CHAPTER 11.

PROMOTING SOCIAL JUSTICE THROUGH MULTIMODAL COMPOSITION IN THE HYBRID WRITING CLASSROOM

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In this chapter, the authors describe **multimodal assignments** *used in online, any time learning, and hybrid learning. Specifically, the authors offer guidance on designing multimodal online learning assignments to promote social justice. In describing their "better practice," this chapter addresses the themes of multimodal learning and practices in motion across teaching and learning modalities.*

FRAMEWORKS AND PRINCIPLES IN THIS CHAPTER

- **GSOLE Principle 1.3:** Multimodal composition and alphabetic writing may require different technologies; therefore, those involved should be appropriately prepared to use them.

GUIDING QUESTIONS BEFORE YOU BEGIN READING

- In what ways do you currently ask students to draw on their diverse linguistic resources to communicate with both community and academic audiences?
- In what ways does composing in non-alphabetic modes impact student confidence?
- When adopting practices from research literature and connecting theory to practice, what does it mean to "succeed"? For students as well as instructors?

INTRODUCTION

It was the end of the Spring 2020 semester. In the midst of pandemic chaos

and fear, and when paired with forced asynchronous remote learning, what was already a difficult class (a first-year writing course in which the learning goals feel mountainous) had become exponentially more difficult in an unexpected era of unrest and uncertainty. Estrella had started the semester of our in-person, real-time learning class quiet yet attentive.[1] She was reluctant to volunteer to share in classroom discussions, but, if called on, would contribute effectively. After we moved to emergency remote learning during the global pandemic, Estrella's writing began to demonstrate a deeper connection with self, and a feeling of importance and ownership. It was exciting to read her work.

Then, in the final reflection of our semester, Estrella described her experiences in finding self-empowerment through writing and the sharing of stories, all in the context of our research project. She explained that the primary text for our project was, although more difficult a text to read and conceptualize than she had previously experienced, a text to which she had connected on a deeper level. Once she'd read the text—"Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991)—Estrella spent her isolation learning about the experiences shared by women of color who've been sexually assaulted, a group to which she belongs. She began writing every day, sharing her stories in online forums, encouraging other victims to share their own stories. She wrote an article that was shared on a website dedicated to sexual assault awareness. In her reflection for our class, Estrella expressed her dedication to sharing her story and encouraging others to share theirs. In her final sentences, Estrella explained that our course research assignment had given her the push she needed to find the person she "was meant to become."

Estrella embodies the power of writing and the importance of sharing stories. As a non-traditional, first-generation student myself, I (Syndee) use my class to expose and challenge existing inequalities, inviting students to use their writing to find and value their own academic voice, and to find their own unique position in academia.

The Intersections of Me research assignment that prompted Estrella's reflection (and that is the focus of this chapter) is one that I use in all of my 100-level composition classes, which I teach in courses across three colleges—two community colleges and a four-year state university. The project was born out of my desire to help students find validity and empowerment in their research and their writing. It is an invitation for students to find out about themselves and to identify their intersectionality by researching people like them. Students learn

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1   We did not seek IRB approval for this project. Instead, Syndee received permission from the student via email to share this vignette in a publication.

about the experiences faced by people with their particular intersections and identities—race, class, gender, sexuality, body type, education, health, ability, etc.—then write an argument about themselves through that lens. It's a tough assignment, but one that students invest in.

In what my pre-pandemic self thought of as a "normal" semester—one in which we gather together once, twice, or three times a week, in a space we call a classroom, for the purposes of learning—the Intersections of Me research project concludes with an academic-style conference. Originally, this final activity of the semester had one purpose: to give students experience in speaking in front of a group, an important skill I had wished I'd had more time to practice. I simply wanted to give students a safe space in front of their class community to share their thesis, quotes from sources, and the overall findings of their research. Over time, I had noticed that it was the effort spent preparing to speak to their peers that gave students the motivation to make their writing something that mattered to them. That last step in their research—presenting their findings to others—was an intrinsic motivator as well as an outward exhibition of learning. Our conference became a low-stakes, yet still serious, activity in which students celebrate their learning by sharing with their writing community. In short, it's amazing.

And, that semester, COVID-19 stole that celebratory experience away from my students.

With no synchronous meetings and too many students who had ineffective, unreliable technology (not to mention an instructor with no idea how to translate the activity to something viable and valuable in an online setting), the conference had been canceled for the Spring 2020 semester. But when I read Estrella's reflection, I knew I had to find a way to introduce the conference in a way that worked in our new, now remote setting.

