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# ePortfolios and Audience: Teaching a Critical Twenty-First Century Skill

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This article reports on a three-year investigation into how and to what extent ePortfolios sponsor teacher and student learning about audience in first-year writing classes at a mid-sized research university. Through interviews with students and instructors and detailed analysis of students' ePortfolios, we found that, more often than not, the audience for ePortfolios is multiple. We argue that the ability to craft compositions that successfully negotiate multiple audiences' needs and expectations is a critical twenty-first century skill, yet the concept of audience is under-investigated and under-theorized in ePortfolio research. Our study provides evidence that working with ePortfolios shifted the ways that students and instructors engaged with the concept of audience. We observed that many student ePortfolios at least gestured toward invoking multiple audiences. We further observed considerable variance in how successfully students negotiated the needs and expectations of these audiences, often experiencing a phenomenon we call "audience interference." We identified three key rhetorical moves that largely determined the success of the ePortfolio in negotiating multiple audiences' needs and expectations: intentional design of structure and navigation; contextualization of content and artifacts; and flexible use of voices. We conclude by suggesting pedagogical implications of these findings.

Who is the audience for a student ePortfolio? The answer to this question might seem straightforward: it's the teacher, or an evaluator, or a potential employer, or the student herself. But a moment's reflection reveals that the audience for student ePortfolios is usually, perhaps always, *multiple.* If a student composes an ePortfolio in a classroom, her teacher is obviously a primary audience. But since reflection and learning are key goals of ePortfolio pedagogy, the student is also a crucial audience for her own work. If the ePortfolio is part of an evaluation, then evaluators (e.g., program administrators, accreditors, employers) comprise yet another audience. And if teachers encourage students to identify an external audience for their ePortfolios, as do many of the teachers in the study we report on here, still another audience comes into play.

The ability to craft compositions that successfully negotiate multiple audiences' needs and expectations is a critical twenty-first century skill. Many, perhaps most, forms of web-based writing—think of virtually any public website—provide different kinds of information and different forms of engagement to different readers. The multimodal and digital affordances of ePortfolios provide a unique opportunity to teach this skill because they can, and often should, offer different experiences to different readers/viewers. Consider how Yancey, McElroy, and Powers (2013) described their individual reading experiences of a student ePortfolio:

> Reading Kristina's ePortfolio involved, first, making a set of choices, some of which were . . . well, to not read. Beginning to review the portfolio, we first decided, each of us separately, which page to click first, then which link to click second—an act that could simply have taken us back to the portal—then which link to click third, and so on. Upon encountering a text, we needed to decide what to do with it. Would we, for example, click the contact screen and complete the email form so that we were both reading and writing? Would we download print texts—which ranged from the one-page resumé to the multi-page research project—to our computers and read those, and if so, would we read them through completely and carefully, or would we skim them, or would we . . . quit in medias res? Would we link to a video and not read it, but rather watch it? Would we link to a separate web page and navigate it? (para. 2-17)

Yancey et al. (2013) found that Kristina's ePortfolio offered a "plurality of gently guided paths" (para. 48). The composer shapes several possible reading experiences and invites her readers/viewers to collaborate with her in making meaning. Provocatively, Yancey et al. (2013) suggested that "perhaps a successful portfolio . . . lies more in showcasing ability to anticipate and satisfy multiple audience needs . . . than in pinpointing a targeted audience for reflection and display" (para. 49).

Yancey et al.'s (2013) work invites further investigation into the construct of *audience* for student ePortfolios. This article answers that call by reporting on a study of how ePortfolios affected teachers' and students' considerations of audience in a first-year college writing program. Drawing on teacher and student interviews as well as analyses of student ePortfolios, we find that while ePortfolios provide an exciting opportunity to help students imagine and write for multiple audiences, they also have the potential to confuse and frustrate students and to lead to confused and frustrating ePortfolios. Based on the results of our study, we call for teachers to go beyond general

audience awareness in ePortfolio pedagogy to include instruction that helps students successfully negotiate multiple audiences.

## Literature Review

The concept of audience has been central to the field of rhetoric and composition at least since Aristotle taught his students how to appeal to their hearers. In contemporary rhetoric and composition theory, audience is theorized as a constituent of the rhetorical situation, depicted in Figure 1, a poster page published by the flagship journal of the field, *College Composition and Communication*. Though scholars have theorized the rhetorical situation in multiple ways (e.g., Bitzer, 1968; Swales, 1990), audience has remained a central component. Indeed, these scholars have theorized various kinds of audience, including invoked, addressed, and involved (Ede & Lunsford, 1984, 2009; Lunsford & Ede, 1996); imagined, intended, real, implied, ideal, and more (Clark, 2003; Ong, 1975; Park, 1982; Reiff, 1996). Research in composing processes conducted in the 1970s and 1980s established that experienced writers use their understanding of their (potential) audience both to generate their ideas and to shape their compositions (National Council of Teachers of English, 2011). More recent work theorizes the complexity and multiplicity of audiences, including and especially in digital environments (Reiff, 1996; Weiser, Fehler, & Gonzalez, 2009).

Despite this long history of research and scholarship on audience, the ePortfolio community is just beginning to devote significant attention to audience as a theoretical construct. Perhaps because we are still learning what it means to think of ePortfolios as a distinct genre—that is, compositions unto themselves, rather than containers for other compositions—audience, until recently, has largely functioned as a ubiquitous absent presence in the ePortfolio literature.

