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Toward A Praxis of New Media: The Allotment Period in Cherokee History

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In this essay, I explore the institutional and intellectual resources necessary to develop, revise, and sustain an outreach initiative involving new media composing with community organizations. A retrospective analysis of one course central to this initiative will be offered to illustrate what I term a praxis of new media. A praxis of new media unfolds at the intersection of critical, digital, and community literacies in order to produce transformative knowledge products with all stakeholders. I argue that particular alignments of material and intellectual resources must be in place if such community literacy projects are to sustain the capacity building of stakeholders.

Over the last decade, I've been working at the intellectual and pedagogical intersections where community, critical, and digital literacies meet. At times, this work has suffered from a lack of resources and institutional support; other times it has suffered because it failed to build the capacity of community organizations. But when the stars of institutional, community, and curricular support aligned, the possibilities for student learning, activist research, and community service were realized in a third space of possibility. In this space of possibility, all stakeholders ideally gain from the collaboration according to their needs, and the process delivers a set of compositions not possible had any of the stakeholders chosen the route of individual learning, isolated research and teaching, or mutual alienation. In reality, though, this space of possibility is hard won, dependent upon multiple alignments of resources, ways of thinking, and institutional



structures, and thus, it is quite difficult to sustain.

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I come to this position through reflection on the overall way that a single course, and my research around and through this course, has developed across a decade-long career in three institutional settings. The course, first named Social Issues of Literacy, was conceived in collaboration with Glynda Hull at UC Berkeley. As director of the College Writing

Programs, Glynda organized and paid for a handful of the College Writing instructors' training in a weekend workshop in San Francisco on digital storytelling with Joe Lambert and Nina Mullen. Our group learned to create movies based on stories we had written that tracked stills, video, and text together with voiceovers and music. The possibilities were exciting: could we develop an upper division course that would train students to work with community members to develop these? Theoretically we could, and we did. As it happened, though, the College Writing Program did not have access to the types of computer support needed to sustain such a course; a different kind of outreach course was developed instead, one that did not require what were then high end computing and compression boards to produce the pieces.

In its second iteration, Multimedia Writing in the Community asked students to create digital stories and interactive sites for community organizations. The course was designed and implemented for the BA in English at CU Denver and, as I'll describe later, its pilot curriculum was significantly different from its final one, a course that was taught twice. The service-learning versions of this course asked students to research, write, and compose digital movies for the Denver City and County Commission on Aging and the National Council of State Legislatures (Cushman "Special Issue").

Currently in its third iteration in as many universities, this course was again revised to become WRA 417 Multimedia Writing, an elective that meets the requirements for four programs at Michigan State University: the BA in Professional Writing, the MA in Digital Rhetoric and Professional Writing,



the MA in Critical Studies in Literacy and Pedagogy, and the PhD in Rhetoric. As it stands, the course asks students to produce digital materials in collaboration with Tonia Williams, the webmaster, Dr. Gloria Sly, the director of cultural resources at the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma, and Richard Allen, a policy analyst with the Cherokee Nation. This project-based professional writing course has students learning two software packages in order to create educational interactive media that extend the already considerable digital delivery capacities of the Cherokee Nation. The Cherokee Nation launched this project on its website during the Cherokee national holiday, held on Labor Day weekend each year.

All stakeholders gain from the collaboration according to their needs, and the process delivers a set of compositions not possible had any of the stakeholders chosen the route of isolation.

This particular course is not at all unique in that it has the typical layers of institutional, curricular, and social complexities that have been well documented in research on service-learning in rhetoric and composition (Adler-Kassner, Crooks, and Watters; Bacon; Carrick, Himley, and Jacobi; Coogan; Cushman “Contact,” “Service Learning,” “Sustainable,” “Special Issue,” “The Public”; Cushman and Emmons; Deans; Flower “Partners,” “Problem Solving”; Flower, Long, and Higgins; Herzberg; Peck, Flower, and Higgins; Schutz and Gere). More difficult to understand are the ways that working at the intersections of community, critical, and digital literacies in a service-learning/new media course places demands on the institutional and disciplinary structures that students and professors inhabit. These demands, when chronicled over time, point to both the persistent challenges in teaching service-learning courses, and one way in which notions of literacy, disciplinary boundaries, and university infrastructures shift to accommodate such work. To understand how one course developed over time, a theoretical framework is needed that can, at least in part, help describe what kinds of composing, curricular, and institutional changes occur and why. In what follows, I outline a praxis of new media, discuss one particular course in relation to it, and show the types and levels of institutional support necessary to sustain community literacy projects that involve new media composing.

