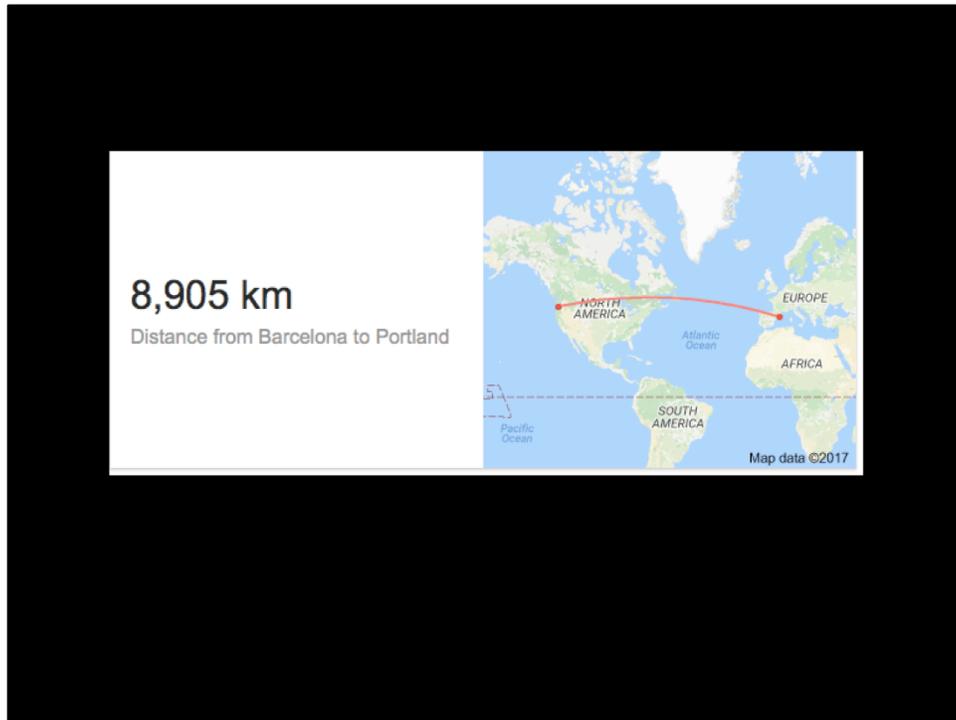


Audio Description as a Pedagogical Tool in Composition and Writing

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Good morning. My name is David Vialard. A PowerPoint deck accompanies my presentation. The slides in this deck are white Tiresias font on a black background. Most of my slides are pull quotes from the talk, though there are a few images that I will describe.

This first slide carries the title of my talk Audio Description as a Pedagogical Tool in Composition and Writing as well as my name, David Vialard, my institution Texas Tech University, and email address david.vialard@ttu.edu.



I move now to a slide with a Google Map connecting Barcelona to Portland, Oregon, United States with a stated distance of 8, 905km. Today we sit at the 6th Advanced Research Symposium on Audio Description. The decade mark is a stark realization both of how relatively new AD is as well as how far AD research has come. As AD research deepens, like any research in any field, its scholarship inevitably widens and begins to intersect with other fields on interests, disciplines, and scholarship. Not to go off the deep end about Kuhnian paradigm shifts, but I would be remiss not to mention the rich areas these intersections offer. Pragmatically, common ground with other fields is a rite of passage for a growing field and indeed legitimizing. Practically, these intersections offer rich areas to explore with new lenses and fresh perspective. I am here to talk to you today about one of these intersections.

As we meet here today another academic conference is taking place concurrently. The 68th Annual Conference on College Composition and Communication, colloquially known as CCCC, is taking place in Portland, Oregon. Is to writing studies what ARSAD is to writing studies.

The intersection of writing studies and audio description is a rich area of reflection that provides insight into each discipline.

Just as there is physical distance between Barcelona and Portland, there is discursive distance between writing studies and audio description research. Distances though can be bridged, and that is my purpose here. The intersection of writing studies and audio description is a rich area of reflection that provides insight into each discipline.