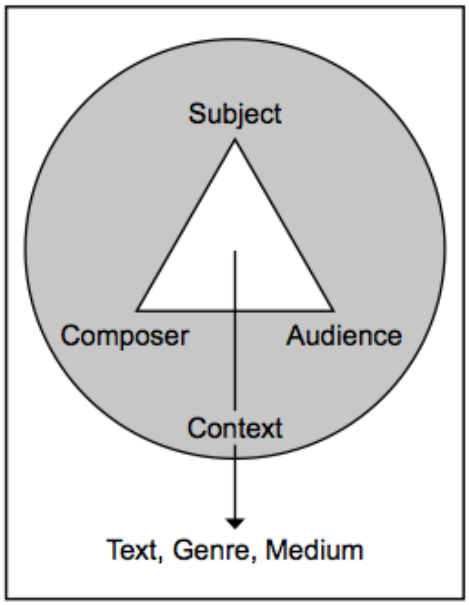
For instance, in Cambridge, Kahn, Tompkins, and Yancey's (2001) collection *Electronic Portfolios: Emerging Practices in Student, Faculty, and Institutional Learning*, audience is mentioned by many contributors, but it is not theorized or discussed in significant detail. In discussions of student, faculty, and institutional portfolios, purpose is routinely privileged over audience, and advice regarding the latter tends to be general and commonsensical: essentially, to keep one's audience in mind while working on one's portfolio. A few contributors (Hamilton, 2001; Kelly, 2001; Ketcheson, Tompkins, & Yancey, 2001; Yancey, 2001) mentioned that the non-linear affordances of hypertext allow composers to design ePortfolios for multiple audiences and point to the wisdom of involving potential campus and community audiences in the development of ePortfolios, and a couple more (e.g., Kelly, 2001; Tompkins, 2001) noted audience-related challenges ePortfolio composers face (writing honestly about pedagogical shortcomings and negotiating the competing demands of colleagues and general readers, respectively). However, the book includes no theoretical discussion of audience as a concept. Similarly, none of the chapters in the collection *Electronic Portfolios 2.0* (Cambridge, Cambridge, & Yancey, 2009) took up audience as a central concept. The term "audiences" appeared in the index only in connection with ratings (one page listed) and "thinking sheets" (two pages listed). Likewise, only two chapters of the 51 in Jafari and Kaufman's (2006) handbook examine audience explicitly (Niguidula, 2006; Price, 2006). The attention to audience in these chapters is limited: Price (2006) raised questions about purpose and audience in the context of shifting from print to electronic portfolio, rather than reporting on a study on audience, and Niguidula (2006) concluded that purpose and audience are important, but does not discuss in detail how to think about these concepts.

Price's (2006) chapter is focused on Spelman's first-year writing ePortfolio. Other studies emerging from college writing programs (including several studies conducted in connection with the Inter/National Coalition for Electronic Portfolio Research, including Northern Illinois, Cohort 1; University of Washington, Cohort 1; University of Georgia, Cohort 2; University of Denver, Cohort 5) focus on reflection, revision, identity, and assessment rather than audience (Desmet, Miller, Griffin, Balthazor, & Cummings, 2008). This relative paucity of explicit attention to audience, even by rhetoric and composition scholars, is curious because the limited research that has been done on ePortfolios and audience makes a strong case for its significance to ePortfolio composers. Wall and Peltier (1996) found that "by 'going public' with their electronic portfolios, students transformed their school-bound ideas of audience, fostered their own sense of community extending beyond the classroom, and renegotiated the traditional terms of ownership of student writing" (p. 207). Similarly, Cambridge (2008) found in a study of ePortfolio Minnesota that

> when portfolio authors have a strong sense that these real audiences [peers, faculty, counselors, employers, family and friends, etc.] find their portfolios interesting and useful, they tend to also see eFolio as having a more profound impact on their lives as wholes. (p. 1238)

In a study of digital portfolios in a range of K-12 schools, Niguidula (2006) found audience to be a critical consideration for ePortfolio composers: "as students and teachers become clearer about the purpose

Figure 1
*Audience is Theorized as a Constituent of the "Rhetorical Situation"*




(National Council of Teachers of English, 2010, p. 1)

and audience of their school's digital portfolio, they can better understand how to build and read the portfolio's contents" (p. 496). While Niguidula (2006) admitted that this does not seem like a groundbreaking insight, he demonstrates that students often struggle with audience for their ePortfolios because their audience is only vaguely described to them, the audience is too far in the future (e.g., potential employers), or they are asked to write to multiple audiences with different, and perhaps even conflicting, expectations.

Cambridge (2010) and Niguidula (2006) also pointed to the tension that runs through much of the ePortfolio literature between "learning ePortfolios" and "assessment ePortfolios." Barrett and Wilkerson (2004) claimed that the purposes of these ePortfolios are irreconcilable: that positivist portfolios designed to assess learning outcomes are fundamentally different from constructivist portfolios, which are designed to allow learners to construct meaning from their own perspectives. By contrast, Cambridge (2010) and Batson (2011) posited that these purposes, while different, are not necessarily contradictory. Both positions recognize the importance and purpose, and therefore audience (i.e., self vs. evaluators), but again the former term takes precedence in these debates and audience is left under-theorized.

Recently, in the pages of this journal, Turns, Sattler, Eliot, Kilgore, and Mobrand (2012) discuss the role of audience in preparedness ePortfolios in engineering. Unlike much of the previous work on audience, this article treats audience as complex and multiple:

> Preparedness is interestingly ambiguous with respect to audience. In this work, we invite students to think about their audience—who they would like to convince with their arguments. The attempt here is to help students transcend the school context that they are in and go beyond thinking of the educator as their implied audience. By bringing the issue of audience into the open, we also have a chance to talk about the types of claims that would interest a specific audience and the types of evidence that the audience would find appropriate and engaging. (p. 5)

Another robust treatment of audience appeared in the inaugural issue of the *International Journal of ePortfolio*. In "ePerformance: Crafting, Rehearsing, and Presenting the ePortfolio Persona," Ramírez (2011) wrote:

> The "audience" for any given ePortfolio may not be readily located or defined. Because ePortfolio invites asynchronous exchanges and promotes sharing through wikis or web-based interfaces, its audience is variable and potentially infinite. A student may perform multiple roles for multiple audiences, as s/he does in everyday life. (p. 1)

Ramírez (2011) argued that the unique affordances of ePortfolios allow students to perform multiple roles, simultaneously writing for themselves to enhance their own learning, and performing for multiple audiences, including but not limited to their professors. She usefully imagined ePortfolios as stages on which "[d]igitized artifacts may be assembled into the virtual environment much the same way that a theatrical setting must be constructed, costumes built, or properties introduced" (p. 3). At the heart of Ramírez's (2011) notion of *ePerformance* is "productive interactivity with audiences who actively influence process, content, and outcomes" (p. 8).

