

Cooltown—The Place of Intellectual Work

Jeff Rice

When I became the new WPA at the University of Detroit Mercy (UDM), I was invited to participate in a faculty development workshop on technology and pedagogy. As the discussion shifted to audience members' experiences with technology, assessment, and writing, the majority of the responding voices expressed hostility to using computers in their courses. A panel member of the workshop (and proponent of technology), I found myself defending computer use against complaints that it discourages teacher-student contact, creates serious labor issues (outsourcing courses to distance education), and destroys the "essence" of good teaching that drew us to the profession in the first place. During the workshop, I was not troubled by these voices of dissent. I understand their concerns, and I feel these are important matters to consider as higher education increasingly turns its attention toward integrating technology into teaching.

What concerns me instead is how faculty often base their perception of technology, education, and writing instruction on one model—the university-sanctioned system which comes premade and preordered. At UDM and at my current institution, Wayne State, that system is Blackboard; other universities purchase WebCT. Products like Blackboard and WebCT assemble in one package e-mail, message boards, file sharing, chat, online grading, and related features. Even though all of these items independently can be had for free or at little cost elsewhere, universities and colleges are willing to pay up to six-figure fees annually to acquire preassembled packages of these products. As universities ask faculty to learn to use these systems for their courses, faculty are not being exposed to pedagogical alternatives. Rather, faculty are left with one choice as the only choice—whatever the university purchases. The dissent my colleagues express for technology, I contend, stems not from actually working with computers and finding subsequent disappointment, but from being restricted to a corporate vision of education and technology that prevents them from exploring other opportunities. Faculty who don't feel comfortable with technology and who may find Blackboard itself a challenging technology application may yet be unaware that systems like Blackboard complicate use in unnecessary ways. These systems

often make us feel that we have to be technology experts to go beyond them when, in fact, we don't have to be experts at all. In other words, my colleagues felt threatened by a false representation of technology that does not reflect diverse pedagogical applications. They have not been given the chance to consider options other than the prepackaged model.

From this perspective, we can see a general problem facing writing program administration. Are there alternatives for WPAs and other campus administrators to the standard technology packaging we are asked to adopt? I address this question and slowly make my way toward a potential solution through another personal anecdote. Not long after the workshop, an e-mail from McGraw-Hill appeared in my inbox, directing me to a new online course service the publishing company is offering called PageOut.

Are you in the process of developing an online course? If so, McGraw-Hill's custom course Website creation tool, PageOut® may be for you. PageOut® offers higher education instructors a versatile tool that is easy to use, reliable, hosted on our servers and perhaps best of all. . . .it is free! (McGraw-Hill)

The temptation of an all-in-one online package that is also free no doubt excites many of us in the teaching profession and commands attention from administrators desperate to maximize shrinking budget lines. PageOut offers the opportunity to upload course information to McGraw-Hill's server to educators who either have no access to server space or do not know how to use such space. For instructors who do not know how to make a webpage or upload web content, PageOut performs these tasks gratis as well. The service comes with an HTML editor that is easy to use. Appealing, accessible, free—what could be wrong with a service like this?

A service like PageOut, at first may appear to be a substitute for our university-sanctioned software package. Careful thought, however, reveals that even though it presents itself as a free educational tool, McGraw-Hill's PageOut, like many similar products other textbook publishers offer, differs little from systems like Blackboard and WebCT. As they tap into a lucrative market for writing instruction, these educational publishing companies recognize the difficulties writing programs face regarding technology usage: lack of computer knowledge regarding set-up and construction, lack of time for computer training, lack of knowledge about what is available for purchase or for free. Managed software provides one-stop shopping for electronic, information delivery and storage and guarantees that customers need

not know how to set up, administer, or operate the technology. By purchasing these products, such decisions will be made for you. As alluring as that promise may be, I see serious problems for program administration.

