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# MEDIATED TEXTS: A HEURISTIC FOR ACADEMIC WRITING

*ABSTRACT: Student petitions for alternative demonstrations of competency in academic writing led to the investigation of the use of "mediated texts" as a classroom practice which meets the requirements of "accommodation" as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This paper defines mediated texts, describes case studies which use these texts with deaf college students who are basic writers, and shows the connection between this heuristic and the development of academic writing skills for ESL and basic writers. Finally, it analyzes the theoretical issues raised by this approach and discusses their implications for classroom implementation.*

The passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, ADA, in 1990, has challenged colleges to find ways of helping non-traditional students succeed in mainstreamed environments. Under ADA, an institution must provide such students with appropriate accommodation to ensure them equal opportunity to participate in the academic setting. Because accommodation is not meant to alter the fundamental nature of a program or its standards, either for entrance or exit, it is incumbent on us as teachers to find ways of creating pedagogies and practices which optimize success for students with special needs.

As a federally-funded institution, the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID)—one of the seven colleges of the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT)—has been, since its opening in 1968, at the forefront of accommodation. At the institutional level, where mandates are clearly defined, making necessary accommodations has

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proven manageable. For its 1000 deaf students, services such as professional tutoring, interpreting, notetaking, academic advising, personal counseling, and job placement assistance have been routinely provided. And, because of its research mandate, NTID has been able to study and refine many of these services over time. At the classroom level, however, providing appropriate accommodation that goes beyond these “services” has been more challenging. Without compromising the traditional goals and standards within higher education, faculty have grappled with designing the kinds of pedagogical accommodations that will ensure student “success” within the classroom and beyond.

The case studies we have undertaken and the resulting methodology which we recommend in this paper were prompted by our struggle with accommodation within the writing classroom. Although the focus of our discussion is on students who are deaf, the concept of the “mediated text” as a writing heuristic has implications for all teachers who work with non-traditional college students, particularly ESL and basic writers.

## **Phase I**

The initial phase of our study began when several students offered a radical interpretation of their rights of accommodation under ADA. Beyond the services guaranteed them, like interpreters and classroom notes, they defined performance measures based on written English as “academic barriers” and suggested substitute activities and measures which would fall under their interpretation of “accommodation.” In lieu of RIT’s test of minimal writing competency—an exit test from English Composition—students suggested a videotaped response which they would deliver in American Sign Language (ASL) to an exit writing test question. Although this substitution of a non-written for a written medium may seem a reasonable request in content-based courses, for those of us who teach writing, such an alternative undermines some traditional academic writing assumptions—particularly fluent, independently-produced academic writing that meets minimum college standards. We were both intrigued and worried about this alternative to demonstrating academic writing, and what it could mean to our students’ present academic progress and to their future success.

Although our response to our students’ proposal was somewhat reluctant, we agreed it was worthy of examination. Consequently, we designed a classroom research project, in the form of case studies, to investigate the feasibility of an alternative approach to producing a written text that meets minimum writing competency. We chose three

students in the “D” range in Composition with a high probability of failing the exit text. We videotaped the students signing their response to an exit test question. Each videotape was then voiced by four different interpreters who produced “translations” from one language, ASL, into spoken English. The resulting audiotapes were then transcribed into written English. Finally, the students chose from the four transcriptions the one text that best represented their intent and style to submit as their exit test. We labeled these final written products “mediated texts” because of the involvement of second and third party “mediators” – the interpreter and the transcriber – in producing the final text.

On a practical level, we found many aspects of the experiment to be problematic. The four different transcriptions for each student varied significantly in length, development, level of sophistication, lexicon, and style. There were discrepancies in the interpretations of certain signs that drastically changed meaning. Beyond the problems of transcription and interpretation, the texts themselves raised issues regarding style and content. For example, when we asked for a response to these transcripts from the director of RIT’s writing program, he described two of them as “too oral,” as “not writerly enough.” He saw them as “transcriptions of a monologue,” not essays. Furthermore, none of the mediated texts chosen by the students as their exit test satisfied the criteria for minimum competency. On a more serious level, moreover, the transcriptions raised questions for us about the ability of students to produce independent texts and about ownership of the text.

These results illustrate the on-going tension within the academy between reforming existing practices to accommodate non-traditional student writers and preserving long-standing assumptions about the production of written texts. As reformists, we believe that students should be able to demonstrate knowledge in various ways and that there is no single literacy that should dominate the academy. In fact, the academy should make room for different forms of discourse and should value these disparate ways of knowing and of demonstrating knowledge. Our own collaborative work is evidence of this belief.