In this article, we build on Ramírez's (2011) conception of ePortfolios as spaces in which students negotiate multiple audiences—self, teacher, and a potentially infinite range of others—in a single composition. Our study demonstrates that ePortfolios can be a valuable tool for promoting this composing practice, which is critical in a digital, networked world. At the same time, it shows that students must be taught to compose in this way; it does not just happen. In fact, the use of ePortfolios in the absence of a rich conception of audience might serve to confuse as much as illuminate audience for students. For this reason, a robust conception of audience is necessary not only for the ePortfolio community, but also for teachers and students.

## The Study

This study sought to understand how and to what extent ePortfolios sponsor teacher and student learning about audience in first-year writing (FYW) classes. This research question was inspired by an inquiry group of writing instructors who had introduced ePortfolios into their teaching practice while the curriculum they were teaching in was undergoing a shift in focus from traditional academic discourse to a broader, rhetoric-based approach in which students write for multiple purposes and audiences in various media. Instructors felt audience was a particularly important consideration for FYW in light of the pending curricular changes.

### Case Study Approach

We selected a qualitative design using a case study strategy to capture the complex and contextual nature of the practice we explored. Our goal was to develop what Creswell (2009) calls a *holistic account*, or the development of "a complex picture . . . reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors involved in a situation, and generally sketching the larger picture that emerges" (p. 176). According to Yin's (2008) definition, the case study approach is appropriate for studying phenomena that are inseparable from the context in which they occur and that include many more variables (e.g., individual instructors, different courses, assignments, pedagogical practices) than data points (number of participants). Our research was conducted within a writing program with specific values, an open-ended approach to using ePortfolios, and a diverse group of students—factors we judged inseparable from the experiences of the participants. Stake (2005) explained that qualitative case researchers connect "ordinary practice in natural habitats to a few abstractions and concerns of the academic disciplines" (p. 448), with organizing themes clarifying the meaning of the case. By identifying themes in each of three data sources, we were able to weave together a narrative explanation of the case that will enable readers to identify transferable lessons (Stake, 2005).

### Context

We conducted our research within a writing program at a mid-sized, private U.S. research university. The overarching goal of the program is to help students develop confidence and competence in writing for academic, professional, and public purposes and audiences. The program offers two required writing courses—First-Year Writing, taken in the freshman year, and Advanced Writing in the Disciplines, taken near the midpoint of a student's course of study.

Our research focused on First-Year Writing (FYW), process-oriented, workshop-style courses designed to engage students in academic and public discourse. Specifically, this study focused on teachers and students in the Introductory Writing course, the first semester of a two-semester "stretch" version of FYW, housed within the university's General Studies Program (GSP). The GSP is a one-year program designed to meet the needs of students who benefit from support services including personalized advising, small classes, and peer tutoring. In recent semesters, the program has enrolled significant numbers of second-language writers. Our study focused on this specific student population because all of the teacher participants who volunteered for the study were teaching Introductory Writing in the GSP in the Fall of 2011, when we collected our data.

At the time of our study, the writing program was undergoing significant curricular change. The instructors involved in this study were positioned in various ways vis-à-vis this shift. Some were longtime teachers in the program and were wrestling with how to make sense of the changes. Others were consummate pedagogical innovators and had been actively involved in the conversations that led to the shift. Still others were newer to the program and were not steeped in its values and traditions. What they had in common is that

they all volunteered to participate in pedagogical experimentation with ePortfolios while the new program focus was being crafted and implemented.

The assignments instructors gave their students for producing ePortfolios spanned a spectrum. On one end were assignments that resembled the comprehensive end-of-semester print portfolios historically required by the program. On the other end, instructors identified a set of process and product requirements but gave students considerable freedom in designing their ePortfolios as a stand-alone project. Somewhere in the middle of this spectrum, teachers asked students to design ePortfolios as a presentational space for completed work after they had generated material related to one or two projects. Some teachers asked students to complete multiple kinds of ePortfolios throughout the semester.

### Data Collection and Analysis

**Interviews**. In fall 2011, we conducted semi-structured interviews with six Writing Program instructors to ascertain whether or how working with ePortfolios had influenced their teaching of audience in FYW. We also visited the classes of five of these instructors and asked for student volunteers to participate in on-the-spot interviews. We interviewed 18 students to ascertain how they conceptualized the audience(s) for their ePortfolios and how they considered those audiences as they constructed the portfolios. The two PIs independently analyzed all interview transcripts. We each identified themes in the data and, through discussion, reached consensus on five primary findings in the instructor interviews and four findings in the student interviews. We also identified six categories of evidence of audience awareness described by the instructors, which we later used in our analysis of student ePortfolios.

**ePortfolios**. At the end of the Fall 2011 semester, students using ePortfolios in writing classes were invited to submit their work to a program repository for purposes of program review and research. Forty-three students submitted work to the repository. We briefly reviewed all the submitted portfolios and categorized them into three different types: process portfolios, project portfolios and reflective/showcase portfolios. We then randomly selected six portfolios of each type to analyze.

We analyzed these 18 ePortfolios for evidence of audience awareness, using a reading protocol based on Lunsford and Ede's conception of audience as invoked, addressed, and/or involved (Ede & Lunsford, 1984, 2009; Lunsford & Ede, 1996) and six categories of evidence of audience awareness drawn from the instructor interviews: home page, structure/navigation, imagery/media, individual artifacts, tone/voice, and reflective writing. We created an online form for data input and completed the form multiple times for each portfolio, once for each category of evidence. The form populated a spreadsheet, enabling us to sort the data across multiple categories.