As a strong supporter of integrating computing into the composition curriculum, my biggest concern is that writing instructors are being made to use tools without knowing how the tools work at even the most basic levels. I contend that when colleagues like those I work with hesitate to embrace computing in their courses, it is because they know only the corporate model. In turn, they see a limited vision of what computing may offer humanities-based teaching. Having been a WPA and now active in my current department's writing program, I am further troubled; my initiatives to develop a technology-based writing program are overshadowed by the dominance of managed software. To demonstrate why WPAs need to, in Cynthia Selfe's words, "pay attention" to managed software, I want to sketch out the larger ideological and professional issues at stake for writing programs when universities adopt these systems. I will start by examining another version of the packaged system, Hewlett Packard's Cooltown, which I have come to understand as the unfortunate future model of this approach to pedagogy and technology.

COOLTOWN

The educational intentions foregrounded by companies like Blackboard, WebCT, and McGraw-Hill parallel mainstream computing missions. Notably, computer giant Hewlett Packard has imagined a futuristic society where everything connects to the Web. This place is called Cooltown.

Cooltown is a place where the physical world and the virtual world meet, where technology works for you, not the other way around. It's a vision of pervasive computing, but instead of requiring new protocols and a new infrastructure, this relies on what's already there—the Web. ("A Future Called CoolTown")

Cooltown proposes that technology may be employed to construct an interconnected information system. It functions by integrating GPS tracking systems, the World Wide Web, mobile phones, consumer habits, and professional writing. The integration principle at the heart of the company's vision was initially implemented in its Vancouver-based project called *cooltown@school*. *Cooltown@school*, like Cooltown itself, exploits the conflation of

consumerism and discourse by capitalizing on student enthusiasm for a term like *cool*. That *cooltown@school* should begin in education, I contend, is no coincidence, for education has become a prime target for software publishers who understand education's need to integrate technology into various pedagogical initiatives like the teaching of writing. Documented in the company's promotional videos, *Cooltown@school* is described as "more personalized" than traditional instruction because learning is an "anytime, anywhere process" that is "more interactive, more stimulating" and enacted by a combination of laptops, the Web, overhead projection, and PCs.¹

Cooltown@school's purpose appears remarkably akin to WebCT's vision of education and computing, a point clarified by a brief comparison of the two mission statements from WebCT and *Cooltown*. First, WebCT's:

With WebCT, students get high-quality, easier-to-access education—education that not only meets their immediate needs, but that also continually adds to a foundation for lifetime learning. Each student has a single point of entry to every institutional offering that's most important to him or her, a point of entry that reflects what the system learns about the student over time and serves as a lifetime learning resource. ("WebCT Whitepaper")

Then *Cooltown*'s:

From the concept of portal-based learning and anytime, anywhere access to a student's curriculum and educational progress, to the development of community resource centers and the seamless connection of schools and other community services, Vancouver officials, with the help of HP, are about to transform the way schools educate their students and unite a community. (Coleman)

The rhetoric of both organizations is strikingly similar; both promise lifelong learning, interconnectivity, and access to significant information resources. What may eventually give Hewlett Packard the edge is its choice of *cool* to describe its services. Using *cool* to attract students and educators recalls Thomas Frank's description of advertising's appropriation of the countercultural beliefs and fashions *cool* promotes through youth culture as it sells vari-

ous consumer goods. Consequently, Frank writes, control over how alternative ideas and cultural habits are formed shifts from its supposed marginal or subcultural beginnings to mainstream, corporate rule. Those who buy into *cool* marketing schemes believe they are subverting the system when, in fact, they support its continuance. Expecting to be more attractive to prospective customers such as universities, colleges, and high schools, Hewlett Packard presents its product as *cool* to subtly convince future clients that Cooltown really is the place they want to be. As writing programs feel pressured to integrate managed software into their curricula, Cooltown's lure, Hewlett Packard gambles, will be immense.