A Praxis of New Media



Multimedia Writing enacts a praxis of new media, an idea that Ernest Morrell and I have been developing for some time.¹ A praxis of new media is both a theoretical and a pedagogical model. This praxis works at the intersections of critical, community, and digital literacies with the goal of producing transformative knowledge by and for all stakeholders. Our notion of praxis has its intellectual roots in Aristotelian rhetoric as *phronesis*, ethical action and good judgment for the public good, as well as in critical pedagogy, especially Freire's understanding of praxis as action *and* reflection. Stakeholders in this model can include teachers, students, community and workplace members, and scholars. A praxis of new media works from three premises:

1. all stakeholders have knowledge, critical awareness, and important perspectives on the social problems being addressed;
2. high-end technologies and multimedia texts need to be interrogated—and produced—with stakeholders;
3. a flexibly structured inquiry and problem solving approach to research and curriculum, one that applies knowledge from various disciplines, can help students address problems that community members have identified.

The novelty of this approach rests in its additive model of knowledge making and curricular intervention as these unfold at the intersection of critical (Fine and Weiss; Freire; Giroux; Grande; Lankshear and Knobel; Lankshear, Peters, and Knobel; Luke and Gore; McLaren; Morrell;), digital (Bolter; Kress; Selfe and Hawisher;), and community literacies (Flower, Long, and Higgins; Hull and Schultz; Moll et al.; Street “Literacy,” “Cross Cultural”; Sheridan, Street, and Bloome). While any one of these separate areas of research is important in itself, when these are integrated, the possibility for a praxis of new media emerges. In such a praxis, curricular models and research on critical, digital, and community literacies unify under the twofold goal of 1) enhancing civic participation and academic preparedness of students, and 2) addressing issues and problems that community members deem important. When all stakeholders are engaged in mutually beneficial collaboration that results in the creation of shared knowledge products, the process is transformative for stakeholders as well as for their audiences, who can potentially benefit from the knowledge products the collaborative produced.



A praxis of new media is a theoretical and pedagogical framing of the ways in which community, critical, and digital literacies, when combined in community literacy initiatives, can be transformative for those who engage them. In the remainder of this essay, I will describe this framework and demonstrate how a praxis of new media unfolds. I find that it is possible to work at the intersections of community, critical, and digital literacies; however, the alignments of material and cultural resources, social practices, and evaluation systems that must be forged and maintained on such a large scale explain why so many fledgling community literacy initiatives fail, particularly those that involve the creation and distribution of multimedia deliverables.

An Expanded Notion of Multiliteracies

A praxis of new media can be understood as an expansion of the Designs of Meaning and kinds of pedagogical practices described in the New London Group's "Pedagogy of Multiliteracies" and their later book on this topic, *Multiliteracies: Literacy Learning and the Design of Social Futures*. In this work, the authors bring together an interdisciplinary understanding of language and literacy to describe what they call "designs," or those flexibly structured social organizations, knowledge bases, and cultural practices that influence daily meaning-making practices and life chances. One aspect of the multiliteracies framework includes the Designs of Meaning that writers and readers use when creating meaning. These Designs of Meaning include the means of available designs (e.g. the tools, grammars, and media used); the designing process; and the re-designed product.

Chronicling a course's demands on Designs of Meaning is useful in that it allows for a grand view of many specific aspects of the meaning-making process, especially important in a digital age characterized by a global proliferation of information. The power of this theoretical framework rests in its multidisciplinary perspective on meaning-making and its inclusion and equal weighting of various sign technologies. In this theory of multiliteracies, the letter, print, and word are valued equally in relation to other forms of meaning-making that include images, motion, graphics, and sound. For all its merits, however, the Designs of Meaning has one weakness: it conceives of the social dimension of meaning-making rather narrowly, seeing it mostly in terms of the immediate social context in which literacy events unfold. It lacks a sense of audience and the socio-cultural exigencies that influence meaning-



making. In short, it needs rhetoric.

A praxis of new media expands upon these means of available designs somewhat to include notions of civic responsibility to our audiences, ethical writing for a public good, and transformed action that leads to the betterment of social groups and communities in addition to individual student learning. A praxis of new media adds rhetorical purpose as well as ethical, invited intervention into the process and products of creating within the designs of meaning. In doing so, it attends to audience and considers how we teach, learn, and research with audiences beyond the school and university in order to facilitate goals that community members and organizations deem important.

