

## Redesigning Writing Outcomes

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### ABSTRACT

*This article responds to the July 2014 revision of the WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition by arguing that the inclusion of multimodal composing offers an opportunity to shift our focus from teaching the standards of academic writing to preparing students for a future of writing characterized by multiplicity and change. Through a close reading of the revised Outcomes Statement, I demonstrate the ways in which the WPA OS recognizes that digital tools have expanded the text forms, writing processes, and conventions students will engage with in composition classes. I then argue that this attention to different modes of writing can encourage students to value difference more broadly.*

When Sid Dobrin posted to the WPA-L in December of 2011 asking whether “the WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition [should] include some acknowledgment of the role of the visual in writing,” the speed with which Dobrin’s question was taken up suggested the time was right for reconsidering what we believe students should learn in composition courses—within days, then-CWPA president Duane Roen formed a WPA Outcomes Statement Revision Task Force. The WPA Outcomes Statement 3.0, approved by the Executive Board of the CWPA in July 2014, is the first major revision of the Outcomes Statement since its original adoption in 2000.<sup>1</sup> Significantly, the revised WPA OS makes clear that the term *composing* refers broadly to “complex writing processes that are increasingly reliant on the use of digital technologies” and that those activities may involve “elements of design, incorporating images and graphical elements into texts intended for screens as well as printed pages” (144). The revision also acknowledges that “digital technologies are changing writers’ relationships to their texts and audiences in evolving ways” (144). By foregrounding the powerful effects of digital affordances on writing, the revised WPA Outcomes Statement constitutes a turn away from

the original, which focused unapologetically on traditional academic writing and relegated digital technology to a brief addendum, “Composing in Electronic Environments,” added in 2008. Arguably, this recent revision of the WPA Outcomes Statement has the potential to change both what students learn in writing classes and how we as a profession define our work for years to come.

Although much about the original WPA Outcomes Statement has been revised, the purpose, as explained in the Introduction, remains the same: to both “represent” and “regularize writing programs’ priorities for first-year composition” (144). To be representative, the revised WPA OS must reflect a broad consensus of what WPA members believe about the purpose of first-year writing based on “what composition teachers nationwide have learned from practice, research, and theory” (144). Achieving such consensus is no small matter. The Revision Task Force spent almost three years conducting surveys, holding discussions at CCCC and CWPA conferences, drafting, seeking feedback, and revising (Dryer et al. 131–34). It should not be surprising, then, that the revision, like the original, is necessarily a compromise, both more and less revolutionary than some might hope. While a compromise statement may, in fact, be the best representation of how WPA members are collectively responding to the challenges posed by the rapid expansion of multimodal composing, such a statement does not go as far as it might in recommending what those changes should be—and why. I want to suggest that the decision to embrace new forms of writing that originate and flourish outside of school offers us an opportunity to rethink the assumption that composition courses serve primarily to prepare students for writing in school. Instead, I want to consider how college composition courses might prepare students for a future of writing, one that will be characterized by multiplicity and change.

The inclusion of multimodal composing in the revised WPA Outcomes Statement is a welcome first step, one many in composition have long advocated for on the grounds that writing instruction should be more relevant to the composing practices students already participate in (Yancey, “Made Not Only in Words”) and that teachers should ensure all students have access to the skills necessary for such participation (Selfe, “Perils”). Equally important, and my focus here, is that multimodal composing provides students with opportunities to negotiate difference as a central characteristic of language use. Opening the writing classroom to textual difference by including composing in multiple modes gives us the chance to foster openness to other differences as well.