TECHNOLOGY AND COOL

My interest in cool and academics stems largely from my own use of technology in teaching. The writing courses I have taught at the University of Florida, the University of Detroit Mercy, and Wayne State University have been in computer classrooms where students engage actively with the tools of electronic discourse: e-mail, weblogs, discussion boards, and hypertext. As the WPA in a small writing program, I encouraged the instructors I directed to use technology in their courses as well. In addition, my research reflects my interests in technology and writing; I have written elsewhere on the role of cool in popular and academic discourse, and how technology relates.³ In the context of Hewlett Packard's system, and by extension Blackboard and WebCT, *cool* functions as an ideological position that stresses image over content; surface impression over meaning. In popular and academic discourse, *cool* is best represented in the always ephemeral list.

On the Web, in magazines like *Rolling Stone*, or on popular TV shows like *Entertainment Tonight* or *Total Request Live*, the "cool" (or "what is cool") list organizes information content. In the cool list, any item can be substituted for any other item as long as the category is *cool*. Like Alan Liu's often-used Voice of the Shuttle: Laws of Cool web portal, the cool list categorizes various events, people, places, ideas, etc. as *cool* in some ranking of importance. Liu, however, makes clear that his listing of the laws of cool is not meant as praise of *cool*'s place in higher learning. Instead, Liu argues against *cool* because of its supposedly anti-intellectual agenda, which contributes to an ever-growing information economy devoid of content and meaning. His critique, though, diminishes when we realize that it is delivered through the cool list as well.

Moments of critique (like Liu's) suggest how and why a project like *cooltown@school* will succeed, and how such a project eventually might serve as a model writing program for other programs to emulate in the not-too-distant future (even though *cooltown@school* is as problematic as Black-

board and WebCT). Educators, and subsequently writing programs, may be eager to criticize various ideological formations like *cool* for not being substantive or for being superficial, but even as they disseminate their critique, they buy into the idea they dismiss. We can easily note how *cooltown@school* panders to students by using the word most familiar to their experience, or we can become exasperated at the participation of a computer manufacturer's shaping of the high school and college curriculum. Nevertheless, because most institutions of higher learning are attracted to products comparable to *Cooltown*, *cooltown@school* has the potential to expand outward from its Vancouver origins and become the norm in writing administration. Why? Just as the cool list demands no real knowledge of what comprises that list (a particular shoe, hairstyle, movie, personality type—we don't know much about it but we know what it looks like, cool) and just as the cool list needs only the image of the thing on the list (instead of the thing itself), the *Cooltown* experience does not require that educators know a thing about how technology works. We just need the image that technology exists on our campuses, in our classrooms, or in our writing programs, and that we consequently have uploaded our courses.

What I am arguing, therefore, is that our dependence on packaged systems has formed a generic version of *Cooltown*, one that borrows its name from Hewlett Packard's project but that applies generally to all managed systems used in education. Rather than say a given university or writing program uses WebCT, Blackboard, or PageOut, we might as well declare that the school or program has chosen to become another version of *Cooltown*.

LIVING AND WORKING IN COOLTOWN

Before I can theorize how we might address the challenges and limitations of the *cooltown* model, I want to provide some further context about why we have found the *cooltown* model (represented in Blackboard and WebCT) so attractive. While other critiques of the corporate university take up ideas like Bill Readings' notion of "excellence," I am more inclined to refer to the contemporary university which purchases managed software systems not as "excellent," but rather as "*cooltown*," a generic term for higher education. To differentiate between Hewlett Packard's project and the more general computer-based education systems widely in circulation, I write "*cooltown*" as all lowercase. Unlike Readings' vision of an institution "no longer central to the question of common life" *cooltown* preaches a rhetoric of the everyday: *cool* (Readings 167). Readings identifies corporate control of education, and *cooltown* is no exception; its benefactors are the computing industries who seek to create computer users and consumers of computer products.

The interconnected, always plugged-in world WebCT and Hewlett Packard promise will, of course, be built out of these companies' goods and services (and hopefully, they think, out of no others').²

I don't believe I simply can argue against writing programs establishing residence in cooltown. Our existence in cooltown seems *de facto*. WebCT claims that more than 1,600 places of higher learning have purchased its educational web portals ("WebCT Learning Transformations"). Blackboard lists more than 1,000 colleges and universities as clients ("Our History"). According to its online journal, *m-pulse*, Hewlett Packard has similar aims for its own product.

