

- I. Adrienne Costello, PhD. Assistant Professor, English
- II. 21st Century Shakespeare: Integrating Traditional Literature with Innovative Practice
- III. Project Description:

The study examined multimodal approaches to teaching traditional literature to future teachers. This research was structured as a qualitative case-study (Creswell, 1998).

The following research questions guided the inquiry:

- 1) What happens when an instructor uses multimodal approaches (such as digital video composing, informal classroom drama, web-page design, storyboarding, learning centers) in the teaching of literature in a “Shakespeare for Future Teachers” course?
- 2) What effects, if any, does the integration of multimodal teaching and learning have on students’ attitudes, engagement, and ability to study Shakespearean concepts in-depth?
- 3) What effects, if any, does the integration on multimodal teaching and learning have on students’ perceptions of their abilities to become successful teachers of Shakespeare in future high school classrooms?

The research site was my ENG 317: Shakespeare for Future Teachers class during the fall 2007 semester. Data collection and analysis focused heavily on the collection and careful study of student-produced artifacts such as storyboards, digital video movies, learning centers, videos of students’ drama activity, and a variety of student-writing including informal reflections. Data also include anonymous surveys and reflections, informal conversations with students, some field notes, and daily writing in a researcher’s journal (Ely, 1991). Analysis of the data record was an evolutionary process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) that was recursive and ongoing throughout the study (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). This approach allowed me to refocus my data collection strategies as I noticed a gap or a need. I aimed to achieve trustworthiness in this study through the triangulation (Mathison, 1988) of a wide variety of data sources, from video footage to artifacts and researcher’s reflections. I sought convergence of data sources to serve as underpinning of categories and themes.

- IV. Major results or findings of your work:

- A. Internalizing Multimodal Teaching

- After being exposed to a variety of multimodal teaching and learning activities throughout the course, data show that students began to internalize the both the discourse and practice of multimodality.

- 1. Walking the Walk: Modeling Transformational teaching to inspire transformational teachers.

- Students took up multimodal teaching practices, though not required to, in their group-taught lessons on Shakespeare. After learning Shakespeare through experiences such as process-drama, comic book creation, interactive learning centers, composing a MySpace page, students emulated similar approaches in their own group-teaching (even when not required to). Students facilitated

learning activities such as comic book design, drama, making clay versions of characters, and the composing of a digital video movie.

2. Talking the Talk: Students adopting the discourse of Multimodality.

In final papers, students were asked to present and defend an approach to teaching Shakespeare to high school students. Data from a range of student papers show students discussing multimodal concepts and adopting the discourse of New Literacies and multimodality, although I never offered any direct instruction on either the approaches or the vocabulary. Through my modeling this type of pedagogy and students facilitating similar learning experiences for their peers, they began to embrace transformational teaching approaches both in discourse and in practice.

3. Students move from apprehension to expertise.

At the beginning of the semester, students used the following words to describe their previous experiences with Shakespeare: “frustrating,” “demoralizing,” and even “scarring.” These students were, for the most part, taught Shakespeare in high school English class, primarily through lecture, independent reading, tests, and here and there a little discussion. Evidence from student reflections at the beginning of the semester indicates that far more students feared Shakespeare’s work than liked it—and these are English majors. As we worked together throughout the semester to break the cycle of the well-meaning, expert teacher failing to reach disengaged students, students began to gain confidence with the content. Placed in a position that required an authentic level of expertise—that of facilitators of group-taught lessons on Shakespeare’s plays—students worked together to build understanding. By the end of the semester, data from both student reflections as well as comments on course evaluations suggest that both confidence and expertise among students were strengthened.

B. MySpace as Multimodal Composing Process

1. Constructing the page as Multimodal Literacy Practice.

As a composing tool that artistically incorporates text, images, art, and music, MySpace is a compelling medium in which to create a character study. Students were required to create a MySpace page for a Shakespearean character, an exercise designed to tap into their millennial interest in social networking sites and web design. Analysis of students’ MySpace pages reveals informed aesthetic choices (such as appropriate layouts, revealing music and emotionally connected images and text to text connections).

2. MySpace as Process Drama, Reader Response Activity.

Technology and drama appear to have found common ground in the world of MySpace. Through the blogs students wrote from the point of view of their Shakespearean character, as well as the interactive “posts” students wrote, as that character, on other characters’ pages, students were engaged in an improvisational cyber-drama in which they connected deeply with the emotional state of their characters.

V. Contributions to campus community:

I look forward to presenting my research to the campus community during the fall 2008 semester. This work has implications not only for faculty in the School of Education, but also for faculty teaching future teachers in the other disciplines.

VI: Professional benefits experienced as a result of the fellowship:

I have had the opportunity to present the findings of my research at two national conferences. While sharing this research with scholars across the country has been fulfilling, what has been even more satisfying are ways in which I have been able to share my research with colleagues right here at Buffalo State College. After discussing my CASTL study with a colleague in my department who is an English literature scholar, she and I decided to co-teach the Shakespeare for Future Teachers course this fall. Working together to continue to explore the balance between content and pedagogy, we are integrating rigorous content with multimodal pedagogy, and look forward to writing about our experiences.