A praxis of new media thus revises the notion of multiliteracies by including the rhetorical exigencies that influence meaning making. In a praxis of new media, the means of available design are not only discursively based (Cazden et al. 74), but are extended to include the tools of meaning-making (sign systems, media, and computer technologies). The means of available design in a praxis of new media consider the access to, ethical use of, and distribution of these tools: who owns them, who uses them, and for what ends. This is a praxis of design that concerns itself with the means of knowledge production in the materialist sense (see Feenberg's *Critical Theory of Technology*).

A praxis of new media also includes consideration of the rhetorical exigencies that influence the locus of design. More than merely describing the local setting in which literacy events happen (Cazden et al. 75), the locus of design in a praxis of new media includes questions regarding the kinds of material, social and cultural networks that are often invisibly present in the context of composing. In what ways are available designs valued and by whom? And, what types of social, institutional, and physical networks are working in the layered locations of design? The types and kinds of resources, intellectual frameworks, and institutional structures that must align to enable a praxis of new media are particularly hard won. A praxis of designing new media, therefore, considers the infrastructural components that need to be aligned to make possible such complex work (DeVoss, Cushman, and Grabill).

Finally, a praxis of new media considers the rhetorical exigencies that emerge in the re-designed products that result from this work. These considerations



take into account who the audiences are, what purposes we have for designing, and what ethical and social needs drive the work. A praxis of production considers for what ends we make meaning and asks, What are the ethical and social ramifications intended and realized by this process? Taken together, these components of a praxis of new media thus expand the idea of multiliteracies to include multiple audiences and the rhetorical dimensions of composing as it unfolds at the intersection of critical, community, and digital literacies. Let me briefly describe below the ways in which this praxis of new media emerged in the most recent iteration of Multimedia Writing.

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The Cherokee Nation | Michigan State University Collaborative

In collaboration with representatives of the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma (CNO), Michigan State University students enrolled in Multimedia Writing and I developed a website and CD titled *The Allotment in Cherokee History 1887-1914* (www.cherokee.org/allotment). This collaboration began when I was awarded tenure and was finally poised to begin the study I had always wanted to do: an ethnography of Cherokee language and identity. To begin this study, I attended the Cherokee National Holiday in 2004 and learned about the kinds of digital mediations the tribe was undertaking in order to reach its outlander citizens, those tribal members who live in areas away from the tribal cores in Oklahoma and North Carolina where the language is spoken and Cherokee traditions and religion are still practiced. I learned that the Nation was warm and inviting to outlanders, especially since the Nation has diverse needs for citizens with skills and education to contribute to the betterment of the tribe. In one effort, the Nation has developed and delivers, free to the public, a series of online language classes taught by those fluent in Cherokee.

So in Fall 2004, I enrolled in Cherokee taught by Sammy Still and Ed Fields whom I had also met at the holiday. Sammy was the course administrator and longtime insider to both the North Carolina and Oklahoma branches of the tribe. He and I wrote e-mails often outside of class, exchanging stories and ideas for cultural preservation. I asked if he thought maybe my students at



MSU and I could do a multimedia project with and for the Cherokee Nation. He introduced me to Tonia Williams, webmaster of the Cherokee nation, and Dr. Gloria Sly, the Director of the Cherokee Cultural Resources Center. I described some possible projects to Tonia and Gloria, and they saw a place where we could begin. Through our discussions we considered what possible materials they might need for their website. They decided that they needed a set of historical educational materials to complement those offered on their already robust, award-winning website (www.cherokee.org).

Together, we agreed that educational materials about the Dawes General Allotment Act of 1887 were needed to show how this federal policy of parceling out Native Americans' commonly held land into individual units of private property has shaped current perspectives on Cherokee citizenship, identity, sovereignty, and the geographic dispersion of the tribe.² We decided that one of our aims should be to recover stories of the allotment process from as many perspectives as possible, to extend the histories that were already told about and from the Nation, and to link these past events to the present. The Nation had three goals for this work:

1. satisfy the need for educational materials that present in-depth, accessible understanding of the allotment period in Cherokee history for any learner interested.
2. distribute widely these digital products to citizens of the tribe, educators, non-citizens of the tribe, and anyone who visits Tahlequah, Oklahoma during the CNO's National holiday.
3. relocate the typical histories of the Progressive Era from the vantage point of Indian Territory, recovering stories from the Cherokee who were negatively impacted by westward expansion.

