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The 'screen-size' art: Using digital media to perform poetry

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Abstract

In this paper, I examine the immersive and performative potential of new media for reading, writing and representing poetry to encourage an exploration of the relationship between text, image and sound and discuss how these are used to mediate meaning making. Based on the premise that poetry is meant to be lifted from the printed page and experienced in multimodal ways, the research explores the notion of poetry as digital performance.

Keywords

Poetry, performance, multimodality, digital literacy, collaboration, play

Poetry should have a central place in all of our lives, not only for the aesthetic pleasure it affords, but also for its ability to awaken our senses, connect us with ourselves and others, and lead us to think in synthesising ways, as required by its use of the language of metaphor (Peacock, 1999; Zwicky, 2000; Hoogland, 2007). Poetry's conciseness, its brevity, and its power to convey so much in such a limited space are its appeal. Peacock (1999) calls poetry 'the screen-size art' that provides a 'quick dive in a deep pool', offering 'depth in a moment, using the depth *of* a moment' (p. 13). Poetry encourages an economy and precision in language that transfers to other types of oral and written communication. Michaels (1999) suggests, 'Reading and writing poems can help us discover profound truths we didn't realise we knew' (p. 3). Poetry evokes feelings and provokes thoughts about complex social issues (Damico, 2005). Poetry is more than a vehicle for expression; it is also a way of knowing. Poetry both requires and facilitates a concentration of mind or sustained attention to which our hectic lives have unaccustomed us. The linking of the strange with the familiar through the image, or even through well-placed line breaks, is perhaps what makes poetry so powerful. Poetry transforms the way we see the commonplace through new and fresh perspectives.

Poetry as a school-based experience, however, seems to fall short of the potential described above. Much has been written about the problems associated with teaching poetry (Wade and Siddaway, 1990; Andrews, 1991; Benton, 1999, 2000; Pike, 2000). More than other genres such as novels, non-fiction or plays, poetry seems to elicit the most complaints from students. Often, Language Arts teachers report feeling less comfortable teaching poetry than literature or drama, either because they aren't sure how to teach it effectively (owing to lack of pedagogical role models), or because they find it elusive themselves (Lockward, 1994). The dominant model of poetry teaching has been to teach poetry through static words on the page, and to focus on finding one meaning to be dissected or a content to be apprehended.

Poetry in school also persists for the most part as a print-based experience. This stands in sharp contrast to the everyday experiences of many students who are growing up digitally literate. The 2003 Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test survey indicated that 97% of students have access to a computer in their home and further, the results show that 79% of the students were using their computers for online chat, e-mail messaging, and accessing Internet material. Access has become even easier five years later. However, issues of access and equity continue to be important, and perhaps one way to begin to close the digital divide is to integrate more new media in the classroom. New media technology facilitates the convergence of multiple modes in one medium, which fosters the strengths of diverse learners and promotes greater educational equity (Kinzer, Gabella and Rieth, 1994; Wilhelm, 1995; Short, Kauffman and Kahn, 2000).

In today's world, literacy includes an understanding of how texts are constructed and how a variety of forms of representation work together to convey meaning. Kress (2003) argues that very soon the screen (whether TV, computer, cell phone or other emerging technology) will govern all of our communication practices and language use. Students will understand language use within an electronic medium. In digital environments words are no longer static, black marks on a white page. Different modes of expression or 'modalities' – aural, visual, gestural, spatial and linguistic – come together in one environment in ways that reshape the relationship between printed word and image or sound (Jewitt, 2006). This change in the materiality of text – that is, the media that are used to create the text – inevitably changes the way we read or receive the text, and has important implications for the way we construct or write our own texts.

To help our students understand and experience how literature, and poetry in particular, brings them to a deeper understanding in life, we need to find meaningful ways to engage them with poetry, ways that are also part of their new media world. Towards this end, I conducted a research study where I engaged in conversation with poets about poetry, poetry teaching and new media.

