Ecologies of Sponsorship: Navigating the *Where* of Multiliteracies Development

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Abstract

Since the New London Group introduced the term "multiliteracies" in 1996, rhetoric and writing scholars have taken up and extended their call to investigate the *how*, *what*, *why* (and later *when*) of multiliteracies pedagogy. This article first reviews the state of multiliteracies research by exploring these issues. It then argues that adding *where* to this list of questions is a critical move that will allow us to productively expand at least one prominent metaphor for literacy—that of sponsorship. This paper finally proposes "ecologies of sponsorship" as a metaphor that explains how people use multiliteracies in various contexts over the course of their lives. Understanding multiliteracies development in the context of ecologies of sponsorship draws attention to the various spaces of multiliteracies development and the ecological connections across those spaces.

Keywords: Digital Literacy, Rhetoric, Composition, Pedagogy

1. Introduction

The use of digital communication technologies has been rising, due in part to the availability of internet-connected devices like computers, tablets, and smartphones. This has resulted in the increasing visibility of a writing public, where everyday citizens are more likely to write (and make that writing public) outside of the context of work or school (Yancey, 2014). As new platforms for technology-mediated public discourse are being developed and embraced in popular culture, the ways that people are reading and writing are also changing. As Hull and Nelson (2014) have noted, "what counts as a text and what counts as reading and writing are changing—indeed, have already changed and radically so—in this age of digitally afforded multimodality" (p. 457). This echoes Hull's (2003) claims elsewhere that our "most urgent need [is] to expand our conception of what it means to be fully literate in new times" (p. 230).

These rapid changes have created an exigence for literacy research to look beyond the bounds of alphabetic text to understand how people are practicing literacy in their everyday lives. The sense of urgency in understanding the relationship between technology and literacy is part of what Mills (2010) has called the "digital turn" in literacy studies, which he characterizes as the "increased attention to new literacy practices in digital environments across a variety of social contexts" (p. 246).

While this shift in the focus of researchers and scholars has happened relatively recently, it is important to note that there is no single moment when literacies became multimodal; in fact, some have argued that literacy and communication have always been visual (Murray, 2014), aural (Selfe, 2009), and multimodal (Shipka, 2005). However, we can trace this shift in our thinking and our vocabulary surrounding literacy in the field of Rhetoric and Composition to the end of the 20th century. In 1996, the New London Group, a collaborative team of scholars, came together to "consider the state and future of literacy pedagogy" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 1) in a manifesto titled "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures." In this article, the New London Group explores the *why,* the *what,* and the *how* of multiliteracies to argue that we need to conceive of and help students develop a broader kind of literacy that moves beyond print-based text.

Since the digital turn, scholars have taken up the New London Group's call to explore the *why,* the *what*, and the *how* of multiliteracies. While some work has been done to expand this framework to consider *when* we need to design for multiliteracies within our institutions (DeVoss, Cushman & Grabill, 2014), there are gaps in our understanding of *where*

multiliteracies develop. Thinking about the locations of 21st Century literacies can allow for new understandings, frameworks, pedagogies, and metaphors to emerge within our field.

By first examining the *how, what*, *why*, and *when* of multiliteracies, I argue that adding *where* to this list of questions is a critical move that will allow us to productively expand at least one prominent metaphor—that of sponsorship. I propose "ecologies of sponsorship" as a framework to better explain how people use multiliteracies in various contexts over the course of their lives to achieve goals like collaborating, developing and practicing rhetorical agency, and participating in projects of personal development and social action. Understanding multiliteracies development in the context of ecologies of sponsorship draws attention to the various spaces and places of multiliteracies development and helps scholars and teachers of writing consider how our classrooms fit into a wider array of literacy gateways and resources.

