

*Writing-to-Learn: Technological Approaches*



**Writing to Learn Activities**

**Center for the Study and Teaching of Writing**



## **Electronic Written, Aural, & Visual Expressions**

(E-WAVE.wikispaces.com)

If you are interested, please visit the site above to view a broad range of models of technology-rich assignments and approaches (admittedly English-focused) where teachers have provided us with assignment descriptions, sometimes the good student work that resulted, student testimonies about the assignments, and teacher reflections on what they think about the approach and what they will do going forward.

## Techno-Pedagogical Explorations

In Pam Takayoshi and Brian Huot's (Ed.), *Teaching Writing with Computers: An introduction*, Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin. (2003) pp. 17-32.

If you are considering how you might, appropriately, integrate sustainable technologies into your teaching, the following reminders have been of great use to the faculty, staff, and graduate students that I've worked with over the years. Indeed, I have to reconsider them myself each year, each term, each time I teaching with technology:

- All technology-rich (TR) pedagogy is experimental.
- Develop locally sustainable teaching practices. Develop locally sustainable teaching practices. Develop locally sustainable teaching practices . . . .
- Don't let the technologies themselves drive your pedagogy, unless . . . .
- Get to know your students.
- Sequence assignments.
- Assess what you do as you go.
- Don't take yourself and your efforts too seriously.
- Add a "critical component" to each lesson.
- Network (in the interpersonal sense) with those around you:
  - Talk to great teachers from all disciplines and collaborate with them.
  - Recruit students as TAs for the next round of TR teaching.
  - Share your insights with other scholar/teachers.
  - Help develop a culture of support for TR teaching at your institution.

The word "sustainable" has a wealth of meaning for me (R. Selfe, 1998). In short, we want locally sustainable technologies because we can't afford to invest time and money in instructional systems that will change over night; successful teachers explore technology-rich pedagogy over a long period of time; these efforts should be tied intimately to changes in our understandings of literacy and learning, neither of which are stable (see the section "All technology-rich pedagogy is experimental" for more justification of sustainability).

# Class (content) Management Systems (CMS)

(Blackboard, Desire to Learn, Moodle [open source], ...)

As you can tell from these two names, these (almost ubiquitous) systems can be used to manage classes or content over time. For the purposes of WTL activities, they include a suite of applications (discussion boards, course content areas, grade posting, dropboxes (handing in and responding to papers), links areas, and in some cases blogs and wiki spaces).\* If your students have access to laptops in class, for instance, they can “hand in” digital versions for a quick review by instructors or graders. For our purposes, we’ll focus primarily on applications that provide writing or communicative opportunities and those that also facilitate the sharing of materials. Of these Discussion boards (boards) are typically the most accessible to students and flexible. Students and teachers can set up content or activity-specific boards for small or large-group exchanges. They allow for attachments that can facilitate a paperless version of any of the “paper exchanges” mentioned in the WTL assignment booklet:

- Class minutes
- Interruptions
- Short-Answer Quizzes
- Notebook or Journal Writing
- Problem Generating
- Letters
- Response or “Position” Papers
- Annotated Bibliographies

\*There are many other web-based systems to facilitate writing and the sharing of files that faculty might want to explore: in general wikis, blogs, email listservs, texting, and instant messaging are a few that have been used for writing-intensive educational purposes. More specifically Flickr, Facebook, YouTube, Google applications, and a growing number of others are worth exploring and talking to colleagues and students about.

## **Concept Mapping**

Many of our WTL activities are intended to get students to make connections and conceive of class concepts in terms that they can understand. Visually organizing the connections and concepts can be a powerful learning experience for students. A range of software from word processing to specialized concept mapping software like Inspiration and CMap can be used (in combination with paper drawings) to provide a special/textual writing-to-learn activity for students. Those concept maps can then be shared using the CMS systems discussed earlier.

## Wiki Work

A wiki is an online collaborative writing environment (some freely available online: PBWiki, Wikidot, Wikispaces) that gives students an opportunity to author, revise, and share course-related materials. Teachers from across the disciplines have used assignments to build increasingly valuable sets of resources that can be used by out-of-class audiences and future students of the same class. Many of the assignments here can be adapted for wiki environments that will “raise the bar” each term as students add materials. Consider these assignments:

- Concept Metaphors
- Study Questions
- Observation reports
- Problem Generating
- Scenarios
- Interview-Based Research