Almost three decades ago, the New London Group responded to the radical cultural changes they saw taking place—increased local diversity

and globalization along with “the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies” (61)—by proposing a pedagogy of multiliteracies. Specifically, they argued that preparing all students to participate fully in an increasingly global, multi-mediated culture where difference was the norm meant literacy teaching could no longer focus exclusively on “formalized, monolingual, monoculture, and rule-governed forms of language” but must involve “negotiating a multiplicity of discourses” (61). The ultimate goal, the New London Group believed, should be the “utopian possibility” of “productive diversity, the idea that what seems to be a problem—the multiplicity of cultures, experiences, ways of making meaning, and ways of thinking—can be harnessed as an asset” (67). The recent revision of the WPA Outcomes Statement moves us in the direction of fulfilling this goal. Given the ever-expanding array of discourse forms made possible by digital communication and the myriad cultural and linguistic differences present in classrooms, workplaces, and communities, it should be clear that there can be no single standard.

Writing programs have long been challenged to attend meaningfully to student differences, and that challenge is perhaps even greater today when significant demographic changes in the US (Colby and Ortman) are leading to stiff competition among universities to attract and retain their share of an increasingly diverse student body (Krogstad, Manuel, and Fry; Pratt; Western Interstate Commission). A school culture that attends to and affirms difference not only makes students’ academic success more likely but can also help prepare them for a culturally diverse workplace (Frey; Hays-Thomas, Bowen, and Boudreaux; Wentling). At the same time, as Jacqueline Rhodes and Jonathan Alexander insist, we must be wary of efforts to co-opt attention to difference as primarily a boon to employability. In their words, “[W]e must nurture a view of social change that works toward justice by thinking beyond simple job readiness and career preparation” (“Reimagining” 485). Those who believe writing instruction can contribute skills needed to work toward justice have a special responsibility to teach in ways that encourage *full* participation in democratic culture and to highlight the value of difference within the context of such participation.

Multimodal composing promotes acceptance of textual difference in a number of ways. As Anne Wysocki argues, multimodal composing invites us to question fixed notions of text or image as we consider “not only what is expected by a particular audience in a particular context but also what they might not expect, what they might not be prepared to see” (59). Similarly, Rhodes and Alexander emphasize that multimodal texts are not just a different kind of writing but have their own histories and rhetorics that deserve attention (*On Multimodality* 3–5). As Cynthia Selfe notes in her

argument for including the mode of sound in writing classes, highlighting the ways other modes of composing differ from rather than resemble writing may appeal to students' different learning and composing preferences ("Movement" 644). Bringing multimodal composing into our classes can also multiply the kinds of writers, audiences, and publication sites students see as legitimate participants in rhetorical action. David M. Sheridan, Jim Ridolfo, and Anthony J. Michel contend, "ordinary rhetors should appropriate the rhetorical tools of graphic designers, illustrators, photographers, and videographers in order to assume responsibility for the production of culture" (xii). Of course, multimodal composing does not automatically produce "productive diversity" (New London Group 67). The very multiplicity that results from welcoming diverse participation also includes anonymous hate speech, cyberbullying, sexting, and other problematic expression. Equally important, continued unequal access to digital tools and experiences means not everyone automatically benefits when we expand the forms of composing we ask of students (Poe). Those very students marginalized by academe's adherence to a single standard will continue to be marginalized if we simply transpose that single standard onto multimodal texts. Instead, we need to consciously focus our writing objectives on "multi" as well as "modal," to not only accept differences but encourage them.

Doing so will require that we examine our often unconscious complicity with academic standards that reify "formalized, monolingual, monocultural, and rule-governed forms of language" (New London Group 61) and the limiting concept of the student writer those standards propagate. Unfortunately, as Donna Strickland and Jeanne Gunner suggest, within WPA circles, critique of our normative practices does not come easily (xi). Consider, for example, Paul Matsuda and Ryan Skinnell's calling out as "problematic," the "lack of systematic and sustained conversation about the implications of the WPA OS for second language writers . . . at a time when their presence is increasingly felt" (231). More pointedly, Jeff Rice laments that "the influence of liberatory pedagogy, cultural studies, media studies, and poststructuralism on writing instruction over the last forty years seems to have had minimal effect in shaking conservatism in writing program administration" (2), defining conservatism as a response to "the implied threat of multiplicity, divergent ideas, and difference" through the expression of a "preference for the already known . . . *the familiar*" (4; emphasis original). Of course, such conservatism may result in part from the institutional constraints experienced by many writing programs: a largely contingent teaching force with varying levels of experience, too-few resources for teacher development, and competing demands that can curb programmatic vision. Writing programs may also skew conservative in cases where WPAs,

especially those without tenure, have limited power to resist institutional expectations regarding what composition courses should teach.

