

Chapter 52

Padlet Walls, Weebly, and Twitter: Incorporating Multimodal and Digital Literacies in the San Antonio Writing Project and in a Seventh-Grade English Language Arts Classroom

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ABSTRACT

This chapter takes a close look at how digital tools were integrated into a professional development experience for writing teachers and the ways in which digital tools were then integrated into the literacy practices of a seventh-grade English class. The authors, Roxanne and Shannon, are director and co-director respectively, of the San Antonio Writing Project (SAWP), a chapter of the National Writing Project (NWP). Following NWP's teachers-teaching-teachers model, the site provides opportunities for teachers to share their expertise and teaching practices with other teachers in the area. Over a handful of years, Roxanne and Shannon observed a major shift in technology use by teachers during the summer institute. Among other affordances, digital tools became more collaborative and user-friendly. Not only were teacher participants using these tools for their daily learning experiences, but they also modeled effective instructional practices that integrated technology. Shannon and Roxanne set out to see how Shannon's middle school students could use these tools in her English class and later reflected on other SAWP teachers' experiences as they explored various digital tools with their students.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-8632-8.ch052

INTRODUCTION

“Aren’t you proud of me?” graduate student Susie asked us at the end of one of our intensive, yet invigorating six-hour summer institute days. “When I was in that first graduate class, I had no idea what digital and multimodal tools were, much less used them in my classroom.” Susie had just presented the digital stories that her pre-K students completed using her phone’s camera and iMovie. To share these successful instructional practices with us, she used the Web platforms *Weebly* and *Padlet*, which had been introduced to her and the other teachers just days before by another teacher participant.

Susie was a participant in the San Antonio Writing Project (SAWP) Summer Institute (SI), a local chapter of the National Writing Project (NWP). Following NWP’s teachers-teaching-teachers model, each local site provides opportunities for teachers to share their knowledge, expertise, and teaching practices with other teachers in the area. Each year, this site holds a summer institute of approximately 15-20 teachers. Teachers from all backgrounds and grade levels meet from 9 A.M. - 4 P.M. for approximately one month. During the SAWPSI, teachers are immersed in a writing community where they write and discuss their writing processes and products with their peers. The premise is that teachers need to be writers themselves (Gray, 2000). Their products include poems, memoirs, stories, and even professional articles. The teachers also participate in professional book studies and share their effective instructional strategies for teaching writing. Over the past few years, Shannon and Roxanne, co-director and director respectively, have noticed an increase in the integration of digital tools, both in collaborative efforts as teachers learn from and share with each other, and also within the classroom literacy practices that teachers shared.

In this chapter, we focus on the reciprocal process of professional development through the SAWP as it relates to multimodal, digital learning.

We examine the approaches and practices within the SI and how Shannon incorporated what she had learned from the SAWPSI about integrating multimodal learning and digital tools into her seventh grade English class, particularly during their unit on bullying issues. The students worked with digital tools and in multiple modes, including drama, art, and music to express themselves and share their new insights and understandings on an issue so relevant to their lives.

BACKGROUND

During the summer institutes of the SAWP, we have discovered how impactful it is to invite teachers and students to express themselves in various modes beyond the traditional linguistic ones. It not only motivates learners to participate, but it allows them to draw on and extend their range of semiotic resources (Janks, 2010; Kress, 2003). Particular talents and/or interests are valued while learners are exposed to the literacies and modalities with which they will need to be familiar in our increasingly diverse, digital, globally-connected society.

For effective literacy professional development, teachers need to be engaged in the same types of technology-rich literacy activities that they would design for their own students (Grabill & Hicks, 2005). In 2007, the SAWP moved from traditional pen and paper to integrate more technology. The teachers began to create their own digital stories each day, were required to reflect on and store important resources on the *Google* site at least once a day, and integrated multimodal digital technologies into their best-practice demonstrations.

In 2010, Shannon completed the SAWPSI, having previously been a part of the Greater New Orleans Writing Project in 2004. She immediately noticed that the tools the teacher participants were using had transformed. The three-ring binder became a USB drive and a *Google* site; the black and white composition notebooks had

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