To create this site, my students and I set about reading hundreds of pages of legislation, treaties, senate reports, pioneer papers, and tribal histories as well as collecting and analyzing drawings, advertisements, documentaries, and photographs. Throughout the semester, we met with Tonia and Gloria as well as with Ben Phillips who authors many of the tribe's online interactive sites for language classes, lexicon, and educational games. Through videoconference and in e-mail, we discussed our progress on interface design and content delivery and secured their continued blessings on this work.



The allotment period was a time in the tribe's history as important as the Trail of Tears, though not treated as often in published histories. Touted as an effort to "civilize" Native Americans, the Henry Dawes General Allotment Act of 1887 and the Curtis Act of 1898 legislated that all Native American tribes were to split their commonly held land on reservations into individually owned private property. Land that was not allotted was then opened for "settlement." This act was part of the larger story of the Progressive Era in US history that included ideologies of manifest destiny, the great westward expansion, and taming the Wild West. US histories of this time are usually told from the urban, eastern seaboard vantage point—a perspective that looks from the U.S. East Coast outward toward the West, seeing "wildness," vast stretches of "unused land," and passive, even welcoming, Indians.

Our work for this project tries to recover, or re-place, the stories of allotment from the vantage of Indian Territory, now Oklahoma, where the Cherokee Nation is based in Tahlequah. This perspective relocates the story of the progressive era, showing the detrimental effects of allotment policy for the Cherokee in Indian Territory who suffered not only erosion of sovereignty, land holdings, and economic bases for their tribe, but also forced assimilation through re-education and dissolution of their tribal governments. This counter-narrative is one that the CNO wanted to present to their web users, teachers, and students as a corrective to the myths of the progressive era narrative. We've presented this counter-narrative with digital stories, cut-and-paste text, audio recordings, and images, as well as links to primary sources, such as legislation and public documents.

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Since this site was launched at the 2005 Cherokee National Holiday, the Chief's policy analyst, Richard Allen, has joined Gloria, Tonia, and me. Our project has grown to include this year's installment for the Nation's online history that will explore the treaties and laws that shaped the tribe from the early 1700s up to the allotment. In our third installment, due in 2006, we



will explore the modern Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) policy of relocation—a policy that influenced the demographic distribution of the tribe across the country and in urban areas. This relocation policy led to the large number of outlander Cherokee citizens, as well as other outlander Native Americans, in urban areas. Together with the WIDE research center that has generously supported this work and, with public television station WKAR, we have developed a grant proposal for the Corporation of Public Broadcasting’s *History and Civics Initiative*. If funded, this grant will allow us to extend our educational materials to create a one-hour documentary based in large part upon interviews gathered from Cherokee around the country discussing their experiences with relocation policy.

A Praxis of New Media: The Case of *The Allotment Era in Cherokee History 1887-1914*

What does the Multimedia Writing class’s production of the website on the allotment era in Cherokee history reveal about the alignment of curricular, disciplinary, and institutional resources necessary to develop and sustain service-learning? The initial project was a success in that, after it went through their internal review process, the Cherokee Nation published it on their website. They’ve also budgeted funds to press a CD deliverable during the 2006 Cherokee National Holiday. The Nation has received a number of e-mails complimenting the work and has asked that the collaboration continue. These are positive results and they were hard-earned. Students achieved these results by addressing the challenges this work presented to their traditional designs of meaning. The means, processes, and products students typically encounter in writing classrooms changed significantly in this class.

The means of available designs expanded in this class to include a sense of the ways in which tools for production of meaning come to be jointly used and distributed. Students typically use the available designs in processes geared toward production for teachers alone. But in this case, students were asked by the Nation to follow a “share, learn, share” model of information distribution. That is, from the Cherokee Nation’s perspective, knowledge is created and shared so that those learning can then re-purpose it for their own ends. The CNO imagined high school teachers adapting this material in and for their curricula and therefore wanted the audience to be able to copy and paste the text. We agreed and so used a creative commons license on the work, a



license that allows teachers to borrow what they need, asks them to attribute the work to us, and then permits them to reproduce it with non-commercial intentions. The creative commons copyright is closest to the Cherokee ethic of share, learn, share, and represents a fairly radical departure from the available designs students traditionally consider. The idea that their work would have such reach was both exciting and daunting to students. They worked for hours beyond course requirements to get the project to a satisfying beta version. In the end, all but one of the nodes (the one with resources and works cited) were completed by students. This project-based multimedia class allowed students to produce writing and digital materials that were added to the public commons as resources to be adapted and shared again. Thus the means of available designs became commonly owned and produced in order to be distributed freely to and publicly owned by audiences who would repurpose this content for their own ends.