It should not be surprising, then, that a consensus document like the original WPA Outcomes Statement can seem overly conservative, even at the very moment it is accepted. Commenting as a drafter of the original WPA Outcomes Statement, Keith Rhodes observed that, “for me what started with a band of outrage is ending with a shrug of acceptance” (65). Rhodes ultimately concluded, “This is not, then, a great moment in the history of composition. It is an ordinary moment” (66). Similarly, Kathleen Blake Yancey, President of the CWPA when the Statement was first adopted, described it as “hardly revolutionary,” noting that the Statement talks about “the more non-controversial of our practices in first-year composition” (67). Although such comments may have been intended, in part, to calm anxious WPAs who feared that the WPA Outcomes Statement 1.0 could somehow be used against them, they also reaffirm the inclination (or necessity) of writing programs to take a moderate stance. Not all WPAs were happy to accept such moderation. For example, Clyde Monyhan declared that “I . . . wish that the document had more to say about teaching writing to heighten social and political awareness among students, about writing as a civic act,” even as he also acknowledged that “as a compilation and synthesis of opinion in our field, the document (like all such documents) is necessarily and inevitably conservative” (63). Mark Wiley also warned that as “a negotiated document, one of compromise” the “middle-of-the-roadness” of the WPA Outcomes Statement 1.0 could lead it to become “one more of those proclamations issued by professional organizations that sound, well, ‘official’ but lack any pragmatic value because no significant consequences follow its adoption” (67). When the WPA Outcomes Statement 1.0 was later published in *College English*, Derek Soles offered a particularly strong critique, remarking that “Radical writing teachers . . . will likely be offended by and scoff at the list of outcomes the committee mandates” (377). In direct response to Soles’ criticism, Kathi Yancey defended the Statement as enabling “radical possibility” by providing for “a composition curriculum that permits all students to write themselves into it.” She also argued that it is “flexible” enough to allow for a wide range of pedagogical approaches (380). Both *The Outcomes Book* and *The WPA Outcomes Statement: A Decade Later* provide evidence of the many ways the various versions of the WPA OS has been used to benefit a variety of writing programs. However, if one goal of the WPA OS overall is to regularize what is taught in writing courses, there is necessarily a limit in how much pedagogical variation it can support.

The challenge of both representing and regularizing the role of technology in writing programs also led to a compromise that might be said to have erred on the side of middle-of-the-road-ness. Although recommendations to include outcomes related to digital composing were made at several points during the process of drafting the original Statement, the version officially adopted by CWPA in 2000 did not mention technology. Soon after, Cynthia Selfe and Patricia Ericsson made their disappointment public, arguing that a narrow focus on print literacies not only threatens writing programs with potential obsolescence but has “dangerous” consequences for students, especially poor students and students of color, by cheating them out of the chance to acquire literacy skills necessary for participating in electronic composing environments that are “essential” as “sites of political activism and power” (34). Although the Statement was amended in 2008 to include what came to be known as the “technology plank,” digital literacy was conceptualized there primarily as an enabler of traditional academic literacy. As Michael Callaway observed, “the 2008 revision of the WPA OS . . . does not move much beyond the 1999 version in terms of its focus on technology as a tool” (275). Echoing Selfe and Ericsson, Callaway proposes that students

need instruction on how to critically engage technology. Students should also receive instruction in how they shape and are shaped by digital mediums, and how their identities and literate practices are constructed and promulgated by digital mediums and within digital environments. (272)

In Callaway’s complaint, we hear an echo of the one voiced by Clyde Monyehun and Derek Soles that the WPA Outcomes Statement fails to advocate for a critical approach in which students learn to recognize how power and difference affect writing. For some, the absence of a critical stance toward technology in the 2008 addendum, and for that matter, toward writing and language more generally, prevents the original WPA Outcomes Statement from achieving the “radical possibility” that Yancey claimed it could.