We worked both individually and collaboratively when analyzing portfolios and sorted the spreadsheet entries in four different ways: by type of portfolio, by location of evidence, by kind of audience, and by audience role. Each PI examined the data in two of these configurations, tallying responses to categorical questions and identifying themes. We compared our individual analyses and, through discussion, reached consensus on themes.

## Findings

In order to provide readers with the "story" our research uncovered about how ePortfolios are being used in this writing program, we present in this section an overview of all of our study findings; our Discussion section focuses on the last finding, which relates to students writing for multiple audiences.

### Finding 1

Though audience traditionally has played a limited role in the program's first-year writing courses, ePortfolios have prompted significant shifts in the teaching of audience.

All instructors reported that audience had previously played a limited role in their teaching of first-year writing and that trying to teach audience to first-year writers presented challenges. As one instructor stated, "a paper or an essay was written to be graded, and that's that." Though some of the instructors asked students to consider their classmates as an audience, they acknowledged that students did not always take to this understanding of audience. Some mentioned that they discuss "the general reader" with students, but these instructors were quick to identify this as an "artificial" construction. Others identified their own struggles in thinking about audience as an impediment to teaching it. As one instructor put it: "I struggle with the sense of what the audience is for all the writing that happens in freshman composition, because I'm not convinced that there is a definite audience."

Instructors also reported that the use of ePortfolios had brought about specific changes in their teaching of audience. They reported spending more time in class discussing audience choices. Several instructors talked about "contextualization," or the need to provide accurate and sufficient information for uninitiated readers/viewers to understand what the writer is writing about. These instructors also talked about guiding

students to think about the experience of their ePortfolios, asking them, for instance, "When you go to a site that you can navigate easily or one you can't navigate, what's the difference in your experience?"

Instructors also reported placing greater emphasis on peer review in their courses and a stronger focus on using peer review to heighten audience awareness. Other instructors described a good deal of sharing of ePortfolios within and in one case across classes.

A few instructors have used ePortfolios as an opportunity to retool their entire pedagogical approach, including the kinds of writing they ask students to do. These instructors are moving away from teaching essays with clearly separated drafts and revisions and toward projects on which students are continuously working, providing the instructors with progress reports as they design and redesign their ePortfolios. They are making "what it means to compose in digital environments" an explicit focus of instruction, as one instructor explains:

> [I tell students,] "You're no longer writing a paper or an essay. You are creating, conceptualizing, planning, composing—from soup to nuts—a writing project that is enacted as a web site . . . [not a] paper to be graded [but rather] something to be . . . experienced."

**Finding 2**

Four distinct types of ePortfolios have emerged in first-year writing classes: process, project, showcase, and reflective.

Our analysis of ePortfolios confirmed our initial observation that students produced different types of ePortfolios, distinguishable by their purpose and audience, in response to different assignments:

- *Process portfolios* documented the process of completing a single project, the product of which was most commonly an alphabetic essay. Process portfolios included the final product as well as a selection or comprehensive collection of process artifacts (drafts, writer's notes, reader responses, etc.) and a final reflection on the project.
- *Showcase portfolios* were similar to traditional, end-of-semester portfolios. Their purpose was to showcase the student's body of work produced over the semester and, usually, to present an argument about the student's achievement. These portfolios included polished pieces of writing, selected process artifacts, and reflective writing about the student's learning.
- *Reflective portfolios* also considered the students' work over the course of the semester, but had a distinctly self-evaluative purpose. These portfolios were produced in response to a particular assignment that asked students to define the standards by which they wanted their work to be evaluated and then to analyze their work according to those standards. Some, but not all, of these portfolios used work samples or excerpts as evidence of claims.
- *Project portfolios* were a new format in these writing courses in which the ePortfolio itself became the platform for the writing project. In other words, students were asked to develop a type of web site rather than a print essay. These portfolios also typically included elements of process work (drafts, work plans, peer reviews, reflections).

**Finding 3**

ePortfolios are shifting instructors' and students' attention to audiences other than the instructor.

Instructors reported increased audience awareness among students using ePortfolios. In particular, they observed students paying more attention to the ways in which multimodal/multimedia texts are constructed to appeal to audiences both within and beyond the classroom. Some instructors described ePortfolios as a tool for displacing the teacher as the primary audience for student writing. As one instructor put it, the question "what is somebody else going to do with this?" became a focus of instruction and of peer review. In short, instructors reported that teaching with ePortfolios had shifted the conceptual focus of their FYW courses from writing to be evaluated by a teacher to writing to be read by other audiences.

Most students, however, identified their teacher and perhaps classmates as the audience for their work. When students did conceptualize an audience beyond the classroom, that audience was most often broadly defined: for example, as a "general audience" or "anyone interested in the topic." When students identified external audiences, those audiences often remained close to the classroom (e.g., students or teachers). Few students identified multiple audiences for their ePortfolios. One student articulated the challenge of writing for both the teacher and an external audience:

> It is harder, because you have to make it . . . professional enough for the teacher to get a good grade, but if it's going to be a web site, it also has to be accessible enough to most people.

**Finding 4**

Although instructors perceived that students had mixed success writing for audiences with ePortfolios,

both instructors and students identified a wealth of examples of choices students made with audience in mind.

Instructors noted that only some of their students composed effectively for audiences other than the instructor. They described students simply uploading print texts; pasting and uploading the same texts; posting images with no apparent connection to the context of pages; linking various media objects but not discussing them; and generally not thinking about what a reader/viewer would need to interact productively with the ePortfolio.

However, when asked where they saw evidence of audience awareness in their students' ePortfolios, instructors offered a wealth of examples. Indeed, both instructors and students identified many examples of choices students had made while constructing their portfolios in order to meet the needs of an audience, and we found alignment among the examples each group offered. Table 1 compares the categories and examples of evidence we identified in the two data sources.