2.1 Why: The "Digital Turn"

According to Shipka (2005), the digital turn was brought into mainstream composition studies by Yancey's CCCC address in 2004 titled "Made Not Only in Words: Composition in a New Key." In this address, Yancey claims that "for compositionists, of this time and of this place, this moment—this moment right now—is like none other" (p. 62). With the increasing push for definitions of literacy to shift and include digital technologies and their role in writing, Yancey saw that "literacy today is in the midst of a tectonic change" (p. 63).

In the eight years between the New London Group's manifesto and Yancey's CCCC address, the Humanities' interest in technology lagged somewhat behind national technology initiatives. There was disciplinary silence from the Humanities leading up to and directly following the Clinton administration's push to bridge the digital divide in America (Selfe, 1999). In this campaign, a long-held literacy myth was being transferred to computer-based initiatives, bringing with it the "widely held belief that literacy and literacy education lead autonomously, automatically, and directly to liberation, personal success, or economic prosperity" (p. 420). In this national climate that favored the uncritical adoption of the newest technologies, writing scholars and teachers could either accept the technological literacy standards being handed to them from others, or they could develop their own theories and standards.

In response to this situation, Selfe (1999) proposed "a situated knowledges-approach to paying attention" (p. 430) that might allow us to intervene and shape conversations around technologies more thoughtfully and ethically. This approach means that we are obligated to

pay attention to "how technology is now inextricably linked to literacy and literacy education in this country" (p. 414) because "two complex cultural formations—technology and literacy—have become linked in ways that exacerbate current educational and social inequalities in the United States" (p. 414). Therefore, it is crucial that we pay attention to how this link plays out within larger systems of education, work, and communities.

It is not enough to unquestioningly adopt new and emergent technologies into our literacy or writing studies. Instead, we need to pay attention to how literacy is being enacted and understood in multiple locations and for multiple purposes; at the same time, we must be critical of the social role of technology and literacy practices in reflecting and shaping the realities of their users. Technology is not simply a tool that we can either choose to use or ignore, and literacy studies needs to continue to adapt to the changing landscape of communication.

It is out of this disciplinary push for agency in the development of technology that the digital turn took hold, and a critical mass of writing scholars and teachers began to examine the relationship between literacy and technology. Without this step, the movement toward understanding what multiliteracies are and how they develop would not have been taken up by so many other scholars in the decades following the New London Group's ground-breaking publication.

2.2 What: Characterizing Multimodality

Many scholars have offered definitions and characteristics that aim to identify what counts as multimodal composition. While it is most simply the act of using more than one semiotic mode together (Kressand van Leeuwen, 2001), definitions and descriptions have been expanded to include additional characteristics. Multimodality has been described as "not simply an additive art" (Hull and Nelson, 2013, p. 457), but a process that is transcendent rather than additive, occurring through a process of "braiding" and "orchestration" (p. 457). The features of "new literacies" have been characterized as involving the hybrid mixing of different textual practices, production with digital media, and collaborative work within online communities (Mills, 2010). In addition, some have argued that "the term new media is typically reserved for practices that are purely digital, such as digital video, digital animation, web pages, virtual reality, etc." (Sheridan, Ridolfo & Michel, 2012, p. 33), and multimodal composition has been defined as the "purposeful uptake, transformation, incorporation, combination, juxtaposition,

and even three-dimensional layering of words and visuals— as well as textures, sounds, scents, and even tastes" (Shipka, 2005, p. 279).

In a study of how these terms are used academically and publicly, Lauer (2009) argues that "defining terms is a situated activity that involves determining the collective interests and value of the community for which the definition matters" (p. 22). Ultimately, Lauer argues that teachers and scholars need to continue using multiple terms to make connections between different groups who are talking about highly related topics (p. 23). Therefore, the terms themselves become less important in defining what writing with technology is; instead, we might look broadly at what has been called new media, cyberliteracy, multimedia, digital literacy, and multimodality to determine how each of these concepts is described, looking for common ground between the threads of knowledge developed from literacy studies, composition pedagogy, communications studies, models of public rhetoric, and elsewhere.