The question now is to what extent radical possibility is enabled by the WPA Outcomes Statement 3.0. If, as Kathi Yancey asserts, “the Statement is a living text and thus will change” (“Response” 68) and if, as Susanmarie Harrington assures us, the WPA Outcomes Statement is a floor not a ceiling for composition programs (xvii), we can and should find ways to use the revised WPA Outcomes Statement not just to sanction multimodal composing but to work toward the utopian possibility of “productive diversity” (New London Group 67) by using such composing to highlight the presence and value of difference in all human expression.

## THE WPA OUTCOMES STATEMENT AS AVAILABLE DESIGN

One change in the revised WPA Outcomes Statement that can help support productive diversity is the foregrounding of design in writing. By recognizing that FYC students will design web pages and posters as well as apply principles of design to more traditional forms of writing, the revised Statement sends a clear message about valuing different textual modes. But treating writing as design and students as designers can and should have larger implications.<sup>2</sup> The New London Group, who uses the term *design* to refer to students' capacity to act as innovators and as change agents, was again prescient. In their words, "literacy educators and students must see themselves as active participants in social change, as learners and students who can be active designers—makers of social futures" (64). Through the process of Designing, each of us uses Available Designs—existing conventions, grammars, genres and so on—to create new meanings, the Redesigned. Inhabiting the role of designer changes how we engage with the world. As the New London Group describes it, "Through their co-engagement in Designing, people transform their relations with each other, and so transform themselves" (76). To become a designer requires access to Available Designs—those already existing grammars, conventions, and discourses, which communities share—as well as support for creating something new. Importantly, the New London Group reminds us, "Designing will more or less normatively reproduce, or more or less radically transform, given knowledges, social relations, and identities, depending upon the social conditions under which Designing occurs" (75). What is created by the act of Designing subsequently becomes the Available Designs others use as their starting point. This is how knowledge is created and change happens—or not.

As a nod to this concept of Designing, I want to approach the revised WPA Outcomes Statement as itself an Available Design—a depiction of the accepted present state of writing instruction that we can use to imagine a transformed future. Even a casual reading of the Statement makes clear that writing teachers should engage students in reading and composing a diversity of text forms, especially ones made possible by the use of digital tools. For example, in the Introduction, readers are told that the term *composing* refers to "complex writing processes that are increasingly reliant on the use of digital technologies" in which writers "attend to elements of design, incorporating images and graphical elements into texts intended for screens as well as printed pages" (144). Use of the term *composing* instead of *writing* and the plural *processes* instead of the singular *process* signals an expansion in both the kinds of texts students may produce and their means of produc-

ing them, as does references to “elements of design” such as “images and graphical elements” and the explicit identification of the “screen” as a publication medium. This view that writing will take multiple forms due to our reliance on computers is repeated throughout the revised WPA Outcomes Statement. For example, in paragraph three of the Introduction, the original reference to “learning to write” has been replaced by “learning to write in any medium” (144), and the section of outcomes titled “Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing” has become “Critical Thinking, Reading, and Composing” (145). Indeed, we are told explicitly that “digital technologies are changing writers’ relationships to their texts and audiences in evolving ways” (144), reminding us that writing will continue to change and that writing instruction must be open to change as well.