Additionally, we have spent much of our professional lives seeking ways to integrate marginalized groups, like our deaf students, into the dominant culture. As composition teachers, we have allied ourselves with postmodernists, feminists, and multiculturalists, because we recognize how the academy and the workplace perpetuate traditional power structures and eurocentric, mainstream – “hearing” – values. For many basic writing students, but particularly for deaf students, these “power structures” are often linked to issues of language, especially the requirement to produce standard written English. So, despite how we perceive our efforts and our theoretical positions, our

students see us as “gatekeepers” in their progress toward their college degrees and, therefore, their professional lives.

Allan Luke, in his book, *The Insistence of the Letter*, criticizes both gatekeeping and the gatekeepers: “English language and literacy courses thus stand as the significant gatekeepers for regulating membership and access to dominant discourses and traditions, relations of knowledge, power, and authority” (Luke vii). Linda Brodkey echoes this sentiment, describing the function of writing courses as “guard[ing] the gates of the profession” (221). In theory, abandoning the gatekeeper role is attractive. However, we continue to see on a practical level—where our preservationist side emerges—that traditional print literacies affect the academic success and potential upward mobility of basic writing students.

One driving force behind the mission of RIT as a technical institute is to prepare its students for the workplace, and the parallel mission of NTID is to move its students into a different work force, freeing them from print shops and auto-assembly lines. Students choose to attend NTID/RIT, we assume, because of this stated mission and their desire to join the professional class. In a recent *College English* article, “Students’ Goals, Gatekeeping, and Some Questions of Ethics,” Jeff Smith reiterates this contention that students attend college because they want “rewarding jobs” and “career advancement” (303). He argues that we prefer to ignore students’ motivation for pursuing a college degree—they want to be “credentialed” (303). As their teachers, then, we have to accept that a critical part of this credentialing process requires that students “learn those rules” of written English and demands that we “are there to teach them” (304). Smith further describes this teacher-student relationship as an “enterprise” (312) which consists of the teacher and of the students who are now “clients” and eventually become professionals who will also have “clients.” For him, a teacher “cannot ignore the claims of that larger enterprise” (312)—college, community, workplace. Smith describes himself—and us—as “agents” of this enterprise, one consequence of which is the “obligation” of “gatekeeping” (312).

As composition teachers, we cannot abdicate the role we play in preparing basic writing students for the current political, social, and economic realities of the workplace and beyond. In Rochester, for example, as the local industries like Kodak and Xerox downsize, a large number of deaf employees have been either terminated or kept from promotion because of their weak written communication skills. While we might like to think that a more flexible work environment would not penalize productive workers for this specific “deficiency,” the bottom line mentality is not that flexible. As proficient as these deaf employees might be in ASL or in other literacies, their proficiencies have not been sufficient to save jobs or facilitate promotions in the work-

place.

These same forces which control local industry now dominate Washington as well. When ADA was passed, we believed that, instead of our students having to adapt to the workplace, that the workplace would be forced to find ways to adapt to them. We relied on the good intentions of people and the spirit of the law. Now, the only news we hear is that of budget cuts, the end of Affirmative Action, and the end of unfunded mandates like ADA. These realities have moved us closer to the preservationist stance than we normally would be or would we feel comfortable.

## Phase II

As we grappled with the tensions between our reformist and preservationist selves, we understood that our resistance was to the concept of mediated texts as *alternatives* to print literacy. Therefore, we decided to look at mediated texts as a *strategy* in acquiring academic writing skills, hoping there would be less dissonance. Shirley Brice Heath used a similar strategy for disadvantaged hearing students who, she says, “have judged themselves entirely unsuccessful in writing” (Langer 99). She asked them to “transcribe a short portion of their talk from [a] tape and to work with the teacher and another student to turn the oral language into a written form” (Langer 99). We recognized from the success of her work that this translation technique had potential for our students. Rather than looking at the mediated text as an alternative to academic writing, which connotes substitution, we were drawn to this technique as a way of helping students develop their academic writing.

For the second phase of this study, then, we modified many variables—the student profile, the translation process, and the students’ involvement with the mediated texts.