It was a comment from a colleague in a faculty learning community that brought in the next piece of the puzzle.

"What if," she said, "students did a TED Talk or something?"

Boom. There it was.

A TED Talk-styled video—in which students would share their research findings—was the perfect new modality for the conference presentation.

At the same time, having been introduced to the idea of Cajitas, or sacred boxes, in a professional development workshop—and subsequently discovering Alberto López Pulido's (2002) "The Living Color of Student's Lives: Bringing Cajitas into the Classroom"—I decided to bring in an option for a Cajita-style video into my course. In a face-to-face format, students would present their own Cajita into which they'd placed artifacts that connect their research with their own personal lives. By giving students a choice of a TED Talk or Cajita-style video, I hoped to help them practice making rhetorical decisions about which

genre best fit their story and their research (see the Better Practice Lesson section for more details).

In the first iteration of this project, I was teaching online, real-time classes and the video project became a means to an end, a workaround for an unplanned (and, dare I say, unwanted) course delivery format. I simply wanted students to be able to articulate and share the results of their research in the same way they had been able to in person. I wanted them to be able to experience the pride and share the joy in their hard work and new knowledge. I wanted to give them something, anything, that felt normal.

Over time, I came to see the specific benefits of multimodal composition in online writing courses, which are detailed in the literature that I hadn't yet read. As the latter half of this chapter argues, designing multimodal compositions increases students' confidence in expressing themselves, which Laura Gonzales and Janine Butler (2020) maintain is because they have to draw on diverse linguistic resources to communicate with both community and academic audiences. On our Fall 2020 video presentation day, students voiced their excitement at sharing their videos with their classmates, most of whom had never even seen each other, and few of whose voices had even been heard. By the time fall of 2021 had come 'round, I had iterated this activity twice, and I was in three different class modalities. Class participants watched their peers' videos through the Zoom call (in "online, real-time" classes) or on the discussion forum (in "online, anything" classes) or in the classroom together (in "hybrid" classes)[2] understanding what it meant to be part of an academic audience, engaged in a sustained dialogue. I watched them recognize the rhetorical strategies they were employing in both their alphabetic writing and their digital design, while simultaneously finding value in their unique academic voice. The result was increased engagement and a sense of belonging in academic conversations. So, while this experience started in the pandemic, emergency remote learning was merely the catalyst that informed how I approach online writing instruction today.

To that end, this chapter will put my experiences and impressions in conversation with "best practices" related to multimodality in Composition Studies, particularly focusing on the recommendations posed by Gonzales and Butler (2020). It will also explore the relationship between theory and practice, illustrating how my anecdotal experiences gave me an understanding of the practice before I had the vocabulary from the literature to discuss it. At the same time, my practice directly impacted how my co-author (Mary) and I (Syndee) responded to the emerging research literature while drafting this chapter.

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2   Our institution defines "online, real-time" as 50 percent video conference call-based engagement and 50 percent asynchronous activities; "online, any time" as 100 percent asynchronous activities, and "hybrid" as 50 percent in person and 50 percent asynchronous activities.

In the following pages, we first offer an overview of the theory of multi-modality in composition studies and describe our teaching context. Then, we describe the Intersections of Me assignment in more detail and include the assignment sheet. Finally, we build upon Gonzales and Butler's (2020) work on multimodality, multilingualism, and accessibility to analyze the ways in which my practice relates to or departs from the recommended practices.

SCHOLARSHIP, THEORIES, AND PRINCIPLES THAT GUIDE OUR APPROACH

In her 2002 *College Composition and Communication* article, Diana George offers a robust history of visual communication in the teaching of writing. She demonstrates that, as early as the 1940s, visuals were a common component of writing instruction. Typically, however, these visuals were prompts for writing, such that students would analyze the visual in their writing, or the visual would jumpstart the invention stage of the writing process; it was also the case that visuals were regarded as a lower or lesser form of communication than alphabetic writing. George argues that a key shift towards seeing visuals as part of the composing process occurred in 1987, with David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky's *Ways of Reading*. Bartholomae and Petrosky challenged the barriers between "high culture" (art history) and "low culture" (advertising), which, George explains, illustrated that "not only was meaning no longer restricted to the verbal, the visual was also not used as a gentle step into the 'more serious' world of the verbal" (2002, p. 23). The argument that visuals "counted" as serious and complex conveyors of meaning laid the groundwork for arguments that multimodal composition "counted" as an important skill for first-year writing students to study and practice.