One thing that remains the same in the original and revised WPA OS is the assertion that “Rhetorical knowledge is the basis of composing” (145). However, the Rhetorical Knowledge section of the WPA Outcomes Statement has been revised to emphasize that students gain rhetorical knowledge from working with multiple kinds of texts. As elsewhere in the revision, the term *composing* is preferred to *writing*, an implied broadening of the forms writing can take. The revision of this section also highlights the importance of students’ learning to write for different audiences and situations. In the revision, the addition of “civic” to the original references to “disciplinary” and “professional” (145) as sites for writing expands both the kinds and purposes of writing beyond academic writing and creates an opening for students to design texts that engage in social action. In another move away from a single standard and toward multiplicity, the revised Statement eliminates the frequent reference to appropriateness that appeared in this section in the original, where students had been admonished to “Respond appropriately to different kinds of rhetorical situations,” “Use conventions of format and structure appropriate to the rhetorical situation,” and “Adopt appropriate voice, tone, and level of formality.”<sup>3</sup> In contrast, the revision emphasizes that “Writers develop rhetorical knowledge by negotiating purpose, audience, context and conventions as they compose a variety of texts for different situations” (145). Indeed, the revision makes explicit that students gain rhetorical insight through negotiating multiplicity: Students “Develop facility in responding to a variety of situations and contexts calling for purposeful shifts in voice, tone, level of formality, design, medium, and/or structure” (145). All of these changes bode well for acknowledging and valuing differences in writing.

Other sections of the revised WPA Outcomes Statement also support the idea that composition courses should allow students opportunities to negotiate a variety of text forms. For example, in the section “Critical



Thinking, Reading, and Composing,” which focuses primarily on how students work with others’ texts, the list of source material includes not just “written texts,” but also “photographs, data sets, videos, or other materials” (145). Likewise, this section expands the kinds of texts students might create in response to these varied sources, including strategies such as considering “the interplay between verbal and nonverbal elements” and learning “how these features function for different audiences and situations” (146). Similarly, the strategies students use to engage with other texts now include “design/redesign” as well as traditional strategies such as response and synthesis (146). As in the original, outcomes related to Processes continue to emphasize the importance of learning flexible composing strategies that are recursive. In keeping with the broadened definition of writing throughout the revision, writing processes here are now called *composing processes*, and the work students produce now falls under the umbrella term *projects*. The original list of writing processes—“generating, revising, editing, and proofreading”—has been revised to further emphasize recursiveness—“reading, drafting, reviewing, collaborating, revising, rewriting, rereading, and editing” (146). Also interesting to note, Proof-reading has been eliminated from the list of composing processes, perhaps to signal a reduced emphasis on a single standard of correctness (“appropriateness”) or to delete the reference to “proof” as in page-proof, usually associated with print. The change may also be intended to acknowledge that editing and proofreading have become one process, typically conducted on the screen. Again readers are reminded that digital technologies contribute to the multiplicity of composing processes as students “adapt composing processes for a variety of technologies and modalities” (147).

One other way the revised WPA Outcomes Statement supports negotiating a multiplicity of discourses is in the expanded version of the final section, Knowledge of Conventions, where we are informed that conventions “arise from a history of use” and vary by genre, discipline, and occasion (147). This assertion makes clear that expectations for writing are situated in social contexts and are thus subject to change: “Successful writers understand, analyze, and negotiate conventions for purpose, audience, and genre, understanding that genres evolve in response to change in material conditions and composing technologies and attending carefully to emergent conventions” (147). Again, changes in conventions are attributed at least in part to “composing technologies,” suggesting that as technologies change, conventions will also change. In contrast with the original WPA Outcomes Statement, where students were expected to learn to control “such surface features as syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling,” in the revision, no such control is presumed. Instead, we now want students to “develop