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This class also revised the processes of design in ways that created another public space for collaboration. To do this, an infrastructure needed to be created that facilitated a third space where students, Cherokee nation representatives, and I could work on files together. In order to facilitate the sharing of these dozens of pages that the students created, the Writing in Digital Environments Research Center at Michigan State created a jointly shared server space for the Cherokee Nation and this class. Rarely are community members given access to university server space, but in such collaborations, the locus for design needs to include a revision of traditionally separate institutional spaces to make room for shared spaces. With thousands of files and dozens of nodes, this site demanded constant revision between Ben Phillips, the web media developer for the Cherokee Nation, and our class. Changes to the site's navigation structure have taken quite a few hours of collaborative programming of memory-hog files, and these changes have been facilitated through the shared server space. Such a shared institutional space is no mean feat given the rigid and often unseen infrastructures that rest behind new media classrooms (DeVoss, Cushman, and Grabill). Without institutional spaces supporting this collaborative, the work would have been discouraging



and tedious at best.

Finally, students were asked to create a knowledge product different from those typically produced in a class. This knowledge product, a new media educational site, was useful insofar as its form and content serves a community's perceived need. While the Cherokee Nation surely has the capacity to do this

In both form and content, the knowledge product of this class enacts a praxis of new media by addressing the community collaborators' rhetorical exigencies, purposes, and audiences.

kind of new media work and has been doing so for years in its website, labor and resources are stretched thin. Asking students to create these projects has augmented the Cherokee Nation's robust site already in place, while it affords students the opportunity to develop their own writing and design skills. This site also con-

tributed content to the Cherokee Nation's site by helping the Nation present its version of the history of the formation of the state of Oklahoma. Our work helped the Cherokee Nation tell its history in ways that also brought attention to an important, though often overlooked, time. In both its form and content, then, the knowledge product of this class enacts a praxis of new media because it addresses the community collaborators' rhetorical exigencies, purposes, and audiences. All stakeholders can potentially gain from their contributions during the praxis of new media, and importantly, these gains will be differentially distributed according to the needs of the stakeholders.

Institutional Contexts for the Course: The Limits and Limitations of Multimedia Writing

The theory of multiliteracies, when expanded to include a notion of audience and ethical intervention, proves helpful when trying to characterize the kinds of symbolic and cultural resources, curricular policies, and institutional structures that enable this work to unfold. The interstitial places created and necessary for this work are difficult to unify, open up, and maintain. Service-learning courses have tended to work in interstitial places in general, often bridging academic units, disciplines, and university and community divides. Likewise those writing classes that use computers and new media in particular have also had to justify themselves in order to gain university resources and flex institutional structures (The WIDE Research Collective).



When viewed from a praxis of new media, the evolution of Multimedia Writing reveals three points about resource allocation that show the limits and limitations of working at the intersection of community, critical, and digital literacies. The collaborative project for the Cherokee Nation represents not just the most recent iteration of a course re-design, but represents a number of alignments that had to be made between and within institutions. These alignments in material resources, disciplinary practices, and institutional infrastructures were not possible when running this particular class at UC Berkeley and CU Denver. The Designs of Meaning in a praxis of new media illuminates these often invisible infrastructural alignments in order to develop, launch, and sustain outreach initiatives.

Figure 1: Institutional Support that Sustains a Praxis of New Media

Types of support	Levels of University Support		
	Curricular	Departmental	Administrative
Material	Labs, software	Hardware, software for faculty's computer	Lab development
	Technology support in class	Faculty training	Network support
Disciplinary	Proposals for individual classes	Vertical writing curricula within or parallel to a BA in literary studies	Support for the development of writing majors
	Cross disciplinary class	Ability to work beyond coverage model of specialization	Support for joint appointments, team teaching, and interdisciplinary collaboration
	Research, teaching, & service in one	Tenure and promo. by-laws facilitate mix of professorial roles	Combining research, teaching & service rewarded & understood in mission
Institutional policy	Data mgt., and lab assignment	Intervention in lab assignment & computing policy	Computing services updated notions of lab use and student production



While discussion of each of the types and levels of support included in Figure 1 is beyond the scope of this paper, let me illustrate how one experience common to all the iterations of this multimedia writing class across ten years demonstrates the ways in which an initiative can be sustained or hindered if levels and types of support do not consistently align. This experience has only to do with scheduling a computer lab space, but such a seemingly mundane action, especially when it goes awry, illustrates well the types and levels of infrastructural alignments necessary for a praxis of new media to operate smoothly.