It was not until the late 1990s that this concept came to fruition because, up until then, George explains, writing instructors did not have the tools to produce non-alphabetic composition. Computers and the internet made the production and, eventually, the distribution of multimodal composition accessible to both students and teachers. Implementing the theory in practice was thus possible, but not yet widely recommended or adopted.

In the decade following George's article, composition scholars like Kathleen Yancey (2004), Richard Selfe and Cindy Selfe (2008), Elizabeth Clark (2010), Cheryl Ball and James Kalmbach (2010), and David Sheridan and James Inman (2010) drew on the theories put forward by multiliteracy experts (e.g., Kress, 2003; New London Group, 1996; Selber, 2004) to effectively illustrate the value of multimodal composition in first-year composition (FYC). Today, composition studies has come to accept multimodal composition as an uncontroversial

(though still sometimes under-taught) component of FYC, as evidenced in textbooks like *Understanding Rhetoric* by Elizabeth Losh et al. (2021), which is designed like a graphic novel. Specific to OWI, scholars have detailed the unique advantages of multimodal composition in online contexts, especially as it relates to facilitating digital literacy (Bourelle et al., 2016). Accordingly, the *Online Literacy Instruction Principles and Tenets* (GSOLE, 2019) names multimodal composition as one of the key components of an online writing course: "Instructors and tutors should research, develop, theorize, and apply appropriate reading, alphabetic writing, and multimodal composition theories to their OLI environment(s)." The GSOLE principle of Accessibility also recognizes that instructors and students should be "appropriately prepared" to use the technologies required for multimodal composition.

Despite the scholarly commitment to multimodal composition, this "best practice" is not necessarily employed by first-year writing instructors, and at some institutions the question of whether multimodal composition "counts" as writing is still hotly debated in department meetings (Pandey & Khadka, 2021). Many instructors additionally hesitate to teach multimodal composition because they worry about the logistics, about making the project too complicated, about confusing students, and about implementing a pedagogical practice that is not understood or valued (Borgman, 2019). All of this—the department debates and the instructor hesitation—was the reality at our institution; consequently, it was not until the shift to emergency remote instruction in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that Syndee began to experiment with digital, multimodal composition.

In this chapter, we hope to demonstrate a "better practice" of multimodal composition in online FYC by building on the work of Gonzales and Butler (2020), who synthesize research on multilingualism and disability studies to introduce "composition pedagogies that embrace multilingualism, multimodality, and accessibility simultaneously." We are particularly drawn to Gonzales and Butler because they advocate for an understanding of multimodal composition that promotes social justice instead of building on research that argues for the value of multimodal composition only as an enhanced form of communication. This theory resonates with Syndee as a teacher and aligns with our department's commitment to social justice. As our program mission statement explains (Program Information, n.d.), we are first and foremost aiming to teach students that "writing (re)produces particular social constructions and power relations." Syndee's Intersections of Me assignment addresses our program goals by asking students to reflect on their own intersectional identities and view their diverse linguistic resources as assets that help them contribute meaningfully to academic conversations. The addition of a multimodal component to that research project enhanced Syndee's goal of promoting social justice in unanticipated ways.

Consequently, our "better practice" is neither theory-into-practice or practice-into-theory; it is instead an attempt to understand where theory and practice organically meet—the theory from Gonzales and Butler of multilingualism, multimodality, and accessibility gives us language to describe Syndee's practice, and the practice gives us concrete examples that enhance our understanding of the theory. In taking this approach, we hope to invite readers to reflect on their own practices and identify moments where they are already enacting the recommendations from the scholarship. Our goal is to offer an alternative to the understanding of "best practices" as something that we take from the literature and apply in our classrooms; the "better practice" we advocate for involves identifying overlaps between theory and practice and then using the language from the literature to better understand and subsequently revise our practice of inviting students to compose multimodal texts that explore intersectional identities.

More specifically, this chapter will discuss the relationship between Syndee's practice and the four recommendations at the conclusion of Gonzales and Butler's article:

1. "Enrich students' possibilities for strengthening their communication skill through multiple languages and modes, such as through video assignments" (2020, para. 48);
2. "Support students' access to intersectional understandings of accessibility and multimodality in collaboration with academic and community audiences" (2020, para. 49);
3. "Position students as social justice designers who not only witness technological oppression, but who also intervene in opposition through their own compositions" (2020, para. 50); and
4. "Promote intersectional accessibility as a social justice issue relevant to writers and designers" (2020, para. 51).

