“On Modality, New Media in Composition”

In “On Modality New Media in Composition” Alexander and Rhodes argue that students should be allowed to engage in complex multimodal composition in scholastic composition studies using new technology that is available to students. However, incorporating multimodal modern forms of new media technology in compositional studies has its share of both positive and negative responses. The use of new media in compositional practices which incorporate and use multimodal, multimedia and new technology practices in compositional studies has some outspoken critics such as Doug Hesse who argues that Selfe was doing more than just tweaking composition as we know it but was changing “the fundamental boundaries of the curricular landscape.” (2). Hesse wrote this in response to Cynthia L. Selfe’s argument that there was a need for scholarship to embrace multimodal and multimedia compositional practices. Fortunately, there are scholars that agree with the necessity of incorporating new media and modern technology in rhetorical composition Alexander and Rhodes quote Kathleen Blake Yancey who in her CCCC chair address indicated that technology was responsible for the quickest development of new genres outside of the academy, Yancey stated the following,

 “Never before... has the proliferation of writing outside the academy so counterpointed the composition inside. Never before have the technologies of writing contributed so quickly to the creation of new genres.” (18).

Yancey is aware of the technological changes in composition and argues for a new curriculum that incorporates a broader or expanded way of thinking about what we do when we teach writing.” (18). When you consider the multimodality of teaching composition with new technology that is available, new curricula which incorporates multimodal teaching which offers students numerous forms of technology which can be utilized for composition.

In addition, to build on what has already been said in favor of multimodal teaching using new technology, Alexander and Rhodes quote Daniel Anderson who stated in his hypertext/video essay, “Prosumer Approaches to New Media Composition.” “Students already consume new media and student should be taught how to produce new media. (13). New media and technology are the new myriad of technological forms of communication available that students use and are exposed to daily. Therefore, it should be included in modern curriculum.

Both Yancey and Anderson recognize the importance of multimodal teaching of new media using modern technology to teach students that are exposed to and consume new media daily. In addition, we can best prepare students in compositional studies by altering current curricula to incorporate teaching composition using multimodal new media and technology. Linear forms of composition are slowly becoming archaic. Where we once used ink and parchment became pen and pencils and paper. Today we use Word, Open Office and a myriad of other forms of modern technology for composition. We can create composition, forward by email, submit assignments, create audio and video assignments without the use of any device other than our computer. If we do not include new modern technology when we teach composition, we are doing a disservice to our students by continuing to teach linear composition which is slowly becoming an archaic form of composition which is being replaced by new modern technology. If we want our students to excel in composition using modern technology effectively