About the study

The study is based on in-depth interviews with four prominent contemporary Canadian poets – Cornelia Hoogland, Penn Kemp, John B. Lee and Molly Peacock – in an attempt to explore the nature of poetry, the teaching and learning of poetry, and the potential role of new media in the teaching and learning process. The following questions guided my investigation:

1. According to poets, what are the most important things to appreciate about poetry, and how should poetry be taught?
2. How does what poets say coincide with: a) theory and research related to poetry teaching and learning and, b) existing print and digital resources? Do gaps exist? What are the points of convergence?
3. How might new media help us reconsider what poetry is and does in the classroom?

My study is extensive and I cannot do justice to all of its components in the space of this paper. I have chosen to focus on one of the themes that emerged from the study, namely *poetry as performance*.

Poetry as performance

Recently, I attended Molly Peacock's off-Broadway stage performance of *The Shimmering Verge*, which included the following: some of her poetry, music, a set, movement, and stories related to the poems. Though her performance was more elaborate than typical poetry performances in

poetry readings, readings are also more than just the words of a poem on the printed page. Poets at poetry readings have a physical presence, they read their poems aloud, they tell stories to set the stage for the poems they read, and they answer questions from the audience. We might view the various components of a poetry performance as annotations to the printed poem – extensions that elaborate and add depth of meaning and lift the poem off the printed page. These annotations adorn a poem and are a way of *making special*, to use Dissanayake's (2003) phrase.

Although none of the poets in the study authored poems using new media, we can imagine what might happen in such a scenario. Let us consider the digital performance of Kemp's (2002) poem, *Not Waving but Drowning* (visit <http://www.mytown.ca/pennkemp/> to view the digital performance). This digital performance was produced after the printed poem was written, and was created not by Kemp herself, but by visual artist Jeff Dawson, who approached the poet and asked her permission to animate the poem. However, imagine that when Kemp had the idea of writing this poem, she also had an interest in new media and let us imagine that she decided to write this poem in a new media environment. How might the poem have been written differently? Would it have been simply a set of stanzas on the screen, mimicking the printed form?

It is possible that Kemp might have used a multimedia authoring environment to write her poem by integrating a variety of modes of expression. Here is one possible scenario: the poem might have been read, with only some of the words printed on the screen; images might have been incorporated to express the feelings that Kemp wanted to portray; perhaps some form of music might have been added at appropriate places in the reading of the poem; she might have also added video clips of herself telling a few stories that relate to the poem; she might want to share more than one version of the poem, perhaps earlier or simply alternate versions. The question in my mind would then be, 'where does the poem end, and where does its performance begin?'

The point I am making is that new media, unlike the printed page, are (much more so) performance media. Writing poetry in new media blurs the boundary between a poem and its performance and reminds us of poetry's oral origins. In the example above, where I outlined a possible alternate authoring of Kemp's *Not Waving but Drowning*, it is difficult to distinguish between what is typically considered to be poetry (the printed poem) and what is a poetry performance, as the reading, the music, the images, and perhaps even the stories on video, are integral components of the authored poem.

As I conducted a content analysis (Berg, 2004) of the interviews of the poets in the study, and as I reflected on the nature of poetry in a new

media context, I identified six performance characteristics of new media. New media performance is: multimodal rather than text-based; collective rather than individual; shared rather than private; multi-interpretive rather than a single meaning; playful rather than serious; integrated rather than singular. I describe each of these characteristics below, and I discuss implications for the teaching and learning of poetry. I should clarify that I do not mean to suggest that the characteristics I identify below are *necessarily* part of poetry written or studied, but rather that these characteristics represent affordances that are introduced or enhanced due to new media.

Multimodal rather than text-based

Although, as Kress (2000) reminds us, all texts are multimodal, the linguistic mode often dominates (p. 187). It is my contention that poetry, because of its use of rhythm and image in concert, is perhaps more multimodal, in a metaphoric sense, than other genres typically explored (and indeed privileged) in English classes. Even more than other genres, poetry lends itself to the kinds of associative linking made concretely possible through new media. A performance, whether it occurs on stage or using new media, is a multimodal expression. On the stage, it involves vocal elements (intonation, inflection, volume, tempo), costume, set design, music, lighting, and movement (blocking or choreography). All of these elements are also present in a new media context, as programs such as Flash, Photostory or iMovie for example, allow for vocal as well as visual expression.