At the end of this chapter, we use those recommendations to organize our reflection on the multimodal project Syndee facilitated in Fall 2021. But first, we describe our teaching context and Syndee's Intersections of Me assignment.

COURSE CONTEXT AND LESSON

The authors of this chapter—Syndee and Mary—both teach at a four-year, public university on the west coast; 47 percent of the student population is Latinx and 53 percent of graduates are first-generation college students. Syndee's eleven years as an instructor at this institution began when she was an MA student in the department that delivers the writing program. Syndee also teaches FYC at two different community colleges in the area. Both of those colleges serve

student populations that are between 42–46 percent Latinx; one college report-
ed 28 percent first-gen students and the other did not have this information
available. At the time of this writing, Mary was new to the four-year institution
where she met Syndee, having joined the department as the writing program
administrator in Fall 2020. She has 15 years of online teaching experience at
for-profit and public, four-year institutions, and maintains a scholarly interest
in multimodal composition and online writing instruction. This chapter is the
result of many conversations, with Syndee discussing her plans for Fall 2021 or
reflecting on her experiences in the classroom, and with Mary contributing with
commentary on the connections she sees between Syndee's practice and OWI
research, as well as reflections on how Syndee's practice is similar to or different
from her own. Throughout those conversations, we each influenced how the
other understood both the theory and the practice of multimodal composition.

In what follows, we offer a composite reflection on Syndee's experience
teaching six sections of hybrid and online, real-time FYW across her institutions
in Fall 2021. Our shared institution defines "hybrid" as one to two hours per
week in person plus asynchronous activities and "online, real-time" as one to
two hours per week on Zoom plus asynchronous activities. We begin with a de-
tailed explanation of the Intersections of Me project and then put that practice
in conversation with Gonzales and Butler's theory of multimodal composition.

Better Practice Lesson—Syndee's Intersections of Me Project

At all three institutions, the second half of Syndee's first-year writing semester is
spent deep diving into a research project in which students look at themselves
through the lens of intersectionality. In the final step of this Intersections of Me
project, students take the most important parts of their seven-page (approxi-
mately 1750 words) argument paper and present those parts in a brief video, ap-
proximately four to five minutes, choosing the video style (TED v. Cajita) that
best suits their purpose and message. Leading up to this stage of the semester,
students have practiced:

1. **Academic reading:** Crenshaw's "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality,
   Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color" (https://www.
   jstor.org/stable/1229039) is the primary text. All assignments for this
   project center around Crenshaw's arguments and ideas.
2. **Summary:** Students write a five or more paragraph summary of Cren-
   shaw's text. The summary must include an overall synopsis of the text
   and its main ideas, as well as an outline of some of the evidence Crenshaw
   uses as support.

3. **Application:** A worksheet and discussion guides students to apply Crenshaw's concepts to their own experiences, reflecting on how their experiences are shaped by visible and invisible intersections.

4. **Synthesis:** Students complete a research proposal and an annotated bibliography, which helps them integrate sources in support of an argument about their intersectional self.

5. **Multimodal Composition:** Students complete multimodal activities and assignments such as weekly presentations and asynchronous discussions. They also engage in synchronous discussion about the rhetorical strategies used for the different modes, purposes, and audiences.

After students have submitted the final draft of their written project, Syndee facilitates a class-wide conversation that consists of two synchronous sessions and an asynchronous conversation about how to use the most important parts of their composition as a script for their video, which will be presented to their academic and community audiences, in the form of a TED Talk or Cajita video. The formal assignment instructions that Syndee shares with her students is featured below.

Step Six: TED Talk or Cajita Video

Four to five minutes

- **Ted Talk Video:** The purpose of your video is to teach your viewers about people like you. What do people with your unique intersections experience? Where/when are people with your intersections considered "normal" in our society? In what ways do people like you receive help, get the benefit of the doubt, blend in with the crowd, or get "a pass"? What discrimination do you—and others who share similar intersectional identities—face?

- **Cajita Video:** Share a Cajita that is a representation of you. In this sacred box will be artifacts that represent who you are and the experiences you have had as someone with your intersections. Tie your artifacts to your sources, explaining the significance of each item, including the box itself. You have absolute creative freedom for this box, including whether or not it is an actual box, or some other physical or virtual container.