Even if we agree on what constitutes multimodality, we must also consider what counts as literacy to understand what we mean by "multiliteracies." Selber (2004) has proposed a framework of different types of literacies: functional, critical, and rhetorical. These different forms of digital literacies position people as users of technologies, questioners of technologies, and producers of technologies respectively (Kindle Location 489). Selber argues that the best kinds of multiliteracies allow students to move through these different roles and practices fluidly to best suit their immediate needs and goals.

This model of multiple kinds of literacies makes space for the rhetorical sovereignty of technology users, or "the rights and responsibilities that students have to identify their own communicative needs and to represent their own identities, to select the right tools for the communicative contexts within which they operate, and to think critically and carefully about the meaning that they and others compose" (Selfe, 2009, p. 618). Keeping this idea in mind, I would like to land on Hull's (2003) definition of multiliteracies, which states that "a familiarity with the full range of communicative tools, modes, and media, plus an awareness of and a sensitivity to the power and importance of representation of self and others, along with the space and support to communicate critically, aesthetically, lovingly, and agentively—these are paramount for literacy now" (p. 230). This is not to say that Hull has the definitive definition of multiliteracies that can on its own answer the *what* question. Instead, this definition highlights how complicated and layered our characterizations of multiliteracies have become, and how this complexity has informed discussions surrounding the *how* of multiliteracies.

2.3 How: Design and Pedagogy

The *how* of multiliteracies has generally focused on the production of texts with digital technology and the pedagogies associated with integrating this kind of production into college writing classrooms. One way that the New London Group and subsequent literacy scholars have approached this task is by focusing on the concept of design, or purposeful engineering (Shipka, 2005). Within this framework of design, multimodal composition is a process with specific characteristics: available designs, designing, and the redesigned (New London Group, 2014). Available designs are sets of conventions that designers can draw from, which might take the form of discourses, styles, genres, dialects, and voices. Designing is "the process of shaping emergent meaning [which] involves re-presentation and recontextualization" (p. 197). Finally, the redesigned are "the resources that are reproduced and transformed" (p. 197). Here, design is a process of understanding and evaluating available resources, then transforming them to meet the designer's specific needs or purposes.

Like the New London Group, Hull and Nelson (2014) emphasize the role of design in composition, writing that "it is obvious how useful the notion of design can become as a way to conceptualize the suddenly increased array of choices about semiotic features that an author confronts" (p. 460). In other words, as we shift from a primarily text-based understanding of authorship, design becomes a way to theorize and understand how to use not only text but other modes and media as well.

Design is also a way to think about how norms and standards have emerged within new media productions. Wysocki (2014) has focused on ways of identifying potentials and constraints in media, and understanding what might be inherent to that media and what might be socially constructed around it. She writes, "we can see what beliefs and constraints are held within readily available, conventionalized design" (p. 307). Because creating within this design framework involves starting from "available designs," Wysocki reminds us that what is available is only a portion of what might be possible, and many of our constraints have been socially constructed through patterns of use and design. Further, Hull and Nelson (2014) argue that "it is through an informed, intentional process of design on the part of the individuals, making creative use of available preexisting designs and resources, that meanings, selves, and communities are powerfully made and remade" (p. 460). This makes multimodal composition a profoundly humanistic activity, and makes a case that new, subversive, creative potentials can be developed within a system even as conventional designs provide significant constraints.

In the past 20 years, literacy and writing studies have embraced the idea that "design is just another word for composition" (Murray, 2014, p. 334) and writers in the 21st Century might be better understood as designers whose jobs would consist of "putting together with intent" (p. 334). When we think about writers as designers, our pedagogical and analytical strategies need to shift.