Disciplines have histories and these histories not only tell us where we have been but provide insight into where we are headed, what research is needed, and what are questions that need to be answered. I have no intention of covering the vast history of writing pedagogy. Others have done so and I would refer you to them namely, James Berlin. What I do offer is a quick overview to situate where I am heading in this talk.

The advent of computers began a seismic shift in writing instruction away from “literary” writing towards “discursive” writing.

The advent of computers began a seismic shift in writing instruction away from what I will term for brevity sake “literary” writing towards what I will term broadly “discursive” writing.

“Literary” Writing

- **Classical Literature**
- **Poetics**
- **Methodical Process**
- **Individual**
- **Vertical**
- **Static**
- **Analog**

Literary writing is characterized by classical literature, poetics, and methodical process. Is in general individual, vertical, static, and if I may analog.

“Discourse” Writing

- **Dynamic**
- **Multimodal**
- **Collaborative**
- **Purposeful**
- **Digital**

In contrast, Discourse writing is dynamic, multimodal, collaborative, purposeful, and digital. Discourse writing is not a binary of literary writing but in a different place on the spectrum created by technology, cultural change, and globalization.

The names of discourse writing vary including not exclusively writing across the curriculum, technical writing, professional communication, workplace writing, or business writing.

To summarize broadly writing instruction focuses on generating deep student understandings of audience and purpose.

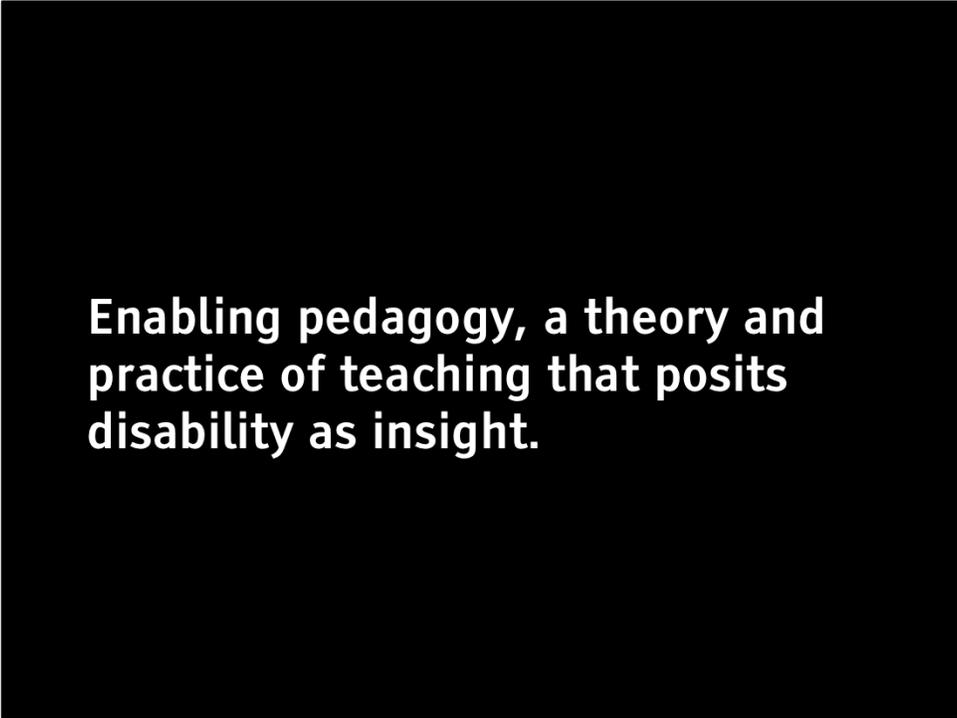
Despite a varied constellation of naming this discursive writing, what is shared is a common core of situating writing instruction in rhetorical persuasion, audience concern, multimodal composition, and service learning. To summarize broadly writing instruction focuses on generating deep student understandings of audience and purpose.