### Student Participants

First, we targeted a different group of students—those whose compositions ranged between “C” and “B-” but who had not yet passed the timed exit exam. These students were successful in many of their other college courses which emphasized discipline knowledge and technical expertise rather than writing fluency. We thought them to be good candidates for a study of how mediated texts could help them demonstrate what they know through writing.

### Changes in Methodology

Second, while in phase one the students were given the exit test question and asked to respond to it on video without any other prepa-

ration, in the next phase, two students—Chad and Mark—were asked to follow a more traditional drafting process. These students began by independently producing their written response to a question. We then asked them to continue the drafting process on another day by meeting, along with one interpreter and their instructor, in a small conference room. Each student responded in an informal conversational way to the same exit test prompt using American Sign Language. The interpreter simultaneously translated the ASL into spoken English and voiced it onto an audiotape machine. The audiotape was later transcribed; each student's transcription was given to him as his second draft, to be used in the revision process. For his final paper, each student had access to his first draft and his mediated text.

This change in the translation process, which produced the mediated text, involved the elimination of the video; student feedback in the initial experiment suggested that videotaping was overly formal and intimidating. Simultaneous voice translation corrected these problems. Using one interpreter instead of four reduced the complexity of the process, which allowed the students a more natural, interactive way of developing their thoughts on a topic. The resulting audiotape transcriptions also had a quicker turn-around time, which resembled a more natural drafting process.

In phase one, the students simply chose one out of four mediated texts and submitted it as their final product. The decisions they made were a "matching" process rather than a production one, more passive than active. In the second phase, students assumed responsibility for writing both the first and the final drafts themselves, using the mediated text as a significant part of the heuristic.

### **Findings—Student One**

As a way of reporting the findings of the second phase of our study, we first want to focus on one student writer—Mark—and his mediated text. Mark is a twenty-one-year-old, Cambodian-born student pursuing an associate's degree in Industrial Drafting Technology and aspiring toward a bachelor's degree. He became deaf at the age of five and moved to Massachusetts two years later, where he began to learn signed and written English. He has some lip-reading ability and uses voice occasionally, but he prefers a combination of signed English and American Sign Language without voice as his mode of communication. With hearing people, including his parents, Mark uses written English. His parents speak Cambodian and some English at home. Mark has attended mainstreamed programs since kindergarten and is experienced using interpreters. He is a very conscientious and successful student who, like many basic writers, considers his major obstacle in composition to be putting down his thoughts in appropriate words and grammatically and syntactically correct sentences.

For his first draft, Mark wrote, without time limitations, a response to the following prompt—a typical exit test question given to all students in RIT’s English Composition courses:

Modern technology helps us in our everyday lives. Select one invention that has had a significant impact on modern life (i.e., personal computer, TTY [teletypewriter], TV captioning, Internet, etc.). Describe the ways in which your life would be different without this invention. Develop your essay with specific examples and details.

In looking at the introductory paragraph of Mark’s first written draft, we see many of the problems deaf students face in writing—syntax, grammar, and diction:

Since the invention of TTY devices, there have been a better life for those people who lost a voice and speech and their relationship with hearing people. Without these new technology, many deaf people such as me would not have a good life as well as socializing with hearing people. Modern technology such as TTY devices have helped our everyday lives for those people who lost a voice and cannot speak.

More important than the problems with surface features, however, this introductory paragraph makes essentially only one sweeping point: that people without voice and speech are helped by the invention of the TTY, because it gives them a connection to the hearing world. That point is repeated explicitly in the first and second sentences and is implied in the third.

Later, Mark responded to the same prompt in American Sign Language to create his mediated text, which shows noteworthy differences:

My topic of modern technology will be about the TTY. I’d like to talk about the different evolutions of technology in the world. There have been a lot. Before any technology was invented, there were just deaf people, and words were nothing to deaf people. They were just mute. There was nothing there. How do people communicate with them in the world? I’d like to explain about modern technology and how it’s helped us communicate, receive information, and become more independent.

At a glance, the changes from his first draft seem minimal. However, when we take a closer look, we find some interesting shifts. In the

mediated text, Mark establishes a larger context for the invention of the TTY—the “evolution” of modern technology. In his first draft, the phrase “people who lost a voice and speech” focuses on the pathology of deafness, while in the mediated text, the phrase “words were nothing to deaf people” connotes more about the nature of spoken language itself and its role in the communication of deaf people. Also, Mark’s use of the first person pronoun in the mediated text helps establish him as an authority in his argument. The first draft hypothesizes about life’s difficulties without the TTY (“would not have a good life as well as socializing with hearing people”), while the mediated text focuses on communication, not just socialization (“how do people communicate with them in the world?”). The word “mute” in the mediated text conveys not only a physical condition but also the marginality and isolation that accompany this condition (“there was nothing there”). Finally, regardless of how we feel about a formulaic thesis statement, Mark’s final contention in the mediated text is much more specific than the repetitive and general final sentence of his first draft.