Multimedia Writing at UC Berkeley

Computer lab access and allocation necessary to sustain this course have been particularly difficult to negotiate. These difficulties emerge in part because of departmental turf wars, in part because of a lack of administrative support, and in part due to the institutional location of the class. Between 1996-1999 while at UC Berkeley, I taught as a non-tenure stream lecturer in a non-departmentally housed writing program, which was charged with providing intensive writing experiences for at-risk incoming freshmen. Though this college writing program had the strongest support possible from its director, it was viewed by the University at large as a less-than-essential service program, and its status vis-à-vis departments on campus was low. As a lecturer in this program, I had proposed a course that took a year and a half to get through academic senate. When it finally was passed, the faculty senate put in place a policy that prohibited any other lecturers from proposing courses. Though most lecturers in this program held PhDs, the faculty senate determined that lecturers, by dint of their institutional position, were not qualified to teach any students above the freshman level.

As it was originally proposed, the class combined digital storytelling in a teacher education class on literacy studies that paired students as writing partners with youths in Richmond, CA. However, as a lecturer, I simply could not get access to any of the computer labs on campus. When the director of the program, an associate professor in the school of education, was not able to get the course scheduled in a computer lab, the class was revised to exclude the digital storytelling component. Even if we could have gotten access to a timeslot in a lab for the course, the lab was not outfitted with software and external CD burners that would have facilitated the teaching of this course. Ten years ago, the digital video software we were using was only a few years



old, not widely available, and demanded huge amounts of processing and memory for Macintosh. With both the material support and disciplinary support lacking at the curricular and university levels, there was no possible way to get the Richmond Community Literacy Project and the class attached to it, *Social Issues of Literacy*, to have any digital storytelling component.

Today, however, this class has moved to the College of Education and Glynda Hull now works with students in it to facilitate the Digital Underground Storytelling for Youth project at the Prescott Joseph Center in Oakland (<http://www.oaklanddusty.org/>). The class was moved out of its disciplinarily suspect position, into a respected college, and integrated into the school's vertical teacher training curriculum by a tenured professor. That is, it now has the curricular, departmental, and institutional alignment necessary for its sustainability. Importantly, the material resource capacity with the computational tools (hardware, software, knowledge, infrastructure) is located in the community at the community center. Glynda Hull and members of the center were able to secure a grant from the federal department of education's PT3 initiative (Preparing Tomorrow's Teachers to use Technology) to develop the lab in the community center. Hull's students mentor and tutor the children and youth in this project as they create digital stories, compilations of image, text, spoken word, and audio. Students and youths alike bring their knowledge, expertise, and stories to the table in this collaborative and produce powerful representations of themselves, their families, and their communities (Hull and Schultz; Hull; Hull and Zacher). Of this work, Hull and Zacher write: "What counts as literacy-and how literacy is practiced-are now in historical transition, and young people like Asia [a participant in DUSTY] are at the vanguard of the creation of new cultural forms."

Multimedia Writing at UC Denver

While I was at UC Denver, different issues of access and allocation emerged when three departments were fighting to get classes scheduled in one multimedia lab shared by two colleges. The lab at UC Denver is indeed well suited for the creation of interactive stories and digital storytelling; it has high-end computers, loaded with all the software necessary, and it sports all the peripheral hardware to make the capturing and translation of data smooth. Its layout and design facilitated individual and group work, presentations, and production. The problem with this lab had less to do with access to the resources



necessary (they were indeed there and ready to be used) than it had to do with allocation and the questions of who gets to use these resources, when, and for what noble purposes. Because two other departments on campus also needed the lab, the times and days that English courses could be scheduled were few and far between.

While tremendous material support can be in place across all levels, disciplinary and institutional policy support is also needed to govern fair access to and allocation of those material resources.

Communication Arts and the Digital Media program representatives controlled the scheduling of the lab and naturally selected the best and majority of times for their classes. This English course was low on their list of scheduling priorities because they did not believe that English stu-

dents “needed to use computers.” This meant that during one semester, for instance, the only times left available in the lab schedule were on five Saturdays. The class literally went one whole month without meeting between the first two Saturday meetings. Because the representatives from the commission on aging and the national council of state legislatures were unable to meet on Saturdays, students understandably weren’t as motivated to work for and with these community members because they never had faces for the names and little indication that their work mattered to the representatives. Though we muddled through that semester, the class still faces troubles with scheduling the lab and gaining respect for its content from other departments. This iteration of the class reveals that while tremendous material support can be in place across all levels, disciplinary and institutional policy supports also need to be in place to govern fair practices of access to and allocation of those material resources.