Purpose

This final piece of our Intersections of Me project is where your research becomes relevant beyond the virtual walls of this class and, more importantly, beyond the imagined walls of academia. With this assignment, the skills you've practiced all semester become critical in a new way, for a broader audience. Your

unique voice brings validity to the information you share. This final assignment invites you to find your own unique voice in your writing, and to share the importance of your research with a broader audience. This project contributes to Student Learning Outcome #1.

Task

Once you have submitted your research paper, read it out loud and select the parts of your paper that feel like the heart of your argument. Consider which parts of your paper are the most important overall and which parts your new audience might find the most interesting. Using these most important parts of your paper, create either a TED Talk video or a Cajita Video. Your video will be four to five minutes long.

Skills

This assignment gives practice in the writing skills we employ in the real world. Since this is a video, your message will come through in more than just your words. Combine all of the unique qualities of you—your voice, presence, tone, and gestures—with the images and/or physical artifacts you will share in your video. In the process of moving your argument from the written page to a video, you will:

1. Practice making rhetorical choices and decisions for your argument.
2. Consider the ways that your unique message comes through in a new mode of communication.
3. Judge and evaluate the usefulness of your sources in this new mode and text.
4. Synthesize multiple perspectives as you integrate sources and quotes into your video.

Knowledge

As you design your video and make decisions about which information and sources to include, consider the knowledge you have gained this semester. Your video will display your knowledge of:

1. The concept of intersectionality and differing experiences individuals face.
2. Rhetorical decision making and strategies for your writing in a new mode of communication.

Important Information to Consider

1. You will be on camera for your video, and you will include some sort of visual in your video. (TED Talk = shared PPT, doc, and/or images. Cajita video = share your Cajita and its contents).

2. Include integration of two sources, two quotes, and a 2021 MLA style Works Cited page/slide.
3. Use the technology that works for you, whether that be the program used for your video production, or the programs you use in your video. This video is about your argument, not about your knowledge of technology or your ability to make a great video.

Video Presentation Reflection

Complete this assignment after you have completed your video and it has been uploaded to the discussion assignment. Write a cohesive paragraph that responds to the following questions.

1. Which video genre (TED Talk or Cajita video) did you choose? Why?
2. What points from your paper did you include in your video? Why?
3. In what way did your time in this class help you make decisions for making this video?

Students complete this project in the latter half of the semester, which, depending on the college, is anywhere from four to eight weeks. The project, from start to finish, is challenging in both subject and skill: they read a 60-page article published in the *Stanford Law Review* written in 1991 by Crenshaw on the topic of intersectionality. Then, they are asked to take this concept—which they've just begun to understand—and apply it to their own lives. Next, they conduct academic research and locate scholarly sources and then write in unfamiliar genres such as the research proposal and annotated bibliography. Throughout, they are daunted by the knowledge that they ultimately have to produce a seven-page paper that integrates sources in meaningful ways.

For most students, the struggle persists until they reach the "ah-ha" moment of what Syndee calls the "this-is-why-it-matters," which typically occurs as they are designing their multimodal compositions. The one thing they are not daunted by is making a video. Because these first-year students are a part of a culture of social media videos, they understand the purpose and the potential of using videos to reach both intended and unintended audiences. The process of creating this video helps them see that same potential for their alphabetic writing.

In the fall of 2021, to assess the Intersections of Me project, Syndee used a labor-based grading contract. In order to receive a "high pass," the students needed to revise their work in response to instructor feedback and to submit a paragraph that reflected on the rhetorical choices they'd made throughout the composing process. This project continues to evolve. At the time of this writing (Spring 2023), Syndee's labor-based grading contract asks students to create a

"video process reflection letter" directed to Syndee in which they explain and reflect on their rhetorical strategies in translating essay to video with an audience of peers and a more global audience of video viewers in mind. Additionally, in this final piece of writing for the semester, students must reflect on the learning they've done over the course of the class, and what they will continue to work on. It is in this letter that students show the work they've put into their writing over the course of the class, and articulate their purposeful process for their video, focusing on course objectives such as audience, process, and purpose, and where they inevitably describe themselves as members of different communities who are navigating between those communities, making choices about how to present to each.

REFLECTION ON PRACTICE

In this section, we put Syndee's experience with this assignment in Fall 2021 in conversation with the four recommendations that Gonzales and Butler offer at the conclusion of their article. Throughout, we reflect on the relationship between "best practices" in the literature and actual practices in the classroom.