Mark’s use of the mediated text to compose his final draft allows him to move towards a more coherent presentation of his thesis:

There have been a lot of different evolution of modern technology in the world right now than before. Most of them have helped a lot of deaf and hearing people become united together than before. For instance, TTY is a new modern technology that has changed a lot of deaf and hearing people life after it has been invented, such as deaf people could communicate with hearing people and more. TTY also helped deaf people receive information and become more independent very quickly.

We find it interesting that in this final draft Mark provides a place for hearing people to benefit from this technology and that he sees it as a site for community. What we miss, however, is Mark’s “presence” in the text and the imagery of his still-unpolished prose.

Mark’s third draft—his final revision—was a minimally passing exit exam. The improvements from the first through the third were substantial enough for all readers to agree that it should pass. The examples offered earlier, all from the introductions of his three drafts, represent the kinds of revisions he made throughout his texts. The organization of the essay, the improvements in sentence structure and syntax, the clear use of the first person stance on the issue, and the development of the idea through examples all point to the positive influence of the mediated text. Consider, for example, the following sentence from the first draft:

Another reason [why the TTY is important] is to receive many new informations easier by themselves such as asking the operator for company phone numbers, emergency phone numbers, etc. than depending on other people, who could hear and speak, to speak on the phone for them.

In the mediated text, Mark devotes four-and-one-half pages to a discussion of how to receive information through the TTY and disperses many examples over several different paragraphs. In the final draft, Mark writes three sentences which revise the original one sentence while including many of the ideas and examples which had been clarified through the mediated text. The final version reads:

Another reason [why the TTY is important] is receiving information. For instance, we as deaf people, could call the police, the fire department, the operator, the hospital, or whatever very quickly when we have a last minutes emergency. There are just many different uses for the TTY.

Although Mark had the opportunity to produce an error-free paper by submitting the mediated text, he chose instead to continue the revision process with the third draft. He explained to us that he wanted to expand his ideas in certain places and was not content with the mediated text – the second draft – even though it was syntactically and grammatically better than the third. Because we had not asked the question directly, we can only hypothesize why Mark made this decision. Was it his sense of integrity or his fear of plagiarism? Or was it his need to own his text? In our next case study, we attended to these specific questions while we continued to analyze the value of the mediated text.

### **Findings – Student Two**

In order to further our investigation of the mediated text as a heuristic, we looked at the drafting process of a second student, Chad. He is a twenty-year-old, Canadian-born student who has been deaf since birth. Chad attended residential institutes for the deaf in both the United States and Canada through high school; at RIT he had his first experience with a mainstreamed academic setting. Chad is a second-year Information Technology major, pursuing a bachelor's degree and aspiring to a master's degree. His preferred mode of communication is American Sign Language (without voice) in academic situations; at home, with his hearing family, he uses sign language that follows English word order and incorporates a great deal of fingerspelling. With hearing people who don't sign, he relies exclusively on writing. Chad sees himself as a "satisfactory writer" whose writing is "com-

prehensible," but identifies his lack of English vocabulary as a problem (in contrast to his extraordinary fluency in ASL), and he feels limited in getting his points across, a frustration often voiced by many other basic writers.

Chad wrote a response to the same prompt which Mark had been given—one aspect of modern technology that has had a significant impact on his life. The introductory paragraph of his first draft clearly shows his skill with introducing the general topic and narrowing it down to a thesis. Although it is more fluent than Mark's text, it is still marred by grammatical errors:

Internet is today's modern technology that makes life easier for everyone—the deaf, blind, crippled, and so forth. For this reason, internet is an electronic way of getting any kind of information through a modem to another modem all over the world. One of the most useful place to find information is using the world wide web where it have everything you need to know about. In other words, it's also known as our electronic encyclopedia. Internet made life easier and what would it be like if we never had internet?

Life without the internet would be very difficult because there would be no easier access to information. Secondly, there wouldn't be equal opportunities; especially for the deaf. Lastly, this world wouldn't be much of a friendlier place to be in because we wouldn't be able to make friends internationally.