**Finding 5**

Audiences beyond the classroom largely remained imagined, as few students took the step of publishing their work beyond the classroom.

The ePortfolio system (TaskStream™) offered students several levels of permissions and privacy for their work. Most instructors required students to submit their work to them, and in some cases their classmates, through features that kept the work private. While the system also allowed students to publish their work on the Internet, with or without password protection, many students were unaware of this feature or unsure whether or not they had published their work. A third of the students stated that they would not share the work beyond the class, either because they lacked confidence in their writing or didn't think anyone beyond the class would find the work interesting. Some said they might publish an ePortfolio if their confidence increased or if they improved the work. Those who said they had shared or would share their work beyond the class commonly said they would do so with friends and/or family, not the identified audiences of the work.

**Finding 6**

While there is evidence that many students had multiple audiences in mind as they composed, their ePortfolios reflect varying levels of success in negotiating the needs and interests of multiple kinds of readers.

Ede and Lunsford's (1984) theoretical framework for audience allowed us to consider a range of potential audiences for student work, including a mass audience: teachers, friends, critics or evaluators, co-workers, themselves, and others. Across all types of portfolios, we identified the teacher and a mass audience as by far the most common audience roles. This finding is consistent with our interview data, which suggested that many students continued to identify teachers as their primary audience even when encouraged to target external audiences and that students had only a vague sense of potential external audiences for their work.

The portfolios of students who attempted to write for both their teacher and another audience, mass or not, often exhibited what we came to call *audience interference*, a phenomenon that results when students unsuccessfully attempt to meet the differing expectations and needs of more than one audience in the same ePortfolio. In particular, we found that portfolios exhibiting audience interference lacked the following features:

- intentional design of structure and navigation (i.e., purposeful naming and ordering of the sections to guide readers' experience of the portfolio);
- adequate contextualization of content and artifacts (i.e., sufficient information for readers to determine the purpose of the materials included in the portfolio); and
- flexible use of voices (i.e., appropriate shifts in tone and perspective to account for different readers' expectations).

By contrast, composers of portfolios that successfully negotiated multiple audiences thoughtfully attended to these same features, inviting different readers to have different experiences of the portfolio by offering them guidance in how to understand, experience, and interact with the portfolio.

## Discussion

The introduction of ePortfolios into the first-year writing program created both opportunities and challenges for instructors and students with respect to teaching and learning about audience. To be sure, ePortfolios prompted the instructors—and, as a result, the students—in this study to devote more attention to audience than they otherwise would have. As digital, online compositions that could be easily circulated to a range of potential audiences inside and outside of classrooms, ePortfolios opened up innumerable audience possibilities. At the same time, these ePortfolio affordances did not automatically translate into robust, diverse, audience-aware teaching and writing. Teachers who struggled to incorporate audience into their pedagogies in paper-based

Table 1
*Categories of Evidence of Audience Awareness*

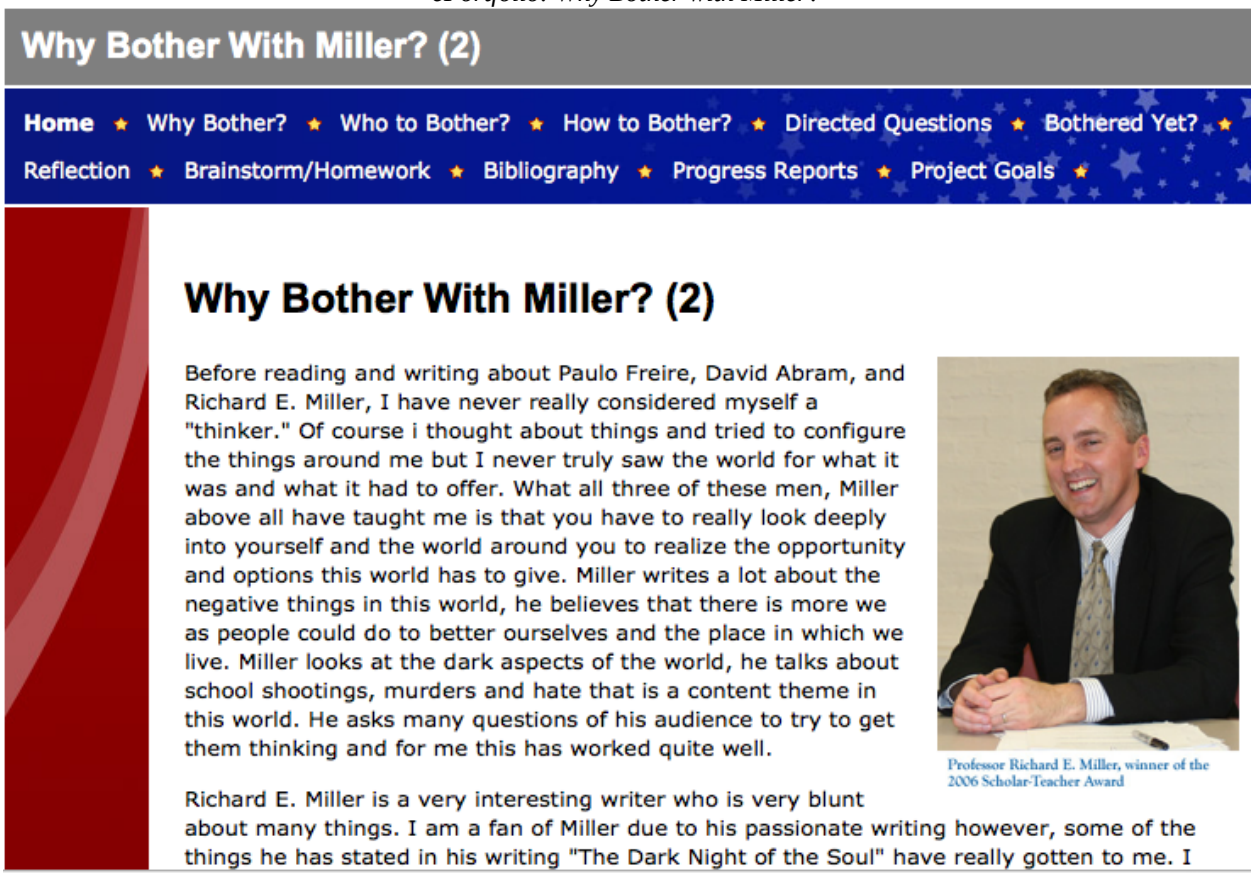
| Instructors (Reported finding evidence of audience awareness in these locations) | | Students (Reported making choices about the following with audience in mind) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Use of visuals | Choice of visuals<br>Consideration of composition<br>Intersection of visual and written | Media | Visuals make work more accessible<br>Included a music clip to listen to while viewing slideshow of images |
| Contextualizing | Contextualizing work<br>Prefaces/intros to bring reader into portfolio | Explanation and contextualizing | Writing to make work understandable if reader had not read original text<br>Adding quotes so reader could relate to original text |
| Design/structure /arrangement | Talking about use of the page, design<br>Expecting links<br>Discussing design and arrangement in terms of navigation | Structure/design | Designing for non-linear reading<br>Defining main idea on home page<br>Including section to define terms<br>Using quotations to introduce sections |
| Relationships between and among artifacts | | Theme/metaphor | Building each project around a theme<br>Using metaphor for structure (i.e., running a race, using remote control)<br>Using imagery of diverging/converging paths |
| Tone/voice | Using intimate or formal language<br>Using second person<br>Use of multiple languages | Tone/voice, language/ vocabulary | Trying to be fun, entertaining<br>Using "we"; using accessible language<br>Using quirky titles, plays on words |
| Direct address of reader/ viewer | "Exhortation to participate"<br>Asking questions without answering them<br>Giving reader "a turn" | Involving/ connecting to audience | Interviewing people<br>Using popular culture references<br>Exhorting audience to formulate own ideas |