RECOMMENDATION 1: STRENGTHEN COMMUNICATION CONFIDENCE THROUGH MULTIMODALITY

Gonzales and Butler's first recommendation is to "enrich students' possibilities for strengthening their communication skills through multiple languages and modes, such as through video assignments." They further explain that multimodal assignments "encourage students to recognize the communication skills that they already possess and correspondingly to develop confidence expressing themselves through written English and other languages and modes" (2020, para. 48).

Butler offers an example of this in her Video Reflection on Multiple Differences in Communication Practices assignment. She asks her students to conduct an interview about a person's intersectional communication practices. For example, Butler explains, they might "interview a Deaf person who comes from a Spanish-speaking family and communicates through American Sign Language, español, and English" (2020, para. 33) Then, in their video, they build on what they learned from the interview to create a "multimodal and multilingual text" that persuades a target audience "to recognize the significance of multiple and different communication practices." In Butler's example, the video might feature a person signing directly at the camera with written English captions that occasionally include palabras en español. This assignment requires students to draw

on their own communicative expertise and lived experience, as well as on the expertise of their interviewee, while making rhetorical decisions about how to best combine and synthesize multiple modes and languages to effectively reach an audience. These overlapping practices underscore the intersectional nature of all communication in a way that celebrates linguistic diversity and embodied difference.

Syndee's students similarly make decisions about what alphabetic, visual, and aural elements to incorporate into their videos, and they deliberately base those decisions on an analysis of what will persuade their target audience of the importance of their message. In Syndee's case, the emphasis is on developing an academic identity; the goal is for students to develop a sense that they have something valuable to say and to contribute in academic conversations. The video assignment also requires them to leverage multiple communicative strategies to reach an audience they have identified. Their success in this effort enhances their confidence that they belong in the academic arena because it highlights the many different language varieties and languages and communicative modes involved in constructing academic knowledge, many of which these students already have experience with.

While Syndee's assignment looks quite different from Butler's, it nevertheless achieves the recommended goal of encouraging students to "recognize the communication skills that they already possess and correspondingly to develop confidence expressing themselves." Syndee did not design the assignment with the intention of enacting Gonzales and Butler's recommendation, but reading the scholarship informed the way we thought and talked about the project in the course of drafting this chapter.

RECOMMENDATION 2: UNDERSTAND ACCESSIBILITY AND MULTIMODALITY IN COLLABORATION WITH ACADEMIC AND COMMUNITY AUDIENCES

Gonzales and Butler's second recommendation is to "support students' access to intersectional understandings of accessibility and multimodality in collaboration with academic and community audiences" (2020, para. 49). Engaging with public audiences "puts multimodality and multilingualism in action, in spaces where these practices are already connected" (para. 49). Additionally, the opportunity for community engagement "encourages students from historically marginalized communities to stay connected to their communities and incorporate community knowledge into their work as writers and designers" (2020, para. 49).

Gonzales offers an example of an assignment that employs service learning to connect students with public audiences. Her students "collaborate on a digital

book making project with an Indigenous rights advocacy organization" (2020, para. 27). The project taught students about the "history of Indigenous language translation and interpretation" (2020, para. 27) and facilitated conversations about "the connections between race, culture, disability, and access" (2020, para. 28). It also led students to create "digital materials (i.e., videos) that were multilingual and accessible" (2020, para. 29). Most importantly, "social justice was centralized in this course through the course readings, through student projects, and through the overall impact that students' assignments were positioned to have outside of our classroom" (220, para. 29).

In Fall 2021, Syndee's course did not employ service learning or emphasize technical or digital accessibility, but it did leverage multimodality to help students engage with community and academic audiences. By creating TED Talks or Cajita videos, students addressed their peers as an academic audience and also imagined the public audiences who might see their videos online, should students choose to post them. Students also had to decide whether a TED Talk or a Cajita video was more appropriate for their intended audience and purpose. Creating videos that could be circulated on social media networks—and making intentional decisions about what modes, languages, and language varieties to integrate into those videos—further prompted students to reflect on the ways that multimodality and multilingualism pervade digital public spaces.

The juxtaposition of the video and the alphabetic research project additionally facilitated reflection on the role of multimodality and multilingualism in academic spaces. Ultimately, the students' efforts to reach a public or community audience pushed them to figure out the "this-is-why-it-matters." By the time they submitted their TED Talk or Cajita video, students had a much clearer sense of what they were trying to achieve in the written research paper for an academic audience. They also had concrete examples of how to draw on and combine their linguistic resources in a way that appeals to particular audiences.