The New London Group proposed a series of pedagogical strategies to support this kind of design: situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice. Situated practice involves learning through hands-on practice. Overt instruction scaffolds those experiences to highlight important aspects, and makes information available when needed. Critical framing allows learners to place their practices in their historical, cultural, political, and ideological contexts. Finally, transformed practice brings theory and practice together so practice becomes a reflective part of the learning process. Most subsequent multimodal composition pedagogy takes up the first strain of this pedagogy, so that students might learn best from hands-on practice, adding a reflective component that does the work of critical framing (Shipka, 2005; Selfe, 2009).

Regardless of the different ways that administrators, programs, and teachers have built pedagogies that support design, one value remains consistent: that we must prepare students to engage critically and rhetorically with communication technologies, because functional skills are not enough. As Selfe (1999) has stated, if we

> require students to use computers in completing a range of assignments— without also providing them the time and opportunity to explore the complex issues that surround technology and technological use in substantive ways— we may, without realizing it, be contributing to the education of citizens who are habituated to technology use but have little critical awareness about, or understanding of, the complex relationships between humans, machines, and the cultural contexts within which the two interact. (p. 432)

If we want to help students become designers and not just users of technology, this reflective component must be built into our pedagogies from the start, or— as DeVoss, Cushman, and Grabill have argued—before the act of composing ever begins.

2.4 When: Infrastructural Concerns

One major expansion of the *why*, *what*, *how* framework developed by the New London Group came nearly a decade later when DeVoss, Cushman, and Grabill (2014) argued that we needed

to also pay attention to the *when* of multiliteracies. For them, this concern over time focuses on what we (scholars, teachers, and designers) need to attend to before the moment of composition: infrastructure. They use their own institution as a case study to argue that "few [theories] offer frameworks for understanding the spaces for a practice of composing in contemporary, technology-mediated ways" (p. 405). They focus on institutional infrastructures to examine how institutional choices made before we ever begin a multimodal project constrain our possibilities for rhetorical action. They note that we are sometimes "prevented from working in certain ways as teachers and writers because it was infrastructurally impossible in a given context. Not intellectually impossible. Not even technologically impossible. Something deeper" (p. 406). These moments spark questions about when multimodal composition should factor into the development and design of our institutions.

DeVoss, Cushman, and Grabill (2014) ask us to expand our notion of infrastructure to intangible things like policies, noting that infrastructure often only become visible upon breakdown (p. 410), and that it "is more than material, is never static, and is always emerging" (p. 411). For them, infrastructures are the systems—technological, social, and otherwise— in which communication take place. When that communication is taking place in a teaching and learning environment, we need to be especially attentive to the ways our institutions shape our possibilities. Because "the *when* is acutely felt when students are seen as potential threats to the network as opposed to its users" (p. 417), we must acknowledge and potentially resist systems where our ideas and goals must be accommodated to fit the infrastructural constraints. Instead, we need to consider multiliteracies in conjunction with the infrastructures meant to support them and look early and often to how these systems are supporting or constraining design.

This expansion of the multiliteracies framework that began in the mid-1990s is important because it begins to remove multiliteracies from being positioned strictly within writing classrooms. It reminds us that multiliteracies—like more traditional studies of literacy that came before this digital turn— are implicated within systems of power that support, maintain, hinder, or otherwise shape what those literacies could or should look like. I argue that we need to take this extension one step further and also consider the *where* of multiliteracies.

2.5 Where: Voluntary Spaces of Participation

Literacy research has often focused on spaces other than traditional classrooms— settlement houses (Peck, Flower & Higgins, 1995), after-school programs (Hull & Nelson, 2014; Hull & Schultz, 2001), community centers (Kirkland, 2010; Hull, 2003), gaming communities (Gee, 2003), workplaces (Brandt, 1998), and others. This is what Gere (1994) calls the extracurriculum of writing, made up of "individuals who meet in living rooms, nursing homes, community centers, churches, shelters for the homeless, around kitchen tables, and in rented rooms to write down their worlds" (p. 76).