knowledge of linguistic structures . . . through practice in composing and revising” (147). Similarly, instead of developing “knowledge of genre conventions ranging from structure and paragraphing to tone and mechanics,” we want students to “gain experience negotiating variations in genre conventions” as well as “learn common formats and/or design features for different kinds of texts” (148). The changes in this section thus emphasize what students learn from working with different text forms and reflecting on differing conventions, including different ways of acknowledging the use of others’ work. In a change from the original WPA Outcomes Statement, which asked students to “Practice appropriate means of documenting their work,” the revised version encourages students to “Explore the concepts of intellectual property (such as fair use and copyright) that motivate documentation conventions” as well as applying those conventions (148). The notion of exploring further highlights that documentation conventions are both multiple and evolving. This open-ended stance toward the inevitability of change is one of the most important revisions in the WPA Outcomes Statement 3.0.

#### TOWARD A REDESIGN OF WRITING OUTCOMES

In the revised WPA Outcomes Statement, there is much to admire in the efforts to move writing programs toward the radical possibility of achieving productive diversity. The revised Statement sends a clear message that writing is multiple, that purposes for writing are diverse, and that writing is changing and will continue to change. However, while the inclusion of multimodal composing in the revised WPA Outcomes Statement supports teaching students to negotiate a variety of text forms, it does not explicitly mention other differences that students should negotiate and value. Surely as schools and communities become increasingly multilingual, as ethnic and racial minorities become majorities, as gender differences become more visible and less stigmatized, and as differing religious identities are publicly expressed, expression in all modes will be affected. Although the revised WPA Outcomes Statement does not prevent individual teachers from treating a broader range of difference as assets, given that literacy education has historically sought to erase such differences and the very real difficulty of attending to difference in our age of standardization, we must do more in our classes to support difference, more than simply practice different modes.

There is also more for us to do in seeing students as designers engaged in significant acts that go beyond the arrangement of graphics in a brochure or video. While the revised WPA Outcomes Statement clearly signals the

importance of increased attention to design in writing classes—the term is used six times and in every section except for the section on Processes—as a field, we have not yet embraced the full meaning of design as a human-centered, strategic, generative approach to problem-solving.<sup>3</sup> When the revised Statement tells us that “Writers also attend to elements of design, incorporating images and graphical elements into texts intended for screens” (144), the meaning of design is limited. Similarly, when the WPA OS asserts that students should “Develop facility in responding to a variety of situations and contexts calling for purposeful shifts in voice, tone, level of formality, design, medium, and/or structure” (145), design appears as merely one feature of a text. The revised WPA Outcomes Statement does begin to capture a fuller meaning of design in the Critical Thinking, Reading, and Composing section when it suggests that students should be able to “Use strategies—such as interpretation, synthesis, response, critique, and design/redesign—to compose texts that integrate the writer’s ideas with those from appropriate sources” (146). Here, grouped with other meaning-making acts such as interpretation and critique, design/redesign achieves roughly parallel status with traditional academic writing and, in suggesting that writers integrate their own ideas with the ideas expressed by sources, emphasizes how new ideas are produced. This use of the term *design* resonates with the New London Group’s idea that all meaning-making acts are acts of design, which “always involves making new use of old materials” (76). Such an approach to design helps prepare students to become “designers of social futures” (65) and make their worlds anew.

Writing programs have long had to negotiate between valuing students’ differences and teaching the standards associated with academic writing. We have only to count the times the word *appropriate* was used in the original WPA Outcomes Statement to be reminded of the degree to which we have internalized our role as gatekeepers, and hints of that role remain even in the revision. For example, appropriateness continues to be emphasized in the “Critical Thinking, Reading, and Composing” section. There, we’re told that the purpose of critical thinking is to enable students to “compose appropriately qualified and developed claims and generalizations,” practices which are “foundational for advanced academic writing” (146). Of the three instances in which the term *appropriate* appears in the revised WPA Outcomes Statement (compared to five in the original), two of them appear in this section. For example, students are still admonished to compose texts using “appropriate sources” (146), a reminder that students’ claims are limited by the legitimacy of others’ work. The revised WPA Outcomes Statement does expand the kinds of texts students can refer to, suggesting that students might compose and read “a diverse range of texts,” and that work