The use of new media offers one way that poetry can be lifted from the printed page and explored in multimodal ways. The use of new digital media for reading, writing and representing poetry encourages an exploration of the relationship between text and image, and how images and sound might be used to mediate meaning making. Giving students opportunities to create poems or respond to and annotate existing poems using new media provides them with opportunities to use the technology in meaningful ways. Following are two examples of how teachers with even minimal technology skills might use new media to explore poetry:

Writing hypermedia response

Students can use HyperStudio or the hyperlinking function in PowerPoint or Corel Presentations to create links from key words or phrases in an existing poem or a poem that they have written. Students might create links that take their reader/viewer to a written personal response to an aspect of the poem, to a definition of a poetic device or convention used in the poem, to an image that the student feels illuminates the poem in some way, to an external link that might provide an oral reading of the poem or biographical information about the poet, or even to a video or audio clip that presents a dramatic performance of the poem. The use of

new media enables the student poet to experiment with the use of images, to provide some annotations, to add further insights, or to point to certain things in the poem, which is something many poets do before or after oral readings of their work. Adding visual or auditory components to poetry opens up new ways of using language and experiencing literature.

Creating digital poetry

Students can use PhotoStory or iMovie to create their own digital poems or to represent an existing poem through multimedia. These two programs are very simple to use (and are in fact widely used in Ontario schools) and provide students with step-by-step instructions through the creation process. Students can use scanned or downloaded images or, even more effective, take their own photos with a digital camera. They organise their images and use the voice-recording feature to read the poem aloud. They can add sound effects or a soundtrack of music they have created through the program or clips of music that come with the program. Most significantly for the study of poetry, these new media allow students to have oral readings linked with their print version of the poem, an approach that honours the multimodal nature of poetry and the students' multiple literacies.

In my current research investigating the creative processes of students who author poetry with new media, it is interesting to note that the approach varies from student to student. Some students begin with a concrete image, a photograph or a piece of artwork, and create text for their poem around the image; others begin with the words of the poem, develop the language and then search for visual images to use in conjunction with their words. Some students use a combination of the two approaches, perhaps beginning with an image that inspires words or phrases, which in turn leads them to more visual images.

Because they are immersed in digital environments, not only on the Internet, but also through their gaming systems, students naturally express themselves in multimodal ways. It would not require any kind of leap for most students to create hypermedia or digital poetry, as long as they had the appropriate technology to do so. They already possess the necessary cultural and cognitive tools, albeit in a nascent form.

Collective rather than individual

John B. Lee refers to the writing of poetry as a 'solitary art' which is 'learned and practiced in solitude' (Hughes, 2006). In fact, all of the poets in the study describe their writing 'habits' and the necessity of carving out time for writing. However, when Molly Peacock creates a stage performance of her poetry, such as *The Shimmering Verge*, she collaborates with others on set design and construction, on the live music

to be used and played, and on the choreography of her movements. She employs a director for the production and performs with a pianist on stage. Creating such a performance is typically a collective enterprise. By 'collective' I want to refer not only to the human collaborators (poet, musician, choreographer, set designer), but also to the physical and other artifacts that inhabit the stage. Music, set, light, and movement become tools to think with and tools that affect how a poet sees and performs her poetry.

Levy (1997) suggests that such a collective forms a 'cognitive ecology' in which 'The system for the production and distribution of knowledge doesn't depend on the individual features of the human cognitive system alone, but also on collective methods of organisation and the instruments with which information is communicated and processed' (p. 200). Borba and Villareal (2005), researching students doing mathematics with new media, suggests that different media reorganise thinking in different ways. Borba and Villareal quote Noss and Hoyles (1996) who emphasise the role of computers, or any tool, as mediators of knowledge. Using new media to create poetry is not just about adding pictures to poetry or having more ways of expressing ourselves poetically. To use Borba and Villareal's terms, it reorganises and restructures our thinking about poetry. The shift from text to new media is analogous to the shift we made from an oral culture to a print culture.

