Chapter 59
Re/Designing Online Platforms by Citizen Designers and its Contribution to the Digital Writing and Research

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ABSTRACT

With the development of digital technologies, many have been used for a cross-cultural collaboration in First-Year Composition (FYC) classroom in a cross-cultural contact zone situation. However, their current design excludes writing students from periphery cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The author conducted a usability test that focused on culture and language issues on the current Blackboard interface in order to confirm whether writing students from periphery cultural and linguistic backgrounds are really excluded from current Blackboard interface design. Therefore, the author proposes to invite citizen designers to re/design Blackboard interface so that Blackboard online environments will be transformed into democratic platforms. In this chapter, the authors discuss how Web interface re/design by citizen designers in cross-cultural digital contact zone helps the designers acquire their agency and foster invention in digital writing and research since student agency and invention are the two most sought after elements in the Rhetoric and Writing programs.

CROSS-CULTURAL CONTACT ZONE SITUATION IN ONLINE PLATFORMS

With the evolution of digital technologies, many have been adapted in the First-Year Composition (FYC) classrooms in US universities widely since they facilitate collaboration in cross-cultural contact zone where students from different racial, cultural and linguistic backgrounds along with different prior literacy skills come together to form a FYC discourse community. FYC classrooms in US universities are comprised of students from both the center and the periphery. Center, in this context, refers to Western, White, and English speaking community whereas periphery refers to non-Western, non-White and non-English speak-

ing community. Due to cultural and linguistic differences between center and periphery cultural and linguistic backgrounds, FYC classrooms in the US universities have been the excellent examples of cross-cultural contact zones where different cultures meet and clash, and dominant cultures and languages are privileged over periphery cultures and languages. As a result, cultures, languages, and literacies, the composition students bring with them, are not treated equally by composition programs in terms of the implementation of their composition curricula, syllabi, pedagogies and teaching materials. Further, the cross-cultural contact zone situation equally comes into play in online environments since these environments favor dominant cultural and linguistic backgrounds over periphery cultural and linguistic backgrounds since they are designed from dominant perspectives. Therefore, I propose to invite citizen designers to re/design digital interface of online environments in the cross-cultural digital contact zone for a cross-cultural collaboration the digital contact zone situation of FYC classroom. Citizen designers in this regard are writing students with periphery cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In other words, they are the writing students with democratic sensibilities for creating a just society through their writing/designing interfaces of online environments.

Contact zone is a complex concept that refers to a situation in which multiple discourse communities with asymmetrical power relations exist in a dynamic relationship with each other (Pratt, 1991; Yee, 2002). Pratt (1991) defines contact zone as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out many parts of the world today" (p. 34). On the other hand, contact zone situation can also be regarded as imaginary spaces where different cultures that have different languages and values meet, and one of the cultures dominates others in the process of privileging itself. Wolff

(2002) describes contact zones as spaces where two cultures come together, "sometimes in situations of conquest and sometimes in conversation" (p. 241). Even if there is a possibility of conversation in a digital contact zone where students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds come together to collaborate, their meeting turns out to be that of conquest because of the current design practice of online environments which honor and acknowledge dominant cultural and linguistic values in the name of universalizing technology.

Even if the RWS scholars like Wolff (2002) and Miller (2002) don't agree with Pratt's (1991) notion of safe houses that stand for "healing" in the contact zone, they seem to be agreeing upon her notion of "mutual recognition" and "construct(ing) shared understandings, knowledges, claims on the world" since "they can bring into the contact zone" (Pratt, 1991, p. 40). Inclusive online environments can work as safe house for a cross-cultural collaboration in a digital contact zone situation as they provide students an opportunity of mutual recognition and shared understanding through design activities. Miller (2002) thinks that the contact zone situation can be very productive to solve cross-cultural conflicts because the part of work in the contact zone "involves articulating, investigating, and questioning the affiliated cultural forces that underwrite the ways of thinking that find expression in this student's essay" (p. 131). Even if these RWS scholars don't discuss contact zone in terms of electronic environments, Selfe and Selfe (1994) look at computer interface from the perspective of Pratt's (1991) notion of linguistic contact zone, and this chapter borrows their ideas to discuss contact zone situation in the digital platforms in order to analyze their current design practices.

INTERFACE AND ITS DESIGN

The meaning and scope of interface range from place of interaction to developing hardware and software. In its most basic level, interface refers

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