with multimodal texts might call for analyzing the “interplay between verbal and nonverbal elements.” However, students are still reminded to apply the familiar school standards for what constitutes an appropriate academic source. Similarly, even though the list of possible “primary and secondary research materials” now includes “informal electronic network and internet sources,” those new options come at the end of a long list that begins with “journal articles and essays, books, scholarly and professionally established and maintained databases or archives.” Such a list broadens the kinds of materials students might work with but fails to complicate assumptions about why “scholarly” and “professionally established” (146) sources are preferred and how such preferences may limit the views that contribute to knowledge-making. Likewise, while students might respond to texts by using design/redesign in addition to more traditional academic strategies of interpretation, synthesis, response, and critique, the potential for student agency implied by the term *design/redesign* is denuded by the explanation that these strategies are to be used to “compose texts that integrate the writer’s ideas with those from appropriate sources” (146), putting equal emphasis on the source text.

This question of judgment, of who decides what counts as an effective or valuable text in the marketplace of increasingly diverse ideas expressed in increasingly diverse forms is, unfortunately, not addressed in the recent revision of the Outcomes Statement. If multimodal composing is to afford students the opportunity to negotiate difference, to explore why teachers may value documented research papers over remixed videos or to consider whether anonymous apps like Yik Yak foster free speech or hate speech (or both), we need to make explicit that difference does matter: Not all writing has equal power, and the power of texts can shift when contexts shift. A significant change in the revised Outcomes Statement, then, is the deletion of the only original outcome that dealt with power: Students should “understand the relationships among language, knowledge and power” (62) and teachers in all disciplines should address “the relationships among language, knowledge, and power in their fields” (62). In contrast, the revised Statement omits references to power altogether.<sup>3</sup> Given that a chief purpose of revising the Outcomes Statement was to include multimodal composing, and given the ways in which such composing challenges academic standards, this omission is a limitation. Students need to understand not just that there are diverse text forms to choose from (something they already know well) but what difference their choices make to whom and why. The persuasive value of different kinds of texts, including the *ethos* their composers convey as a result of their choices, is not simply the result of objective differences in modal affordances but is also affected by the power of

cultural and institutional systems eager to control meaning and representation. Furthermore, the Outcome Statement's increased recognition of the influence of digital technologies on composing necessitates vigilant attention to the role that power plays in determining access to these technologies. If we include multimodal composing in our courses but exclude discussions of language and power, we fail to fully prepare students to negotiate among the diverse contexts for writing where differences in power are obviously at play.

Some may say that working toward this kind of productive diversity in writing courses is more than the Outcomes Statement can be expected to achieve. It is, after all, a description of desired outcomes for what is often a single course. As a consensus document, the Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition necessarily expresses a moderate—even, modest—position, describing present values rather than arguing for a vision of the future. As a document used to shape curriculum, teacher training, and assessment, the Outcomes Statement must remain eminently practical, with outcomes that are achievable under current conditions. Additionally, while most of us are not yet in a position of having to teach to a test, the specter of assessment may limit our enthusiasm for messy or complex writing outcomes, especially those that challenge accepted standards.

Nevertheless, by including multimodal composing, the revised Outcomes Statement has opened the door to a conception of writing instruction as preparation for just such a messy and complex future of writing, one which will call on all of us to be designers capable of transforming the past into something new. Toward that end, let me describe a few ways I have redesigned my writing courses in an attempt to use multimodal composing to support difference. In a redesign of my former approach to teaching documentation that focused on MLA only, I now ask students to document sources in different ways—using MLA style for an annotated bibliography (appropriate for an academic assignment), a magazine citation style (naming the author and source so they can be fact-checked) in a personal advocacy essay, adding URLs to presentation slides, and hyperlinking sources in texts published in their digital portfolios. To further highlight diverse ways to document sources, students discuss various positions on copyright, fair use, and re-mix and compose their own philosophy of source use. Though teaching citation style in this way is more complicated than teaching MLA rules, it also better reflects the choices open to writers as conventions continue to evolve.