In the previous section I outlined some possible ways that students might use new media in the reading, writing or representing of poetry by adding visual images, sound or annotations. The various modes can be viewed as additional layers of meaning, thereby adding to the complexity of the poem. The student who adds visual images, sound or uses different sizes and styles of fonts to an existing, previously printed poem, acts as co-creator and, according to Kemp, these new versions or performances of the poem 'change the poem'. She equates these kinds of performances with the act of the reader who takes on the role as co-creator.

What poets, teachers and students might do with poetry in a new media context is an exciting aspect of my continuing research. I do believe the affordances of new media offer opportunities to revitalise poetry in ways that have yet to emerge, as the use of new media in poetry writing, teaching and learning is still nascent.

Shared rather than private

Performance assumes an audience and, although poetry created using new media is not necessarily always posted on the Internet, it is more likely to be. Writing poetry in digital environments such as blogs places poetry more directly on the public stage where it belongs and makes it accessible to a wider audience.

Although it is often perceived as the final stage in the reading or writing process, performance or publication can also be viewed as an integral part of the response and editing cycle. Teachers have long engaged in informal means of ‘publishing’ their students’ work, whether it is bound in class anthologies, fixed to classroom bulletin boards or, more recently, posted to classroom websites. Some teachers organise poetry cafes with their students, either in the classroom or for the school community. There are numerous forums for the formal publication of student poetry that range from journals or magazines and online poetry ezines. Online poetry forums encourage students to post their work and receive feedback and writing advice from moderators or online mentors and, finally, consider the burgeoning number of teen blogs, as many adolescents engage in what Lankshear and Knobel (2003) call ‘self-broadcasting’. Our students spend more and more time in digital environments that are bound up in social practices, and require collaboration and participation. No longer do we just write poetry and file it away; performance is becoming the norm. Performance, many would argue, is what is breathing new life into poetry in contemporary society (Collins, 2004; Holman, 2004; Howard, 2004; Jacobus, 2004; Rodriguez, 2004; Smith, 2004).

Multi-interpretive rather than a single meaning

The ‘immersive and performative potential’ of new media encourage the reader ‘to explore or answer poems with new forms of verbal and visual play’ (Nichols, 2002, p. 23) and offer new ways to experience poetry. When viewing poems accompanied by images, Lee suggests that the reader should compare her or his own idea for the images in the poem with those provided by the creator of the digital performance because each performance offers a new and different interpretation of the poem. Lee uses the analogy of performing Shakespeare or any other play. Each performance is an interpretation and offers points for comparison. Such a view where possibilities are explored and the poem is experienced in multiple ways, stands in sharp contrast to looking for ‘the’ meaning of a poem.

To illuminate the idea that a reading is a performance and an interpretation, I created a ‘digital exploration’ for the poets to consider that examines Molly Peacock’s reading of her poem ‘That Leaf’ (2002) (visit <http://faculty.uoit.ca/hughes/Research/paint.html>). In his book, *Wordplaygrounds*, John O’Connor (2004) proposes that teachers guide their students to pay attention to words that a reader might want to stress, the speed at which the words are delivered and the spaces between those words, and the way the reader might want to pronounce certain words for greater effect. O’Connor calls these ‘performance tools’ and offers exercises in ‘punching, pausing and painting’ words for oral performance. Noting that adolescents are particularly concerned with notions of identity, O’Connor also provides exercises that help students consider

ways of creating or adopting various personae through performance. Using O'Connor's performance tools – paint, punch and pause – in the digital poetry exploration, the reader can visually see as well as hear how the poet uses these tools as she performs the poem. Lee reminds us that a poem is a visual artifact and a poem's arrangement on the page provides the reader with direction, much the same way a musical score gives direction to a musician. Punctuation and line-breaks offer the reader cues as to how the poem should be read aloud. Cadences in the language also steer an oral reading. Long words lengthen or extend the lines while monosyllabic words do the opposite, just as repeated use of long vowels serve to elongate words and slow the reader down, and repetition of short vowel sounds speed the reading up. The choice of words themselves, as well as how they are positioned in a line, helps determine whether or not the word will be 'punched' (emphasised) or not. Poets also 'paint' words by performing the word in a way that illustrates its meaning. In Peacock's reading, for example, she utters the word 'exhausted' with a heavy sigh. Through a close examination of this digital exploration, the reader should begin to observe that when a poem is read aloud, the choices the reader makes could influence the listener's understanding of the poem.