The Vancouver project has attracted the attention of technology-enabled education experts and advocates. They see it as a way not only to modernize the educational process, but also to test the educational system's ability to be up to the task of providing instruction that capitalizes on the underlying technology. (Coleman)

Each classroom encouraged to teach writing through the generic managed system I identify as cooltown forces us to question how we teach writing in such an environment without becoming intellectually managed. And here we find a dilemma; if the WebCT/cooltown model functions successfully, if we don't mind the generic system prepackaged and setup already without our participation, then we will always find the cooltown model suitable for our programs. If that is the case, then we have shifted intellectual production to a force other than ourselves. I find that kind of position hard to accept. Instead of succumbing to outside control, we must educate ourselves more about the role of technology in pedagogy so that our lives in cooltown (deterministic or not) become anything but superficial, and so that we more fully understand what is at stake when writing programs encounter technology.

This final point is a difficult one to work with because of how we currently imagine the role of the WPA, because of the already overloaded workdays WPAs endure, because of the time restrictions WPAs face, and because of other conflicting issues WPAs deal with daily. Nevertheless, I still believe we must challenge our willingness to permit outside interests to determine what the role of technology in pedagogy, and in turn, writing instruction, will be. Writing about academic culture, Cary Nelson notes

The question of intellectualism—of what an intellectual actually is—is always already settled, settled permanently and institutionally, settled by someone other than themselves, settled most often in their disciplines, whereas in fact the nature and relevance of the intellectual life is historically variable and a continuing site of struggle and redefinition. (139)

Following Nelson's remarks, I categorize cooltown as a struggle for intellectual identification. When universities attempt to equate writing programs with the generic cooltown, they imagine themselves engaged in intellectual reform. In other words, the university introduces computing into writing instruction to better prepare students for a supposed technology-rich future, in order to update pedagogy for the new communicative demands of the twenty-first century, and possibly in order to maximize student and professional work potential. Such is the rhetoric of all of the managed software systems I have mentioned. But as Richard Miller writes, educational efforts at reform often stagnate under institutional pressure.

All intellectuals who commit themselves to reforming the academy immediately get caught up in an inescapable structural contradiction: the moment the reform effort moves from the planning stage to implementation, the intellectual is in danger of becoming entrapped by bureaucratic machinery necessary for designing, delivering, and then assessing the new educational product or experience the proposed reform seeks to make available to those en route to the academy. (*As If Learning Mattered* 202-203)

Technology, too, falls victim to this fate. Indeed, the cooltown model, like many of the reformist models Miller draws attention to in his text *As If Learning Mattered*, inevitably reinscribes technology with the habits and work practices that exist without technology reform. Consequently, little to no reform occurs. Even when companies adapt names that ring of high-tech education, such as Educause, Eduweb, or Educom, little in these packages differs from what already exists. Similarly, managed software centralizes control of class readings, but so do textbooks (in particular the rhetoric reader and the literary anthology). The course content WebCT sells along with its portal mostly consists of uploaded print publications: *The Blair Handbook*, *The St. Martin's Guide to Writing*, and *The Bedford Handbook*, among others. In many managed software packages, content is delivered to

students through some variation of the lecture (reminiscent of how television has typically been used in classrooms). The work students produce for classrooms in WebCT or Blackboard environments remains fairly consistent with the work they produced in nontechnological settings: linear essays patterned after the paragraph model. What cooltown fosters, therefore, are *images* of students and faculty working diligently in an idealized cyberfuture. “Personalized learning is happening today in a place called Cooltown,” a cooltown@school promotional video declares (“Cooltown Videos”). These images have been accepted by many of us, no doubt, because of their familiarity (that is, students sitting in front of computers). How students work differently, however, remains unclear. Many of the tasks they perform, and in particular, much of the *writing* they do, are still of the noncyber variety. Faculty attracted to courseware envision their use of technology as in line with a popularly imagined scenario of being “connected,” even though most courseware operates against the principles electronic communication produces. At the very least, the image of connectivity is a false one; WebCT, Blackboard, and even *Cooltown@school.com* are not accessible on the Web without a password and ID. Thus, their connectivity is a limited and confined one. The consequences of managed software are serious, therefore, and we are obligated to locate a middle ground for negotiating the already heavy WPA workload with the need to learn some basic concepts of technology if we are to prevent our work from being completely managed.