Students are situated in real situations communicating with real people for real purposes.

Perhaps another way to explicate this shift in writing instruction is movement across the Cartesian split. Whereas traditional writing instruction was quite cerebral, current demands require university-writing programs to situate mind and body in the writing process and products. Students are situated in real situations communicating with real people for real purposes.

Situated writing requires students have an awareness and appreciation for diversity and difference.

Situated writing requires students have an awareness and appreciation for diversity and difference. Louis Pratt coined the term “contact zone” to describe the role of the writing classroom in having students encounter those different from themselves. One aspect of difference is the growing role of disability studies plays in shaping the writing classroom. Incidentally, it should be noted the three big names in the field of disability studies that I will reference monetarily- Dolmage, Brueggeman, and Kleege are housed in English Departments.



Enabling pedagogy, a theory and practice of teaching that posits disability as insight.

Beyond generating student awareness of difference and diversity, Dolmage and Brueggemann both note how disability and the disabled body enable insight critically, experimentally, cognitively, and sensorily into the human experience. Brueggeman takes insight one step further and constructs the idea of disability as an enabling pedagogy, a theory and practice of teaching that posits disability as insight.

Audio description offers a pedagogy that creates opportunities for insight. Conceptually, insight comprises a sense of deep understanding and critical thinking.

Conceptually, insight comprises a sense of deep understanding and critical thinking—something that all teachers seek to instill regardless of the subject. I submit here that audio description offers a pedagogy that creates opportunities for insight to flourish. I am fortunate to not stand alone in making this statement. Georgia Kleege in a 2015 Disability Studies Quarterly Article advocates that audio description pushes students to practice close reading of visual material, deepen their analysis, and engage in critical discussions around the methodology, standards and values, language, and role of interpretation in a variety of academic disciplines.

Audio description provides a valuable opportunity to hone student observation and leverage audience concerns as a means of encouraging students to actively write for a specific audience and purpose.

I am narrowing Kleege's sentiments here to writing instruction in particular. The very essence of writing, particularly academic writing, is to find ways of teaching students how to examine things closely and communicate knowledge through a process of double articulation to others who may "see" things differently. Writing is very much a process of observing and reporting. Audio description provides a valuable opportunity to hone student observation and leverage audience concerns as a means of encouraging students to actively write for a specific audience and purpose.

When you present students with assignments that require them to communicate visual meaning in verbal/textual form it constructs a rigor, heightened by insight that leads students to critical thinking. Using professionally described media as examples provides classroom discussions that place students in active roles of critical analysis and concerns of audience, purpose, and usability.

Students who complete audio describing exercises report a greater awareness of the need to make multimodal texts accessible.

In January I was awarded an Implementing Novel Service Projects in Responsible Engagement Grant, or INSPIRE Grant to develop service-learning modules in the first year writing curriculum of a local community college. These students will work to describe the visual art in the local cancer center and local museums. I have no delusions about the students involved. It is highly unlikely that many or perhaps any of them will ever pursue audio describing as a career path. That said in my pilot study conducted last semester students who complete audio describing exercises report a greater awareness of the need to make multimodal texts accessible. They demonstrate a greater understanding of audience awareness, and perhaps most importantly they become advocates for audio description.

“When I have to write knowing that my audience needs my work to get information, it makes me a better writer. I care more about what I write. When I see for them, I see more.”

I close today with a quote from the exit survey I conducted following the pilot audio description project at Heartland Community College- “When I have to write knowing that my audience needs my work to get information, it makes me a better writer. I care more about what I write. When I see for them, I see more.”

Audio description not only appears to be a tool promoting accessibility but also a way to gain insight into complex multimodal complex texts.

I return then to the notion of insight. The conventional view of audio description approaches it from the perspective of the user with low vision and/or blindness. This is of course a critically important perspective, and one I would not argue against. I would however advocate for further research into the perspective of the describer. That is audio description not only appears to be a tool promoting accessibility but also a way to gain insight into complex multimodal complex texts. Thank you.