environments generally continued to struggle; students who had difficulty writing for anyone other than their teachers in paper-based environments by and large continued to have this difficulty. Indeed, these struggles and difficulties sometimes were exacerbated by the introduction of ePortfolios. For instance, some of the students we interviewed were confused about whether they were supposed to be writing to their teacher, some external audience, or both. On a literal level, some did not know who could access their ePortfolio and who could not.

So while ePortfolios clearly provided the opportunity to compose for multiple audiences, they did not necessarily lead to successful writing of that sort. Still, we found that many students did at least gesture toward invoking multiple audiences inside and outside the classroom. We further observed considerable variance in how successfully students negotiated the needs and expectations of these multiple audiences. As we analyzed the ePortfolios, we identified three key rhetorical moves that largely determined the success of the ePortfolio in negotiating multiple audiences' needs and expectations: intentional design of structure and navigation; contextualization of content and artifacts; and flexible use of voices. In this section, we explain and illustrate these moves by describing two portfolios in detail.

When student composers failed to use these rhetorical moves, or failed to execute them successfully, we observed what we call audience interference. This phenomenon is exemplified in a project portfolio titled Why Bother With Miller? (Figure 2). In this ePortfolio, a student responded to Miller's (2008) essay "The Dark Night of the Soul" and compared Miller's views with those of two other authors, Freire (2008) and Abram (2008). The purpose

Figure 2
*ePortfolio: Why Bother with Miller?*




of the portfolio was to present the student's engagement with the course readings, using Miller (2008) as a touchstone. The ePortfolio included both product (a website that presents the project content) and process (documentation of how the project was produced). The primary audience, then, seems to be the instructor, and perhaps classmates. At the same time, the project is presented as a website, the student has taken some care to frame it with an accessible theme, and he sometimes writes about and explains the class and the readings in ways his teacher and classmates would already know—all of which suggests that he has in mind an external, perhaps mass, audience as well.

The student seemed to be aware that the needs and expectations of his multiple audiences are not the same, but he did not find a way to address them successfully, and this leads to the phenomenon we are calling audience interference. For instance, his use of structure and navigation was somewhat consistent and accessible. Riffing on a key phrase in Miller's (2008) essay—"Why bother?"—he designed a series of sections: Why Bother?, Who to Bother?, How to Bother?, and Bothered Yet? Within each section were subsections with pages entitled What Would Freire Say? and What Would Abram Say? The consistency of the structure and the play on the word "bother" invited reading by an external audience and showed that the student considered how a reader might experience the work. At the same time, an external reader would have no way of making sense of the section called Directed Questions, which is sandwiched between the final two "bother" sections, or of the various process-based sections that follow (Reflection, Brainstorm/Homework, Progress Reports, Project Goals; the section Bibliography—a product section—is inexplicably placed between Brainstorm/Homework and Progress Reports). The inconsistencies aside, it is clear that while the student's teacher and classmates will immediately apprehend what the student was doing with the structure and navigation, external readers would find it bewildering.

Further, the student provided little contextualization of the class and the readings. The home page contains a photo of Miller and began with the following text:

> Before reading and writing about Paulo Freire, David Abram, and Richard E. Miller, I have never

> really considered myself a "thinker." Of course I thought about things and tried to configure the things around me but I never truly saw the world for what it was and what it had to offer. What all three of these men, Miller above all have taught me is that you have to really look deeply into yourself and the world around you to realize the opportunity and options this world has to give. Miller writes a lot about the negative things in this world, he believes that there is more we as people could do to better ourselves and the place in which we live. Miller looks at the dark aspects of the world, he talks about school shootings, murders and hate that is a content theme in this world. He asks many questions of his audience to try to get them thinking and for me this has worked quite well.

The student did not introduce himself or fully explain his purpose. Again, the student's teacher and classmates may already know him and understand what he is doing, but an external reader would not.