HOW DO WE LIVE IN COOLTOWN?

To move beyond the stagnation and limitation cooltown fabricates, we have to engage actively in the critical process while changing the kinds of work we do when we opt to engage with technology. The writing program and, in turn, the WPA, maintain a vital position in facilitating this process at the local level, even when managed software dominates elsewhere on campus. Bill Readings argues that administration has become the focus of the University of Excellence (125). Similarly, I see the WPA’s role as central to teaching faculty, students, and administrators to educate themselves about technology from sources other than the companies who sell managed software packages. As WPAs, we recognize a role for courseware in our programs. Yet we must respond to corporate activity in courseware development by becoming better educated about technology and thus better informed about its relationship to writing instruction. Richard Miller notes accordingly when he writes

While our shared revulsion at the idea that market forces might be allowed to impinge on the world of ideas dependably binds us together as a community, it also prevents us from effectively responding to the changes that are going on all around us. (“From Intellectual Wasteland” 38)

To respond to changes like those produced by technology, there are several courses of action we might begin to take. The first involves what I have begun to do in this essay through my comparison of WebCT and Hewlett Packard; that is, we question the rhetoric of educational altruism the producers of managed software promote in the name of higher learning, and which many campuses seem to take for granted. A quick look at McGraw-Hill’s terms of agreement, for instance, reveals that any course content uploaded to PageOut becomes the property of McGraw-Hill.

The McGraw-Hill Companies has the right to use all material entered into these Web pages (other than third-party material transmitted through private electronic mail) in any of The McGraw-Hill Companies’ print or electronic publications. (“Terms of Use”)

Such are the conditions most textbook publishers attach to their products, but quite often the issue of ownership is not considered as important as it should be by the products’ users. Awareness of conditions, terms, and other related issues will help us formulate better policy which, in turn, can be coordinated with campus administration. WPAs who examine and discuss with students, colleagues, and other campus administrators how packaged software might work against campus educational goals can help alert faculty to the potential problems courseware may raise for the school, such as who owns the materials placed within a given system. Such stipulations for usage cannot be ignored when we entertain technology usage in our classrooms. Otherwise, we fall victim to what cybertheorist Espen Aarseth identifies as the tendency to value the presence of technology over knowledge of technology.

Those who can define and explain a technological concept successfully have power, and the quest for this power may, unintentionally, supplant the quest for knowledge. But even when

they are not analytically successful, these attempts have the unfortunate effect of bestowing an aura of validity and legitimacy on a marketing term with no analytical value and several negative ideological aspects. (Aarseth 426)

Acquiring more knowledge, and, therefore, more power, through critical examination will give us the ability to implement institutional changes concerning program administration and writing instruction. In other words, the WPA must use critique to rethink administration and teaching, so that each encompasses technology not as an afterthought, such as the last reading in a practicum or an option for those who already possess technology skills, but as a thread interwoven throughout faculty development, graduate teaching, and adjunct training. Such activities include restructuring our understanding of rhetoric to include electronic rhetoric as well. The cooltown vision stressed by companies like WebCT, Blackboard, and McGraw-Hill does not include all of the possibilities computer-based learning offers, nor does it address how electronic writing functions rhetorically. My point is not simple corporate bashing. Use of a tool and rhetorical application of a tool must be differentiated in our teaching as well as in our administrative policies. Thus, when we teach and enact assessment, revision, assignment creation, or any other pedagogical issue, we should also teach and enact the technological implications relevant to these issues, how technology specifically alters our perceptions of these issues (that is, outside the print paradigm managed software promotes), and how we can better design technology systems to continue our work.