Part of being a scholar in this digital turn involves recognizing that much of literacy learning happens outside of schools. Mills (2010) argues that "a singular strength of the broader New Literacy Studies tradition is its stance against dismissing youth engagement with noninstitutional learning as merely frivolous, remedial, or inconsequential" (p. 252). In other words, we must take seriously the work that writers do in the different contexts of their lives, and how those contribute to literacy learning and practices over time.

Work on multimodal literacies reminds us that we need to continue looking in these places to better understand the real stakes for citizens in developing 21st Century literacies. Mills (2010) argues that "the hybridization of literacy practices using digital tools occurs organically, typically in voluntary spaces of participation" (p. 256). The *where* of multiliteracies becomes particularly important for developing critical and rhetorical kinds of literacies to draw on within those voluntary spaces. Because these skills are constantly in development, we need to consider how users access and use technologies to develop multiliteracies in multiple spaces across longer periods of time. Placing our focus on the dynamic, shifting places of 21st Century literacies requires that we revisit and revise some of the guiding metaphors that shape our definitions, research, and teaching. In the following section, I will offer one such example of a metaphor for multiliteracies that foregrounds the question of *where*: ecologies of sponsorship.

2.6 Ecologies of Sponsorship

Deborah Brandt's metaphor of sponsorship has been used by scholars of literacy to understand and explain some of the ways that literacy functions within communities. She explains that "sponsors, as I have come to think of them, are any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy— and gain advantage by it in some way" (1998, p. 166). She argues that these sponsors "set the terms for access to literacy and wield powerful incentives for compliance and loyalty" (p. 167).

Much of the work on literacy sponsorship has followed Brandt's lead and focused on institutional sponsors as the agents, because they often shape who has access to literacy resources and define what counts as literacy. Some of the subsequent literacy research using sponsorship as a guiding metaphor has considered how commercial sponsors shape online spaces (Pavia, 2013) and how schools and families become sponsors for students (Webb-Sunderhaus, 2007). Although some of this work has expanded Brandt's metaphor to include multiple, layered sponsors acting in digital spaces (Pavia, 2013), the focus is still on a top-down kind of sponsorship passed from experts and institutions to individual users.

The picture becomes more complicated and interesting when we place our focus on how individuals— the sponsored— become agents in a system that may have marginalized, excluded, or used them. While it is true that "sponsors of digital literacy greatly affect individuals' encounters with digital literacy, their incentives for pursuing digital literacy, their opportunities for doing so, and the barriers that they face when writing in digital contexts" (Pavia, 2013, p. 133), the one-way model of sponsorship does not account for all of the complexity of the communities in which people live, work, learn, and practice these literacies. While our current models of sponsorship are not wrong, they are incomplete. I propose that we complicate this metaphor by thinking about ecologies of sponsorship instead of isolated sponsors.

Rhetoric and technology are increasingly being described in ecological terms. This has been a shift from tool-based metaphors of technology, and it allows for a more careful consideration of technologies within their varied social and cultural contexts (Nardi & O'Day, 1999). As Nardi and O'Day (1999) explain, these metaphors matter: "people who see technology as a tool see themselves controlling it" (Kindle Location 42) while "people who see technology as a system see themselves caught up inside it" (Kindle Location 42). They go on to provide an ecological metaphor with different potentials, writing that "we see technology as part of an ecology, surrounded by a dense network of relationships in local environments" (Kindle Location 42). Here, ecologies highlight potentials for user agency regarding technology, acknowledging that we are neither completely in control, nor completely powerless. We, along with specific technological artifacts, are engaged in a series of "effects, enactments, and events" (Edbaur, 2005, p. 9) that make up this rhetorical ecology. Therefore, it is important that we understand how technologies themselves and our studies of technology might be best understood as parts of complex cultural-rhetorical ecologies.