Multimedia Writing at MSU

At MSU, the lab access and allocation were initially a problem as well. Because the problem with computing policy and hardware is described in detail elsewhere (DeVoss, Cushman, and Grabill), I’ll summarize one aspect of the class that indicates types and kinds of support it would and would not receive. Multimedia Writing was initially offered to undergraduate English majors under a “special topics” listing. When I proposed that this course be made into its own freestanding curriculum with a designated course number, the proposal never made it past the undergraduate curriculum committee. It



stalled because the chair of this committee didn't see why it needed to be a workshop—he simply couldn't imagine that the class would be working on production during class time. The course format includes an introductory software demonstration, time for students to apply these moves, and ample time included troubleshooting the students' application. It's extremely easy to miss a step or single word in programming, or misplace files when trying to learn to use these complex software packages. The troubleshooting becomes part of the instruction and demands one third of the class time. The English professors to whom I was presenting this course proposal could not get beyond the idea that students were learning to use a software package to compose and that part of this learning was in the study of mistakes made. The creative writing workshop model does not equate to this type of new media curricular model.

The decision-makers based in English were equally skeptical about the content of the course. Here, their critique of the form of delivery bled into their critique of the class content with questions about why a software package was part of an English class at all. When I likened it to the film production process, some nodded in apparent understanding, while another dismissed this because “we don't teach film production, just film interpretation.” I persisted, futilely, trying to explain how the preservice English teachers in the classes that I was hired to teach need to know more about how to teach and compose with computer technologies. While this idea was met with general agreement, the objection to this proposal had to do with the unit load. As it stood, students had no room for electives, and if we were to make the course a feature of the English Education curriculum, then students would lose a literature course.

The course didn't get into the English curriculum, and this was indeed fortunate. As it turns out, faculty in the former department of American Thought and Language, charged with teaching the Tier 1 classes at MSU, developed a vertical writing curriculum with a BA in Professional Writing and graduate degrees in the College of Arts and Letters. The university allowed this department to change its mission to create a vertical curriculum based on the need to teach students production and interpretation together at once. In addition to the first year composition course required of all incoming freshman, our department now offers a BA in Professional Writing and a BA in American



Studies. The Multimedia Writing course was proposed as part of the Professional Writing degree and now serves as an elective for three other degrees as well. It is now situated within the newly formed Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures department where it has been supported in every way and at every level. As of last year, the English Education faculty have moved out of the English department and into the department of Writing, Rhetoric and American Cultures, a move that represents the closer intellectual and pedagogical alignments between writing faculty and English Educators at Michigan State University.

Since it has found its institutional home in this department, the class has reached its fullest potential to enact a praxis of new media because the types and levels of institutional support have coalesced. In fact, as the undergraduate program in Professional Writing has developed, faculty in this program have worked hard to secure a computer lab for this curriculum that suits it. Professor Jeffrey Grabill coordinated with faculty to develop proposals for the lab and presented them to central computing. One lab was developed for this curriculum and a second is in the works for wireless computing for all the writing classes. Professor Danielle DeVoss, who sits on key university technology committees, continually secures our intellectual place among the computing services personnel and other faculty. As associate chair of the department, DeVoss also has a handshake agreement and strong working relationship with central computing's lab-scheduling office. As a result, DeVoss is able to schedule the lab a year in advance and insures that all the courses we teach have priority for the lab space.

Finally, as a recently tenured professor in the department of Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures, I can attest to the strong institutional commitment to rewarding faculty who pursue a scholarship of engagement and outreach. In fact, the deans across colleges have developed an exemplary description of the ways to justify and evaluate work that takes place when professors combine their research, teaching, and service. This document describes ways in which professors can represent their work and administrators and academic units can evaluate this work ("Points of Distinction"). The administration not only encourages service-learning and outreach as central features in enacting our land grant mission, but they also have a robust and clear evaluation system in place to reward this cross-disciplinary work. Within



the last four years at MSU, the course and our ability to do work with the Cherokee Nation have been enabled through an alignment of material, disciplinary, and institutional policy support across the curricular, departmental, and administrative levels.