The student did make some contextualizing moves. For instance, he attempted to explain Directed Questions to an external audience:

> At the beginning of class on the chalk board there will be directed questions to the students in this class. We are to answer them to help [the instructor], as well as the audience get a feel for where exactly we are at in our project as well as how we are feeling about our work up to date.

While this information seems clearly directed at an external reader—his teacher and classmates would already know all this—the instructor's name was used, but she was not introduced. Also, the teacher was distinguished from the audience, but the audience was not specified.

Part of the issue here is inadequate contextualization, but part of it is limited variance in voice. Most of the project was written in first person singular, presented as a response both to Miller and to the questions posed by the student (e.g., "So, who do we bother with these thoughts of reading and writing? Well I personally think we should start with ourselves"). At times, the writer adopted first-person plural, inviting readers to identify with him: "How do we do it? How do we bother these huge problems we have regarding reading and writing?" But then he slipped back into the first person singular, answering his own questions, without ever specifying who those readers are or what they might think about the questions posed. The composer seemed to want to write as an author of an original project, but he is constrained by his student voice.

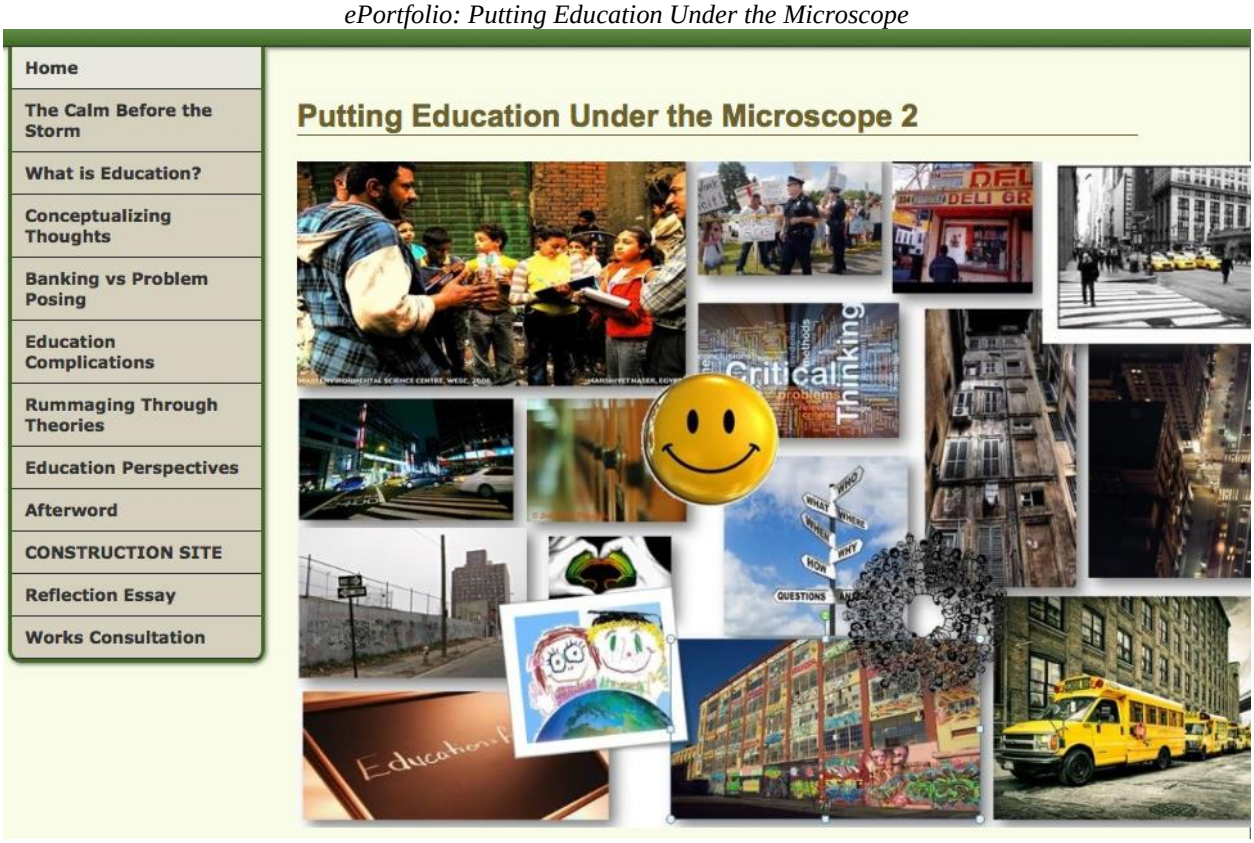
In sum, this student—like many students whose portfolios we read—struggled to meet the differing needs and expectations of his multiple audiences. We see gestures toward this goal, but we also see considerable audience interference.

While we observed numerous instances of audience interference, we also observed successful negotiations of multiple audiences. For instance, in another project portfolio, composed for the same teacher and in response to a similar assignment, a student accommodated multiple audiences by inviting different kinds of engagement with the ePortfolio. Like Why Bother with Miller?, Putting Education Under the Microscope offered a sustained personal engagement with course readings involving education and invoked both classroom and external audiences. However, the author of Putting Education Under the Microscope used more intentional structure and navigation, contextualization, and flexible use of voices to meet the needs and expectations of her various audiences.

This portfolio was structured to function as a book (Figure 3). The image on the front page served as a cover; there was a preface, an introduction, and an afterword; and the student referred to the navigation tabs as a "table of contents." Most of the individual sections serve as chapters of the book. A quick glance through the contents makes it clear that this personal and social investigation of education was designed as a public text for educators and students (indeed, unlike Why Bother with Miller?, it was published to the web).