When they finally shared their videos with peers, they discovered that some classmates are members of both their intended academic and community audiences. Consequently, Syndee's assignment not only helped students understand "multimodality in collaboration with academic and community audiences" (Gonzales & Butler, 2020, para. 49), but also helped them navigate between those audiences and showed them that they already possess the communicative skills to contribute to academic conversations (for more on how multimodal composition creates rhetorically rich communicative contexts, see Jessica Eagle, Michelle Falter, and Caitlin Donovan's work, Chapter 7 of this collection). Furthermore, because the project is about the students' personal intersections, their imagined online audiences are likely members of their own communities, thus somewhat achieving Gonzales and Butler's goal of encouraging "students

from historically marginalized communities to stay connected with their communities and incorporate community knowledge into their work" (2020, para. 49). This is particularly evident when students recognize their peers as members of their community audience. They've shared about themselves, breaking down perceived barriers. They're connecting in more ways than just being part of the same first-year writing class, and they feel the connection.

RECOMMENDATIONS 3 & 4: INTERSECTIONAL ACCESSIBILITY

Gonzales and Butler's third and fourth recommendations focus on the relationship between social justice and technological accessibility. Recommendation three asks instructors to "position students as social justice designers who not only witness technological oppression, but who also intervene in oppression through their own compositions" (Gonzales & Butler, 2020, para. 50). The idea is for students to analyze the accessibility of particular technologies, and then create their own multimodal compositions that intentionally counter the technological oppression they've observed. Recommendation four requires us to first acknowledge that "separating language from race, class, and disability does not provide a clear picture of how real individuals engage with writing or with technologies," and to then advance "intersectional approaches to writing, access, and technology" by positioning "intersectional accessibility as a social justice issue relevant to writers and designers" (Gonzales & Butler, 2020, para. 51).

Gonzales provides an example of these recommendations in her Designing for Intersectional Accessibility assignment. She asks students to reflect on the ways "technologies are inherently imbued with cultural ideologies" and then "create multimodal projects where they practice highlighting the ideological and cultural values embedded in particular interfaces" (2020, para. 23). The project emphasizes intersectionality by asking students to consider more than one access point. For example, students might analyze a school website for an audience of multilingual parents as well as an audience of students with disabilities. The goal is to help students design projects that "are accessible on multiple levels," and to acknowledge "language diversity, race and power, and disability as factors that guide design decisions" (Gonzales & Butler, 2020, para. 25).

Syndee's assignment has the potential to enact these recommendations—students could analyze the accessibility of the TED Talks or Cajita videos that they produce, as well as the accessibility of the platforms they use to distribute those videos. However, this was not the focus of Syndee's courses. These recommendations from Gonzales and Butler have shown her a potential next direction for the project, and they've raised both of our awareness of the role of technical accessibility in multimodal composing.

Beyond the Recommendations

As we drafted this chapter, we talked about what it meant to "successfully" enact the recommendations from the research literature and principle and framework documents. In our early conversations, we concluded that Syndee's class achieved recommendations 1 and 2 from Gonzales and Butler and did not achieve recommendations 3 and 4. One conclusion to this chapter, then, could be that a next step for us and our readers is to help students analyze the intersectional accessibility of the tools they use to create and distribute their multimodal compositions. But as we continued to talk, we worried that such a conclusion implied that Syndee had "failed" to achieve or facilitate recommendations 3 and 4, and we especially worried that such an implication would contribute to narratives that teachers always need to do better and be better. This narrative is particularly problematic in the context of OWI, where so many faculty are contingent (Mechenbeir, 2015; Philbrook et al., 2019) and where institutional resources, such as compensation for professional development and training, are scarce (Breuch, 2015; Kahn, 2020).

These conversations also led us to notice that most "best practices" articles tell a positive story. In short, these kinds of articles suggest that the authors' pedagogical goals and intentions were met and the students experienced valuable learning as a result. In our own examination of Fall 2021, we found a much more complicated reality. There were, of course, some wonderful things that came out of this assignment. In their final reflections, Syndee's students demonstrated a clear understanding of the diverse communicative strategies required to reach both academic and community audiences. They remarked on how enjoyable the video assignment was and reported that it made them feel more confident and capable as writers/designers. But it was also the case that several students who demonstrated positive and successful learning in response to the video did not pass the class. In most cases (and this is something we are seeing with more and more regularity at our institution), the students failed because they simply didn't finish, meaning they didn't submit the final project or they didn't follow through on opportunities to make up work missed earlier in the semester. In a few instances, students completed the video assignment even though they knew that they were not going to be able to pass the class.