In the digital exploration discussed above and in a similar exploration developed for Cornelia Hoogland's (2004) poem 'Normal, Blessed Normal' (visit <http://faculty.uoit.ca/hughes/Research/multiple.html>), the reader can compare the oral readings of several different people reading the following stanza:

*And in the silence that followed
The bombs fell
And the silence fell
And the screen got clear,
Really clear like she was back in the exact
Moment of the photo,
The dog with his goofy grin
Looking up at her.*

Peacock points out that each of the readings is infused with the personality of the reader, and Lee notes that the readings reinforce the important idea that an oral reading of a poem is indeed an interpretation.

Lee is fascinated by how the choices about which words to emphasise affect the meaning of the poem. He comments:

What's really interesting to me is that for some of the people the emphasis falls on the word 'fell' and for some of the people it falls on the word 'bombs' and some of the people

say the word 'fell' differently the second time 'and in the silence that followed/the bombs fell/and the silence fell'. There is a subtle parenthetic difference between those two 'fells' – the bombs fell and the silence fell.

(see <http://faculty.uoit.ca/hughes/Research/multiple.html> to hear Lee's comments)

Although I have tried to distinguish between the two 'fells' as Lee reads them by underlining the second 'fell', this is a poor substitute for actually hearing his reading. It is difficult to make sense of his comments without listening to the video clip. Interestingly, this observation offers some insight into the importance of how hearing something read aloud helps mediate meaning making. These two digital explorations afford the reader an opportunity to listen to the readings, to hear the way the poem is performed in order to consider or even discuss with others, how the poem was rendered and how each reading promotes or detracts from his or her own hearing and understanding of the poem. Such explorations prompt the reader to consider how poetry is read aloud and to make connections between the poem as it appears on the page (with its line-breaks, rhyme scheme, punctuation and enjambment) and the way it is performed through a person's voice.

Hearing a poem being read aloud reminds us of poetry's roots in the spoken word and providing opportunities for students to record their own oral readings of poems and to compare these with other readings engages them with the text through a performance which represents their interpretation and response to the poem. The kind of performance made possible through new media allows students to infuse their own understanding of and response to the poem into their performance and to compare those oral readings with others. In this approach, sound is meaning and plays a significant role in cognition. Experiencing poetry in multimodal ways adds layers of meaning and interpretation that might not be conveyed in a strictly print format.

Playful rather than serious

Play takes various forms, but pleasure is at the heart of all play. In the context of this paper, play refers to fun as well as to semantics and the idea of word play, and the notion of experimentation with new forms of expression. A poem and its performance can have a playful feel; however, new media extends how one might be playful with a poem. For example, a digital poem is more easily malleable. Unlike a poem in print, with its words fastened securely to their respective positions on the page, a digital poem's line breaks, indentation, use of white space and other physical features can be easily altered on the screen. This offers poets and students opportunities to explore different structures and consider their effects. In my discussions with the poets in the study, I introduced digital

explorations based on suggestions or comments that they made. Molly Peacock noted that a poem might be understood in part by looking at its nouns or its verbs. Taking Peacock's poem *That Leaf* (1989), I created a digital exploration where the user can choose to see only the verbs or only the nouns or only the verbs and nouns. Such an exploration allows for interesting readings of the poem and invites the reader to fill the gaps in their own ways. Hoogland suggested that one might consider changing the colour of the 'yellow Jello' that she used in her poem *Normal, Blessed Normal* (2004). I consequently created an exploration where the user can change the colour of the Jello that she chose to use in one of her stanzas, and also depicted an image of a bowl of Jello changing colour (visit <http://faculty.uoit.ca/hughes/Research/jello.html>). In an interview with Hoogland, the poet discusses disjunction, the leap from one semantic, discursive, or figurative plane to another. Hoogland points out that 'poetry is disjunctive in the sense that it is always moving, always unpredictable, shifting, it dislocates its meanings, it sets up a trope and challenges it, and alludes to its own meanings'. In Hoogland's poem, a sudden shift occurs that serves to juxtapose the unremarkable experience of a woman drinking coffee in a café with friends, to an image of exploding Jello as bombs begin to fall around them. In discussing the place of Jello in a war poem, Hoogland remarks, 'I needed the Jello badly because everything was so tense and awful and foreboding, I just needed to get out of there. I needed to break out. I needed to laugh and Jello was the way to do it.' In her final comments about yellow Jello, Hoogland suggests that it would be interesting to see what effect would be created if a different colour of Jello was used.