Edbauer (2005) has used ecologies as a metaphor to point our attention to the inter-related nature of contextual elements. She proposes a "revised strategy for theorizing public Rhetorics (and Rhetoric's publicness) as a circulating ecology of effects, enactments, and events by shifting the lines of focus from rhetorical situation to rhetorical ecologies" (p. 9). Thinking in terms of ecologies requires that our analyses of rhetorical situations extend beyond a combination of discrete elements. This method emphasizes circulation and how meanings move and change in relation to multiple, complicated exigencies.

The model of rhetorical ecologies also provides a framework for investigating how rhetorical flows diverge and change as they travel down different paths. Edbauer (2005) makes the following argument about the complexity of rhetorical ecologies:

> Rhetoric emerges already infected by the viral intensities that are circulating in the social field. Moreover, this same rhetoric will go on to evolve in *aparallel* ways: between two 'species' that have absolutely nothing to do with each other. What is shared between them is not the situation, but certain contagions and energy. This does not mean the shared rhetoric reproduces copies or models of 'original' situations (any more than the shared C virus turns a cat into a baboon). Instead, the same rhetoric might manage to infect and connect various processes, events, and bodies (p. 14, emphasis original).

Though it might be unsettling to think of school-based literacy education as a virus that infects students' understanding of their goals and agency in relation to technology, this metaphor highlights how affects, attitudes, and dispositions toward technology can spread across the varied contexts that matter in students' lives. For example, many students will engage with Generative AI during their years of formal education. However, their perspectives will likely evolve in 'aparallel ways'. One student may go on to become a teacher who uses AI to refine lesson plans, while another could become an advocate for keeping AI out of the classroom. One shared moment would not determine the outcomes for all students; but, creating opportunities for critical engagement with and reflection on AI has viral potential. It could lead to more critical thinking later, as students continue to encounter this technology.

Once we acknowledge the ecological nature of rhetoric and technology, the importance of the everyday and the mundane factors within technical systems becomes more obvious. Rivers and Weber (2011) explain that "in expanding public rhetoric's scope to include the mundane, we ultimately want to emphasize the ecological nature of public discourse and offer a pedagogy designed to help students recognize and engage public rhetorical ecologies" (p.

188). Because each piece of an ecology is tied to each of the other pieces, even small acts, texts, or events can have significant and lasting ripple effects. This means that there are "myriad and mundane ways we can, collectively, effect change" (p. 195).

The ecological conception of literacy sponsorship is a shift from models that often do not explicitly reference technology (i.e., Webb-Sunderhaus), or present technology as a system that users are caught up in (i.e., Pavia). If we conceptualize technology as an ecology rather than a system, we can also rethink literacy sponsorship as emerging through complicated interactions with many sponsors over extended periods of time. The ecologies of sponsorship that shape digital literacy development are always in flux, and small actions can have significant effects within the rest of the ecology.

This metaphorical shift helps account for what Hawisher et. al. (2004) have called the "cultural ecology of literacy" that is made up of "social contexts; educational practices, values and expectations; cultural and ideological formations like race, class, and gender; political and economic trends and events; family practices and experiences; and historical and material conditions— among many, many other factors" (p. 64). If we believe, like Hawisher et. al., that "literacies have lifespans" (p. 64), then we need to build models that help us account for these cultural ecologies.

One way to begin theorizing how ecologies of sponsorship operate is to draw on models of public rhetoric that foreground circulation. Ecologies of sponsorship can develop and grow organically because resources are being developed to maximize rhetorical velocity. Sheridan, Ridolfo, and Michel have described rhetorical velocity as the ability of a composition to be widely distributed, shared, and recomposed by other rhetors within a (usually digital) community. They argue that "rhetors need to see themselves as part of a larger web of considerations that include audience, exigency, modes, media of production and distribution, infrastructural resources, other collaborators, and other compositions" (p. xxvi)— in other words, as part of an ecology.