Issues with retention and persistence have been part of the story of online education for a long time (Boston et al., 2009), and the pandemic has exacerbated both drop rates and equity gaps (Gordon, 2021). While composition studies scholars have offered recommendations for how program directors and institutional decision-makers can improve retention in first-year composition (Ruecker, 2021), issues like retention are often absent from calls for faculty to

enact best practices. Nevertheless, there is often an implication that if we faculty would employ the best practices, then things like retention would improve. Instead of agreeing or disagreeing with that statement, we want to call attention to the unproductive pressure of the implication.

Thus, as a conclusion to our "better practice" chapter, we invite readers to reflect on what it means to adopt practices from the research literature and principal documents (and thus actively participate in connecting theory to practice), as well as on the consequences of expecting those kinds of "best" practices to result in "success" for both the students and the teacher.

CONCLUSION

Engaging with best practices in the teaching of writing—reading the literature, talking with colleagues, collaborating on projects like this one—highlights the ways that teaching is an ongoing and iterative process. Our practice evolves as we gain experience and exposure to new strategies for facilitating learning. In Syndee's case, the pandemic prompted her to first cancel in-class presentations and then reimagine them as multimodal compositions; that reimagining was facilitated by conversations with colleagues about how to manage the pivot to online, and by her past experience in faculty learning communities and engagement with Pulido's scholarship on Cajita videos. What began as a reaction to emergency remote instruction has now evolved into a pedagogical strategy that Syndee consistently employs across the modalities in which she teaches.

At first, the assignment instructions were simply to "use four to five minutes" of their papers to make the video, much like their in-class conference-style presentation had been. The goal was for students to translate their seven- to nine-page papers into a four- to five-minute video. After a few semesters, the prompt evolved, more directly instructing students to include what they feel are the "most interesting parts," and the parts that "feel like the heart of their argument." Next semester, Syndee is changing it up once again: she's going to move the video assignment so that the "this-is-why-it-matters" occurs earlier in the semester and hopefully helps more students complete the final project. She's also going to put more emphasis on the reflections, which should help her assessment scheme better account for the positive "ah-ha" moment that students experience during the video project.

Because of conversations during the co-authoring of this chapter, Syndee and Mary have both changed the way they talk about multimodal composition. We sensed that creating videos made students more confident in expressing themselves, and we felt that some of the success was related to students making intentional decisions about how to address both academic and community

audiences. We also felt that multimodal composition was in line with our writing program's commitment to social justice. But we didn't have the language to explain why. Gonzales and Butler gave us that vocabulary. Their work has changed how we talk about these ideas with each other and with our department, and it's helped us more precisely explain the intended goals of multimodal composition to our students.

Looking further into the future, we'll both be thinking about intersectional accessibility; while we can't totally see how we'll revise our courses to adapt that recommended practice right now, it's on our radars and will become part of our continued conversations. Most likely, in a couple more semesters, we'll find that what started as a theoretical conversation has woven its way into our classroom practice. This is the goal of "best practices" scholarship. Teaching, by nature, pushes us to revise and reconsider our practice; reading articles about teaching similarly inspires us. These resources—and the scholars who have created them—don't show us how we've failed; they give us the language to talk about what we are already doing, and encourage us to acknowledge the existing strengths in our practice. They also challenge us to consider how we might do things differently, in a way that feels authentic to us and our students.

MOVING BETTER PRACTICES ACROSS MODALITIES

Syndee teaches this assignment in all of the below modalities. In what follows, she offers tips for each.

- **In-Person, Real-Time Learning:** Reserve class time for discussion of how to translate an essay into a video. Have students work in groups to create scripts, and allow them to work together to create the videos. Watch the videos together, perhaps on final exam day, and have students reflect on their decisions for their videos, especially where audience and language is concerned.
- **Online, Real-Time Learning:** Similar to the in-person class, videos are played synchronously. Students put questions in the chat for every video author, which should focus on decisions made with audience and language in mind, and then the author answers two or three questions from the chat.
- **Online, Any Time Learning:** Students post their video at the beginning of the week on a discussion forum. Throughout the week, they leave comments in the forum about their peers' videos.
- **Hybrid Learning:** At our university, the hybrid version of this activity works identically to the in-person, real-time version. Another option

is to have students post their video at the beginning of the week, have students watch all the videos before the final class meeting, then spend that last day discussing and celebrating rhetorical strategies.

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