All of the poets responded first to the playfulness of the exploration with expressions of delight such as 'what fun!'. Lee elaborates on how the exploration works for him:

You're reminded of the meaning being both in the actual implication and dictionary denotative meaning of the word but also in the difference of how it sounds and this forces you to think about it as a colour. The word yellow, it keeps coming back to me that yellow is right because of what it sounds like, not only because of what it looks like or the image that you conjure up as a result of it. Everything else seems so entirely wrong and instantly wrong.

For Lee, the effectiveness of the exploration lies in the combination of the words with the image as they work together to offer insight regarding the appropriateness of the poet's choice. The new media treatment of this stanza in the poem offers a new performance of that part of the poem, giving the reader /viewer an opportunity to experience – to play with – different versions or interpretations of it.

The notion of playfulness became a focus in the design of the digital explorations that I created for two reasons. The emphasis of poetry teaching in most primary and some junior classrooms is on language play. The poetry of Shel Silverstein, Dennis Lee and Jack Prelutsky, for example, delights children with word play, rhythm and rhyme, as well as often silly subject matter. Indeed, de Castell and Jenson (2004) point out that while 'the rich potential of learning from games and play has not been entirely unrecognised in education', play-based approaches have typically been reserved for the early years of a child's education. Blachowicz and Fisher (2004) offer four research-based statements about the importance of word play in literacy development. They argue that word play is motivating and an essential component of a word-rich classroom, and calls on students to reflect in meta-cognitive ways on words, word parts and context. Blachowicz and Fisher also suggest that word play requires students to be active learners and capitalise on possibilities for the social construction of meaning, and that word play develops domains of word meanings and relatedness as it engages students in practice and rehearsal of words (p. 219). These are all important components of the English language arts programme, yet any emphasis on play or fun in the teaching of poetry seems to dissipate in the intermediate and senior grades. John B. Lee argues that 'Serious poetry is just an increasingly sophisticated form of play. The fun doesn't have to be quite so lively, but when you see someone witnessing the deeper wells of herself or himself, then you know you're doing your job.' Inviting students to enter a poem by enabling them to play with words, as one example, is a way to encourage play through new media.

Recently, I worked with a class of 11- and 12-year-old students on digital poems. Their teacher had introduced the concept of metaphors, and had asked them to write a poem based on an emotion. They were to create five metaphors and to select images that might accompany the text. One student, whose chosen emotion was anger, combined an image of a smoldering forest fire to describe the sometimes brooding nature of a fire waiting to burst into flame, like a snake ready to strike. This student arranged the font to mimic the 'curling smoke'. This student also played with the transitions between his slides, timing them so that they moved slowly for this particular image, but moved very quickly when he described anger resembling 'a volcano, bursting forth, molten fire from a dragon's massive mouth'. Students have been writing concrete poems that play with the arrangement of text to create a certain effect for decades; however, the use of digital media offers new possibilities for this kind of play that include the use of sound, visual image and not only the arrangement of text, but how it 'behaves' on screen. It also encourages students to think about how the multimodal elements of new media converge with the words of the poem to create new meaning.