Readers looking for an extended inquiry into education, then, will experience this portfolio much as they would a book—though a richly multimodal one. (This ePortfolio included 20 images, several of which are compound and two of which are animated; 11 links to videos, including nine movie clips curated by the composer using Windows MovieMaker; and links to sources in the works cited.) Some chapters offered personal narratives focused on the author's experience of education, others considered social forces that affect education, and still others grappled with competing educational theories. At the same time, readers interested in understanding or evaluating this student's abilities as a writer and a thinker were offered another way to experience the ePortfolio: through the "CONSTRUCTION ZONE," which collected documents related to the student's writing and thinking processes as she composed the ePortfolio—progress reports, brainstorms, and work plans. The upper-case letters were the composer's: she clearly intended to mark off this section as distinct from the others, presumably because readers who are not interested in her processes may wish to skip it. With this simple move, the composer was able to accommodate the expectations and needs of evaluators without interrupting or confusing the reading/viewing

Figure 3
*ePortfolio: Putting Education Under the Microscope*




experience of her primary intended audience: educators and students.

In addition to her careful attention to structure and navigation, this student contextualized her work in ways accessible to both classroom and external audiences. Here, for instance, is the beginning of her Preface:

> In the introduction of a book a reader is usually revealed to a table of contents. In my e-portfolio introduction you're going to be revealed to a series of ideas that construct my table of contents. In this e-portfolio you will be introduced to several forms of texts such as, Paulo Freire's "The Banking Concept of Education", Richard Rodriguez's "Achievement of Desire" and other forms of literature from authors such as Richard Hoggart, Alexander Kapp, and Malcolm Knowles. I want to reveal "you" the reader to not just different literatures that are focused around the idea of education, but also different types of media that support it as well. Several films such as "Lean on Me" a 1989 production as well as "Dangerous Minds" a 1995 production have great significance to the idea of valuing education. They allow me to portray my ideas visually for you to grasp and perceive all the information being thrown at you. I want to make you see the many struggles "Education" as a whole has not only endured but has sir come to from the moment it began, to its current standards.

While the prose certainly bears markers of a basic writer, we can see that the author was working to establish a context that will allow readers to understand, appreciate, and interact with the materials she presented in the portfolio.

The direct, intimate voice we hear in the passage above is maintained throughout the chapters. While the author mostly used first-person singular, she occasionally used the second-person "you" to invite readers to consider a particular idea or story. She explained in her CONSTRUCTION ZONE, which is addressed to her teacher (and perhaps classmates), that she wanted "readers to inhabit the idea that education is not something that can be taught in one specific way." To explain what she meant by this, the author shifted registers:

> Overall Goal For Viewers—Education cannot be acted through any one way . . . or any single

> method it must be expressed onto its subjects in a way that gives them room for trial and error. Education is also perceived in different ways how are we to judge how one subject might handle a certain situation that another might excel in? There are not any more problems with the Banking Concept of Education than there are with Problem-Posing or any other synthesized form of education.

This voice, which we might characterize as efficient, declarative, and critically distant, stands in stark but appropriate contrast to the expansive, inquiring, and intimate voice featured in the chapters. This student was able to use voices flexibly to meet her various audiences' expectations and needs.

Why do some students struggle to compose for multiple audiences while others are able to do so more successfully? What are the causes of audience interference? These questions bear further study, but based on our analysis of student ePortfolios and our interviews with students and instructors, we hypothesize the following possible causes:

- The power of prior knowledge. For many students, writing in school has involved writing for teachers exclusively. Even when teachers instruct them to write for an audience other than themselves, many students perform writing for other audiences while viewing themselves, still, as writing primarily or only for their teacher. In addition, students may associate ePortfolios with print portfolios that they have completed in the past, whose audience most likely would have been teachers or other assessors of their work. In both instances, we may be witnessing an inappropriate application of prior knowledge (Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, Lovett, & Norman, 2010). In any case, in their interviews with us, most students indicated that they were writing for their teachers, even when they had identified an external audience within their ePortfolios.
- Audience as an undifferentiated concept. For many students, especially those unaccustomed to writing for external audiences, the instruction to "find an audience" or "write for your audience" does not help them do these things. The undifferentiated concept of audience may be too broad to be helpful to these students. Without resources for and instruction on identifying or constructing particular audiences, they often default to a general audience or "anyone."
- Misapprehensions about audiences for online writing. This explanation is a particular instance of the previous one: for many students, placing their writing online means writing for anyone. Ironically, asking students to broaden the potential audience for their writing by putting it online may have the effect of making it more difficult for them to consider and write for external audiences because they believe that online writing is read by anyone and everyone. They must be prompted to think about how writing circulates (or does not) to particular readers.
- Confusion about the status of the circulation of their ePortfolio. Several students did not know whether their ePortfolios were published to the web or not. Some did not know that they could publish their ePortfolios to the web and others did not know that they had the choice not to do so. Students may have been genuinely confused about who could access the portfolios.
- Perceived purpose/audience conflict. Some students were not convinced that anyone outside the classroom would be interested in their writing, particularly when that writing was a traditional academic essay. They considered essays to be school-based genres written for the purpose of evaluating their work, and they found it difficult, sometimes impossible, to re-purpose that writing for external audiences.

## Conclusion

The list above offers possible pedagogical and curricular foci for working with students as they compose ePortfolios. We believe that students (and teachers) would benefit from explicitly addressing students' prior knowledge about writing and portfolios; developing a robust concept of audience; exploring who reads online writing and how; clarifying how student writing, including web-based writing, circulates; and attending to the alignment (or misalignment) of purposes and audiences for student writing. We also recommend explicit attention to, and practice in, writing for multiple audiences and creating ePortfolios that offer different pathways for different readers. We believe that assignments and instruction that draw students' attention to the three rhetorical moves we have discussed here—intentional design of structure and navigation, adequate contextualization of content and artifacts, and flexible use of voices—is a promising approach to helping students learn the critical twenty-first century skill of composing for multiple audiences. At the same time, we believe that this study demonstrates the need for rich constructions of

"audience" in the ePortfolio research community. We hope this investigation provides the impetus for further work on this critical concept.

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