They argue "one risk of this ecological understanding of rhetoric is that rhetorical agency seems to evaporate" (p. xxvii). However, they urge us to think about rhetors and texts as points of articulation within this matrix where agency is not diminished, just distributed through different parts of the ecology. Hawisher et. al. (2004) echoes this statement, arguing that "people can exert their own powerful agency in, around, and through digital literacies" (p. 64). As multiliteracies scholars, we need to consider what happens when agency is distributed within an ecology of sponsorship, and people become simultaneously sponsors and the

sponsored. What happens when literacy resources are no longer held under tight ideological control by institutional and corporate forces, but are widely distributed and crafted to maximize their rhetorical velocity?

Thinking about culturally situated ecologies of sponsorship can provide us with a place to investigate these questions. By thinking about specific events within this ecology as a snapshot of an ever-moving system, we can frame artifacts, classrooms, and conversations as points of articulation in a dynamic ecology. By tracing the connections between various points of articulation, we might start to better understand the role of rhetorical velocity in multiple, layered strands of sponsorship.

3. Conclusion: Implications and Future Directions

Because schools, workplaces, communities, and homes are some of the major gateways through which people access technology (Hawisher et. al., 2004, p. 670), these might be some productive places to continue looking for points of articulation within these ecologies of sponsorship. However, we must acknowledge that none of these "gateways" act in isolation to sponsor and support multiliteracies. As educators, we need to realize that schools cannot act alone to sponsor the complex multiliteracies we hope our students will develop. Instead, we should recognize that "the more gateways people have open to them, the more likely they are, over their lifetimes, to acquire and develop effective sets of digital literacy skills and to value these literacies of technology" (p. 670). It might serve us better, then, to ask how we can connect school-based gateways with other places of sponsorship in students' lives. How might our classrooms create momentum for students to enter and participate in vibrant and complex ecologies of sponsorship?

These questions become especially important when we think about the political nature of literacy and how literacy standards and education have been used to maintain unequal systems of power. Many have described new technologies as democratizing forces. They highlight how "emergent technologies are fundamentally altering the dynamics of access by providing non specialists the resources necessary to produce, reproduce, and distribute rhetorically effective multimodal compositions" (Sheridan, Ridolfo & Michel, 2012, p. 31), and argue that they have the potential to bring more voices to the table.

However, we need to think critically about what it means to be literate and how we study and use multiliteracies. While we cannot rely on literacy myths that claim technologies and their associated literacies will automatically lead to better lives and a more just society, we

do need to find places of hope within this current moment of rapid technological development, places where our students (and we) can use all of the materials available to us to meet our immediate and future needs. I argue that this requires us to expand our view beyond our classrooms and ask how we might teach students to use technology to find other gateways, perhaps those with fewer gatekeepers than are present in formal education, to develop multiliteracies with divergent goals and agendas over the course of their lifetimes. It involves connecting students to local communities and organizations, and it requires crafting assignments and experiences that allow students to mobilize their skills beyond our classrooms to meet real needs in their communities.

This goal is especially urgent in this moment when we are in the midst of major political changes. As a nation and a world, we are facing some major divisions and crises. All of us need to take advantage of every available resource to engage meaningfully in these rhetorical situations. To borrow Selfe's (2009) words,

> Students need these things because they will join us as part of an increasingly challenging and difficult world—one plagued by destructive wars and great ill will, marked by poverty and disease, scarred by racism and ecological degradation. In this world, we face some wickedly complex communicative tasks. To make our collective way with any hope for success, to create a different set of global and local relations than currently exists, we will need all available means of persuasion, all available dimensions, all available approaches, not simply those limited to the two dimensional space of a printed page. (p. 645)

Considering the *where* along with the *why*, *what*, *how*, and *when* of multiliteracies is one step toward this goal. Focusing on ecologies of sponsorship to understand how 21st century literacies develop can help us better explain how people already use multiliteracies to achieve their goals, and to make recommendations about how our research and pedagogies might continue to support this kind of work both in and out of the classroom.

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