The focus of this introduction is clearly on the beneficial aspects of the Internet, particularly for information-gathering. Rhetorically, Chad is moving toward the traditional three-paragraph development of the thesis. Perhaps the most innovative aspect of this introduction is that it is spread over two paragraphs and the thesis statement is cast as a question and a series of answers.

The next time we see Chad's ideas on the topic is in the mediated text. The most apparent difference between his first draft and his mediated text is the contrast in length—a six-paragraph essay versus five full pages of information and ideas. What immediately strikes us in these pages are the changes in direction which Chad chooses. Initially, he takes the same attitude toward his subject (the positive aspects of the Internet), although making a much more detailed argument to support his opinion. By the second page of his mediated text, however, Chad is beginning to explore the "dangers" of the Internet as well as its benefits; he briefly likens it to a "drug" to which a person can become "addicted." We also see a more sophisticated way of broaching and expanding ideas raised in the first draft. So, for example, in the

first draft Chad devotes a whole paragraph to the ways in which the Internet helps to develop equal opportunities for people who are “deaf, blind, and crippled,” describing how the “text on the Internet doesn’t reveal our disabilities.” In the mediated text, Chad continues this theme of the Internet preventing discrimination, but doesn’t fall into generalizations as he had in his first draft. He also introduces the idea of discussing the Internet as “neutral space”:

Well, blind people can use the internet, because I was chatting with this one guy on the internet and I just wanted to let him know I was deaf. As we were talking through the conversation, he said “oh well, by the way I’m blind.” And I was puzzled as to how he could use it, but he had a keyboard . . . a specialized keyboard or something that transcribed his voice into the typed text. So with the internet if he wanted a job or just to chat with somebody or conduct business over internet, he would be able to, was just normal. You don’t have to worry about . . . being, you know, the most articulate or skilled writer and I was really surprised when I found out that this person was blind.

So I think that the Internet will help to prevent discrimination. It seems to be a very neutral space, and it will force us to judge each other on. . . you know, the words and the intelligence and the vocabulary. You know, it’s uh sometimes you think it’s uh, you know, this person you’re conversing with, you’re “wow, this person is very smart by the way this person speaks and types and the words he uses,” and then later you find out that the person is disabled whether he be deaf or in a wheel chair or blind and then another person might use very simplistic vocabulary and think well “gee, he’s a knucklehead,” and you find out that he’s a regular hearing person. So, in that respect it’s a very neutral space.

In the mediated text Chad includes other points not in his first draft, like the ways in which the Internet makes research outside the library possible. Mark, the other student writer present during the taping of the mediated text, commented that the Internet might contribute to the “demise of libraries,” which led Chad to see the negative effects of Internet technology on the postal system as well. Mark asked Chad to consider the effects of “the different questionable things that are on the Internet, like porno.” Chad then considered how the Internet seems to progress without our taking careful stock of it and finally suggested limitations that should be placed on it.

By the final draft, Chad had the opportunity to sift through his

initial draft and the mediated text, extracting those ideas which he found most useful to the development of his thesis. Chad writes:

Internet is today's technology that allows us to communicate with everyone in the world and access to information via a computer hooked up with a modem. Today, isolated internet users sit in front of a monitor using addictive internet applications such as Internet Relay Chat, World Wide Web, newsgroups, E-mail, conference rooms, and many more. What would happen to our society if the government shut down the internet?

Remind yourself that our life are a lot easier because of the internet. For this reason, we can use inexpensive Internet Relay Chat to your families and friends without paying phone bills. We can use World Wide Web for the following: we can get free electronic newspaper daily, go shopping in your home on a rainy day, obtain a lot of information for your research paper without going to the library, and many more. In addition, we can write letters to our friends and families and they can get it in a matter of seconds without the need of stamps. The bottom line is, we are living in a society full of people who no longer wants to wait and requesting speedy services. Internet is here to satisfy our luxurious needs.

Chad has maintained the two-paragraph introduction and the question-answer format of his first draft. The reference to "isolated internet users" and their "addictive internet applications" immediately picks up the drug metaphor which he had begun in his mediated text; he also takes a critical stance which had not before existed. The second paragraph is filled with details regarding various ways in which one can use the Internet, including an embedded reference to libraries and post offices being rendered obsolete by the Internet. His final assertion is stronger; the phrase "luxurious needs" reinforces the criticism inherent in the drug metaphor.

