.

Findings

Within my decentralized electronic writing classroom, I found that:

- Transacting dialogic composition is a new thought and composition process; students experience changes in authoring, reader/writer relationships, and multilinear processes.
- The decentralized computer-assisted writing classroom can enable development of dialogic composition if we provide adequate technical support, access, and safety for student writers.
- Pedagogies supporting dialogic composition can be essentially integrated within the composition curriculum in the electronic environment. Composing, reflecting, and collaborating occur repeatedly within the dialogic composition process as separate and simultaneous processes.

Discussion of conclusions

Theory guides pedagogy and while much composition theory is grounded in various concepts of literacy, the transaction between writer and reader, the classroom environment and the pedagogies shape the communication as well. For the purposes of this dissertation, I envision dialogic composition, both linear and multilinear composing using images and words, to be a larger view of composition in which literacy is only one of many elements shaping the composing process.

In this study, students practiced dialogic composition, an integration and sharing of meaning-making in transactions between writer/creator and reader/viewer via signs, symbols, images or words, in constructing and interpreting linear and multilinear compositions. Within their face-to-face and online community, they became co-authors, recognizing a stronger relationship to their reader and a new interactive, writing dynamic.