

## Chapter 12

# Examining 7th Graders’ Tablet–Created Screencasts to Promote Safe Driving: Reflections from a Service– Learning Project

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study explores patterns emerging from 7th grade students’ digital multimodal compositions created in response to a service-learning project focused on safe driving. Through a descriptive content analysis of three case-study groups’ digital products, this chapter presents educators with tangible ideas of what the digital composition process can yield when students are offered multimodal tools for self-expression. Three themes, collaboration, experimentation, and choice, describe the classroom contexts that are supportive of students’ creation of digital screencasts. Findings suggest that collaboration engages students in a participatory culture that invites those students who may be less proficient with alphabetic writing but who have unique perspectives to share and rich ideas to communicate. This study stands as a useful starting point for guiding teachers toward ways to incorporate an expanded set of writing practices, including digital multimodal composition, that engage all students in finding their voice.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Internet technologies are rapidly changing the landscape of reading and writing (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear & Leu, 2008; International Reading Association [IRA], 2009). The prominence of

digital media opens up unique opportunities to explore ideas and create digital content for the Web. Recent policy reports emphasize important shifts in the design of learning experiences, moving away from those that foster information transmission toward those that develop personal

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understanding, self-expression, and construction of new knowledge (Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills, 2008; Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010; International Reading Association & National Council of Teachers of English, 2010).

The increased availability of inexpensive digital devices has made technology use ubiquitous and fundamental to all aspects of our daily life. In the process, these devices have transformed the way we communicate and share ideas. An increased emphasis on technology use in the Common Core State Standards coupled with the Department of Education's advancement of technology use as an important component of education reform (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2012; IRA, 2009; National Technology Education Panel, 2010) has paved the way for the use of tablets and computers in the classroom. This opens up new potentials for students to engage in digital multimodal composition experiences across the curriculum. Digital multimodal composition uses the writing process as a basis to help students develop, organize, and present information; however the final product conveys messages through a variety of modalities. These digitally enhanced experiences embrace an expanded view of literacy that positions writing as an act of communication that extends beyond alphabetic-only compositions to those media rich projects that incorporate video, images, animation, sound effects, voice narration, and text (Takayoshi & Selfe, 2007). While there is less of an emphasis placed on spelling and grammar in digital multimodal composition, the processes of brainstorming, drafting, revision, and publication are central to the development of the final piece. These elements lie at the core of idea development, reflection, and revision processes and support students in refining their compositions to communicate ideas.

Recent standards call for learners to become skilled at writing and presenting ideas using tech-

nology (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). For example, students are expected to use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and interact with others about writing, while also recognizing the strengths and limitations of various technological tools. They are also expected to select and skillfully use digital tools that are suited to meeting specific communication goals. In addition, learners are expected to skillfully engage in opportunities that utilize traditional forms of print, digital, and online reading and writing and represent various genres and perspectives, as well as media and communication technologies. Positioning writing in this way widens the scope of classroom writing experiences and supports students' development and communication of ideas across the curriculum.

New technologies have made it possible for students to embrace digital composition as a means of self-expression, yet in today's schools, a significant gap exists between the way young people employ technology in their personal lives and the literacy instruction they receive in the classroom (O'Brien & Scharber, 2008). Recognizing the disconnect between students' everyday literacy practices and the classroom reading and writing they often participate in at school is an important first step toward transforming writing instruction. The next step is providing multiple means by which students can craft messages to express ideas and their learning with the outside world. For example, mobile technologies allow students to move around freely as they compose, collecting photographs or other artifacts to include in digital compositions thus allowing them to bring in elements of their voice through representations of their daily world.

Teachers are reporting being more comfortable implementing technology into lessons and as a way of communication with students, parents and peers. A recent Pew survey of 2,462 Advanced Placement and National Writing Project teachers

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