Perhaps the most interesting and valuable emergence from text to text is the drug metaphor. As a passing remark, made halfway in jest in the mediated text, Chad signed, "And some people really are addicted to the internet. I think they really should set up some kind of rehab or recovery program for them (smile). It's getting serious, like a drug." In the final draft, this germ of an idea from the mediated text becomes the basis for his critique of the Internet. Chad sets up a comparison between drug use and addiction to the Internet by focusing on the progression of use; as a person escalates in his/her drug use from pot to crack and finally to cocaine, so an "Internet addict" progresses

from e-mail to newsgroups to “the addictive World Wide Web.” He compares the effects of a possible government shutdown of the Internet to a drug user experiencing withdrawal symptoms.

The rest of his final draft proceeds in a more balanced way than had his first draft, which focused only on the benefits of the Internet; in the final draft, Chad brings together both its positive and negative aspects. He maintains the point about the Internet providing equal opportunity for marginalized groups, like the deaf, the blind, and so forth. He again mentions the influence of the Internet in helping families communicate more easily across distances. New, as a result of the mediated text, is the reference to the threats to the postal system, to workers who will be replaced by this technology, and to children’s “innocence” because of the amount of nudity and sex available on the Internet.

Chad’s final draft also points out that we have come too far to retreat to life before the Internet. The addictive aspects of the Internet, the threats it poses — they are mitigated by its ease and our dependence on this new technology. He writes, “We have to accept that we cannot go back to the hard labor days anymore because the internet is our new oxygen.”

If you remember, we had wondered about our first student, Mark, and his decision not to adopt for his final draft the error-free sentences of the mediated text. Chad made the same decision. He created a new text that took ideas, but not sentences (again, error-free), from the mediated text. We had not asked Mark about this choice, but this time we explicitly discussed with Chad the decision he made. Chad did not feel that he wanted to borrow the exact wording of the mediated text but instead to make it his own — “no cheating.” He felt strongly about writing in his own style and language, using his own “voice.” His response supports Maurice Nevile’s contention — with reference to J. Gee — that “any language use cannot be separated from the ‘identities’ of the users, which represent ‘socioculturally characteristic ways of being in the world — associations among ways of thinking. . . acting. . . valuing. . .’” (qtd. in Nevile 39). Clearly, Chad saw, even in the errors of his prose, some cultural-linguistic identity.

## Overall Implications

We started this series of case studies from a recognition that our students, who represent a unique, non-traditional population within the academy, could benefit from a broad interpretation of “accommodation” as defined by ADA. This “accommodation” is critical because our students are entering a world of academic discourse, which for all students is alien and new, but which, for non-traditional students, be-

comes a serious obstacle. For students using English as a second or third language, as well as for all basic writers, expectations of academic writing are more mysterious than they are to the traditional, if uninitiated, college student. Producing academic writing that demonstrates a critical understanding of specific problems, persuasiveness, an integration of diverse perspectives and multiple sources, and currency (Nevile 43) becomes a Herculean feat. The mediated text as an accommodation specifically designed for all these students provides one strategy which can facilitate the process of developing academic writing skills.

The issue of accommodation as mandated by ADA does not extend to ESL and basic writers in the same way in which it applies to deaf students. However, this heuristic can have practical and significant classroom applications for both groups. The parallel for certain ESL writers would lie in the use of a first-language voiced "draft" which would allow them to express their ideas, unencumbered by problems of correct English usage. Their spoken language would be simultaneously translated into English on an audiotape (just like the voiced translation of Mark and Chad's signed responses). The transcribed audiotape text would then serve as the mediated text for an ESL student to use either as a drafting heuristic— as a basis for developing academic discourse— or as a "workbook" for sentence-level language learning. A second population that could benefit from the mediated text is comprised of those basic writing students who use English as their first language but who produce a type of inter-language because of dialect and home-language influences. For these students, the audiotape of their ideas would be transcribed into academic discourse, providing them with a heuristic that can be used as a draft of an essay or as a source of language study. Chad told us, for instance, that, "It is interesting to see my ideas in standard written English," a comment which reflects the experience of many of our students. Finally, the mediated text would become an effective strategy for those basic writers whose complex thoughts are often lost as they try to compose in academic discourse and whose products, like Mark and Chad's, do not accurately represent the full scope of their thoughts. Not only would it support student development in composing more sophisticated, complex, and engaging products, but it would also provide the students with more control over a process which has always limited the expression of their ideas. For those of us engaged in the teaching of writing, the possibilities of using this heuristic over time could mean that, as V. Beasley suggests, instead of remediating students, we initiate them into the world of academic discourse (qtd. in Nevile 49).