Integrated rather than singular

An illustrative example of the integrative potential of new media is Rachel Thompson's production of Penn Kemp's *Poem for Peace in Two Voices* (2002) (visit <http://faculty.uoit.ca/hughes/Research/poetry.html>), which has been translated into 102 languages. This video performance integrates various readings of the poem, in several languages, performed at different times and places, along with added images, video clips and sound track, into a single, new reading. The video affords the reader the opportunity to experience the poem visually at the same time as hearing several oral readings simultaneously. It sounds like it might be confusing, but as Kemp points out, the result is quite effective, especially when sound is juxtaposed against the visual images of people from different cultures reading and images of world conflicts.

The video production of *Poem for Peace in Two Voices* illustrates how new media affords the creation of poetry performance that cuts across space and time, bringing together clips of life that are recombined and converge to create a new poetry performance, one that is more than the sum of its parts. The New London Group (1996) argue that people in contemporary society 'create and innovate by hybridising' or articulating in new ways 'established practices and conventions within and between different modes of meaning' (p. 30). They use the example of popular music which often combines cultural forms or traditions that are 'recombined or restructured' often through the use of technology. Kemp's video also serves as an example of hybridity. Her poem, originally written in print text has been 'restructured' or 'redesigned' by new media resulting in a changing relationship between text, audio and visual meanings.

Our students are immersed in shared digital spaces that seem to encourage or expect this kind of integration. Of course, such a pluralist view raises issues of ownership that are still being debated. Those of us working with students in digital spaces must be cognisant of copyright, encouraging the use of copyright free music and images or, better still, encouraging students to create their own images (either electronically generated using draw or paint software, hand generated and scanned or using a digital camera) and music.

Looking ahead

Researchers are only beginning to understand how multimodal, interactive media successfully attract, capture, and hold the attention of students (Jonassen, 2000; Gee, 2003; de Castell and Jenson, 2004). Certainly using new media in the reading, writing and representing of poetry motivates students if only because it offers a new and fresh classroom approach. However, what new media adds to the study of poetry goes beyond motivation.

The performative potential of new media encourages students to explore poetry with new forms of linguistic and visual play, and perhaps helps to move students beyond observing and analysing poetry, toward encouraging a dialogue with a poem. It allows students to get inside the poem, to be co-creator, to play with the language of the poem and to offer their own responses and interpretations. Poetic language disrupts the familiar, and causes us to pay attention not only to what is being said, but the way it is being said as well. Using new media in the reading, writing and representing of poetry also causes us to pay attention because the poem is being presented in an unfamiliar way, where text, image and sound converge in ways that they cannot in conventional print anthologies.

The notion of poetry as performance supports the view that students need to be producers as well as consumers of poetry. Youth are naturally concerned with emerging identities, and they are trying to find ways to express themselves. Through poetry writing, adolescents can give voice to those things that concern them most. We need to provide them with opportunities to think about who they are and what they want to represent to the world through, not only what they say, but also how they say it, and writing poetry using new media offers a fresh way to engage them in the writing process.

It is clear that the whole package is important – the poem on the page, the poem in the air as it is spoken aloud, and the poem as it is presented or performed. New media lift the poem from the print-bound page. New media offer the opportunity to integrate all aspects of poetry presentation, and make them accessible in a public and non-linear way. The performance affordances of new media encourage a sense of audience, and a collective, integrative approach to the creation of poetry that honours multiple modes of expression. Consider the immensely popular YouTube, whose motto is 'broadcast yourself', where people from around the world gather to view performances of various kinds. The new media that is infusing the Web draws us into performative relationships with and representations of our 'content' whether it is poetry or some other subject matter.

Despite the popularity of the Web for bringing people together in various ways through new communication tools, the shift from a print culture to a culture suffused with new media has not yet been realised in the classroom, particularly in the area of poetry study. I am not suggesting that the print form is no longer useful in a digital age, but rather, we have new forms of expression that extend our ability to express ourselves. Immersing students in a digital environment that serves as a model for their own digital performances, views performance as a purposeful and creative process interwoven with other literacy events. Such an approach,

which fully engages the student in all areas of the language arts – reading, writing, viewing, representing, speaking and listening – realises the pedagogical ideal expressed by the poets in my study that students experience poetry through sustained and active engagement, and that they pay attention not only to the meaning of the poem, but also to its music and its artistry.

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