Literacy pedagogies that acknowledge students as designers invite them to envision a future based on a transformed present. We encourage such transformation by asking and expecting students to use existing language

resources in ways that draw on their different perspectives, experiences, and means of expression; instead of emphasizing what students ought to do in response to a composition assignment, we ask students to imagine how they might apply their vision to respond to a rhetorical task. For example, I redesigned what once was a collaborative proposal assignment that included pre-determined deliverables into a design thinking assignment<sup>4</sup> in which teams of students who share an interest in a problem use their different skills and perspectives to create an advocacy campaign that includes whatever discourse forms they think will be effective for their audience. Fostering difference in this way does not call out racial, ethnic, gender, or language differences for special attention but creates an environment in which students' composing of different kinds of texts provides a starting point for negotiating difference as key to effective composing in which all kinds of differences—their own, their design team's, their audience's—matter. At the end of a recent five-week summer composition class, I asked what one thing from the course students expected would stay with them after the class was over; several mentioned how much they had learned from listening to each others' perspectives on the subjects they chose to advocate for, ranging from hunting as a means of helping animals to legalizing euthanasia. What will stick with me especially is our discussion the day after the murders of nine parishioners at the historically black Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, when I asked students what difference rhetoric could make in such a situation. Not surprisingly, their responses varied. The returning veteran who had spent 15 years working in government intelligence responded that the government would just turn the murders into another anti-gun ploy; others insisted that words cannot stop someone bent on such destruction. We did agree, however, that words could make a difference in the aftermath of the violence, both in how we talk about what happened and how we listen to those who see things differently than we do. To work towards productive diversity in our classes, we must give students the freedom and the tools to choose for themselves how to create texts that can affect the problems they care about. We need to teach them the importance of listening to difference, to realize that when it comes to responding to complex problems, difference in perspective is not only expected but necessary and productive.

As an Available Design, the revised Outcomes Statement invites each of us to make of it what we will. I hope that in response, many of us will redesign our writing courses to help students see that composing will always involve a multiplicity of discourses, the result not just of new technologies but of the varied perspectives and experiences such technologies make visible. I, for one, will continue to welcome multimodal composing as a dis-

ruption in business-as-usual, a reminder of the inevitability of difference in the production of meaning, and of the need to be redesigning writing outcomes and myself as a writing teacher in the process.

## NOTES

1. The newly revised version of the Outcomes Statement is available as a pdf at <http://wpacouncil.org/positions/outcomes.html>. Parenthetical citations refer to the version of the WPA Outcomes Statement published in the Fall 2014 issue of *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 38.1. For the original WPA Outcomes Statement, see “WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition” *WPA: Writing Program Administration* vol. 23, no. 1 or *College English* vol. 63, no. 3.

2. I discuss this more robust concept of design, often referred to as “design thinking,” and its relevance to writing instruction in, “Design Thinking and the Wicked Problem of Teaching Writing,” *Computers and Composition* . vol. 33, 2014, pp 1-12.

3. In their discussion of the chief changes in the recent revision of the WPA Outcomes Statement, the revision task force offered this explanation for the deletion of references to language and power: “[M]ost researchers had conceded that neither they nor students were likely ever to fully ‘understand the collaborative and social aspects of writing processes’ or entirely ‘understand the relationships among language, knowledge, and power’” (Dryer 137).

4. Difference in experience and perspective is key to design thinking. In my classes, I rely on the design thinking guidelines popularized by Tim Brown and the design firm IDEO. IDEO has adapted design thinking for educators and offers a toolkit here: <http://www.ideo.com/work/toolkit-for-educators>.

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