Freed from the constraints of having to think in one language and write in another, students can express more complex and complete ideas when producing and then using the mediated text as a heu-

ristic. In fact, Chad's final draft—to a greater extent than Mark's—demonstrates what Cheryl Geisler calls the “multi-modal approach.” According to Geisler, “expertise in academic literacy can best be conceived as the ability to negotiate three distinct worlds of discourse: the *domain content world* of logically-related truths, the *narrated world* of everyday experience, and the *rhetorical world* of abstract authorial conversation (44).” “Domain-content” involves taking discipline or domain knowledge and putting it into English, recognizing multiple worlds of discourse, and negotiating among those multiple worlds. The “narrated world” requires using narrated experience in a hypothetical way, manipulating stories to develop new arguments, and applying stories to other arguments as a way of testing the logic. The “rhetorical world” combines the content knowledge and the rhetorical process.

As a result of using his mediated text, Chad's final draft in particular reflects a new fluidity in his movement among these three domains. Chad's creation of the drug metaphor, for example, shows how stories from everyday experience can be re-created to develop a new argument. Chad goes beyond citing a story as an example or an illustration of a claim. The final draft, then, demonstrates Chad's progress within the “content domain” when he embeds opposing viewpoints by creating an analogy between the world of the Internet and the drug culture.

We have thus far concentrated on the successful use of the mediated text. We cannot ignore, however, the various problems that may arise in adopting this strategy. On the most practical level, using the mediated text requires a great deal of time (from the instructor) and a significant investment of resources (for the interpreter and transcriber)—issues inherent in any attempt at change. In addition, there is always the possibility of abuse. One of our students, not involved in this study, recently admitted that he signed his ideas for his short story essay to his roommate, who then wrote them down in standard English. The “translator” became the “writer,” even though the student saw himself as the author merely dictating his ideas. However, if mediated texts are part of a sequenced, guided pedagogy, the misuses would be minimized.

On a more philosophical level, some will suggest that using a mediated text discourages independence in writing; some will have concerns over the consequences for these students once they leave the academic environment, enter the work force, and are asked to produce their own texts. There is also the thorny question of ownership when students have access to the language and syntactic structures produced by others.

It was, in fact, these issues of independence and ownership, coupled with assessment, that prompted our initial skepticism in us-

ing the mediated text as an alternative to the traditional demonstration of print literacy. Our first phase of this study confirmed the legitimacy of our concerns. But, in revising our research question and adapting our methodology, we found that the issues of independence and ownership were minimized. In order to reduce the possibility of students co-opting the language and syntactic structures of the mediated text, we recommend that instruction in the appropriate use of this heuristic be an integral part of its implementation.

The use of the mediated text proved to be successful for Mark and Chad in allowing them to pass their exit exams, but it was an isolated event in their experience in college writing courses. We strongly suggest that students have multiple opportunities to take advantage of this heuristic in their writing courses. Mediated texts could also prove valuable in other discipline-based courses that rely on written texts to demonstrate mastery, mirroring and augmenting the benefits gleaned from the writing across the curriculum movement. In addition, students experienced in using this heuristic appropriately—as a stage in the drafting process which allows them to move toward a product—will become more adept in producing academic writing, in yoking the domain, content, and rhetorical worlds which Geisler has identified.

When we began this study, we were uncertain about the implications of using this heuristic in an academic setting where it could be seen as giving some students an unfair advantage. The case studies, however, demonstrate that students felt so strongly about their own voice and thoughts that they did not sacrifice them for linguistic perfection or grammatical fluency. Instead, they took advantage of this heuristic to express their ideas more thoroughly and with increasing sophistication. Given these preliminary results and the potential of the mediated text as a heuristic, our hope is that teachers will convince colleges and institutions to support the development and use of this approach as a viable way of meeting the needs of non-traditional students.

As we step back and think about what this project has meant, it is clear that its benefits have been not only for the students, but also for us as teachers. When we listened to our students and attempted new ways of accommodating their needs, we had the opportunity to challenge our long-held assumptions about the production of academic writing, consider new ways of “doing business,” and embrace the resulting innovations.

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