Conclusion

A praxis of new media is an intellectual framework for scaffolding active work; rather than disappearing into the work once a project begins, the framework always allows one to see, critique, and adjust practice throughout the development and iterations of that work. Seen across institutional contexts, this class has secured more success and sustainability when types and levels of institutional resources are aligned; it demonstrates that work at the intersections of community, critical and digital literacies is only possible when these alignments are achieved. Although the space of possibility that a praxis of new media occupies is difficult to obtain and sustain, it can result in transformed practices on many levels and is therefore worthy of our attention.

This is not to claim that all service-learning needs to include components of new media. Again, the types of tools available and valuable for designing depend largely on the stakeholders' current culture of technology—their values and practices attached to various sign technologies. However, a praxis of new media does demand that in whatever context our work unfolds, we explore, understand, and extend—when invited to do so—the capacities of stakeholders to integrate sign technologies into their current culture of technology.

A final point about the sustainability of projects that involve a praxis of new media and service-learning projects in general: In large part, sustainability is driven by local need for the knowledge products our collaborations can produce. Needs change, of course, and when these needs no longer demand a contribution from various stakeholders, then the project can become 'a sleeping giant.' This phrase I borrow from colleagues Patti Stock and Janet Swenson who created the Write for Your Life Project and described this project to me as such when I first came to Michigan State University. Their project experienced a shift in needs, purposes, and contributions of stakeholders, though the collaboration could be re-awakened when necessary. The sleeping giant metaphor for this project suggests its resting potential. Sustainability is not a zero-sum game, a collaboration that produces intense high rates of pro-



duction or nothing at all. Rather, sustainability can be understood as maintenance of a collaborative potential at intensity levels that peak when needed but that can also rest when rhetorical purpose, resources, or alignments do not present themselves.

Notes

1 Together, Ernest and I have been supported by the Writing in Digital Environments Research Center at MSU to develop a curriculum for high school teachers, deliverable on a CD, that allows teachers to engage their students in civic research for social justice. Students are asked to develop research papers in collaboration with communities, and teachers are offered cut-and-paste activities that they can mold to their needs.

2 My family went through this process of allotment and enrolled on the Dawes roll, a kind of census for the Cherokee Nation and other tribes. Because they went through that seven-year long process, today's generations of Drews (my Cherokee family's name) are able to maintain their citizenship with the tribe.

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Birth of the Cherokee Constitutional Crisis.Â Following is a real chronology that will be refined further as we progress toward the Byrdâ€™s removal from office, along with Deputy Chief Garland Eagle and the eight council members we will call Byrdettes for lack of a better term. CHRONOLOGY. Feb.Â April 15: On one of the darkest days in Cherokee history, Byrd hires a non-Indian attorney to provide one of the most ludicrous interpretations of a document in the history of Indian-white relations. The interpretation will ensure Byrdâ€™s place in history as the most sinister destroyer of Native American sovereignty since Andrew Jackson. The attorney, Thomas Seymour of Tulsa, was reportedly paid from \$100,000 to \$300,000 for the deed. Our new president has asked all citizens to find ways to serve and thus to integrate our academic labor and our occasions for service into the fabric of our universities and communities, which themselves are caught up in moments Cite this Item. PART 1 Rhetoric Revealed.Â Knowledge Work with the Cherokee Nation: The Pedagogy of Engaging Publics in a Praxis of New Media. (pp. 175-192). Ellen Cushman and Erik Green. The new treaty limits tribal land rights and eliminates the possibility of a Cherokee State and is the prelude to the Dawes Commission. John Ross dies in Washington, D.C. Slavery is abolished. 1871---The Cherokee seal is designed to embrace the early government structure and the eternal endurance of the Cherokee Indians. It is adopted by Act of the Cherokee National Council and approved. 1887---The General Allotment Act is passed--it requires individual ownership of lands once held in common by Indian tribes. 1889---Unassigned lands in Indian Territory are opened by white settlers known as "boomers." 1890---The Oklahoma Territory is organized out of the western half of Indian Territory. â€œToward a Praxis of New Media: The Allotment Period in Cherokee History.â€ Reflections 5.1-2 (Spring 2006): 111-132. In this article Ellen Cushman outlines a praxis of new media, a theoretical and pedagogical model, which frames the ways in which â€œcommunity, critical, and digital literacies, when combined in community literacy initiatives, can be transformative for those who engage themâ€ (Cushman 115). Cushman illustrates the need for sustainable community literacy initiatives/projectsâ€ones which have support at curricular, departmental and administrative levels.