This is a complex challenge that will demand broader discussions across the professional spectrum regarding how to reassemble our administrative duties to better deal with technology, and it is a challenge which won't be resolved easily. The "CCCC Position Statement on Teaching, Learning, and Assessing Writing in Digital Environments" begins this process, but it does not yet address ways to educate ourselves as administrators. That is probably because declarations won't help us learn the basics needed to develop better pedagogical practice; instead we need to combine a variety of activities. In addition to critique, teaching ourselves and our graduate students a broader conception of writing, which includes examination of the tools we use to write (such as computers or related equipment), is necessary for increasing our levels of cultural capital regarding technology acquisition and application. Such a move will clarify to our colleagues and those higher up in the university system how novices as well as those who already feel comfortable with technology can benefit from this process.

Once we initially address questions of knowledge acquisition, our work may shift to actual, hands-on training in how to create and use websites, bulletin boards, weblogs, chat rooms, web portals, and listservs on our own without the need for an outside provider. By constructing these primary tools ourselves, we gain greater control over the pedagogy which drives our courses. We don't have to be computer experts to form our own tools, nor should we pose that as an excuse;⁴ but we should have and be able to use *basic* knowledge about how technology functions. I am stressing the word "basic," because basic knowledge is all that is needed. I recognize the time restrictions and work overloads many WPAs face, but again, my call is not for tech-guru status. I am asking that we understand the discursive shifts occurring by valuing some degree of technological knowledge as much as we value any other form of knowledge we have come to see relevant to writing programs over the last one hundred years. What we think is not part of our job today may in fact be more so than we currently realize, and it's the responsibility of WPAs to address technology's influence in the classroom by participating actively in its implementation. The argument that time prohibits us from doing so could just as easily be leveled against other important program administrative issues we have come accept as part of our jobs: assessment, theory, maintaining academic currency, etc. Only technology seems to be dismissed because of time constraints.

We can acquire basic knowledge through newly designed practica, WPA workshops, online discussion, increased familiarity with resources available on the Web, and better cooperation with a new generation of WPAs and rhetoric scholars who work extensively with technology. Regarding this last point, several scholars are currently producing their own courseware options and making them available for other writing programs. And while these products may not satisfy all or any writing programs' current needs, the fact that alternatives to the cooltown model exist gives hope that other spaces for WPAs will flourish and be available if we work together. At Western Illinois University, for instance, Bradley Dilger is working on the development of a "locally administered courseware system" that he will construct and test with students and faculty (Details available at <http://faculty.wiu.edu/CB-Dilger/f03/summer-stipend.pdf>). Dilger's project promises to be customizable; its functions will apply locally and elsewhere, thus making it a viable alternative to corporate courseware. George Pullman at Georgia State University has designed his own weblog software for other schools to use in place of paid services or tools too complicated for new users to understand (See: <http://rhetcomp.gsu.edu/blogs/>). And Joe Moxley at the University of South Florida offers academics the opportunity to use his online blogging system for their writing courses (See: <http://writingblog.org/>). At my own university,

I have installed open-source software like Drupal, Word Press, Moodle, and MediaWiki for graduate assistants to work with in the teaching practicum I teach. Each program requires minimal knowledge for installation and takes anywhere from five to fifteen minutes to install. Each platform offers diverse pedagogical opportunities for new instructors to develop while they learn theoretical and practical approaches for teaching composition.⁵

The work of these three educators (and my own) provides examples of what others in composition studies can do or learn from without turning to corporate investment. They also provide models for how support can be created within a network of compositionists interested in learning about technology, as opposed to buying technology from outside sources. Forging contact and professional relationships with educators like Dilger, Pullman, and Moxley will lead to a new kind of WPA network invested in technology, where beginners and the experienced come together. The network signifies a new media-based logic we can produce in our programs as we more fully grasp the apparatus shift underway from print to technology-based systems of information production and distribution. The more WPAs become involved in localized courseware production and engaged with others creating home-grown products, the stronger this network will become, and the stronger support will be for different levels of users who work in various kinds of institutions. Only through such networking, which includes the conversations and questions networking generates among the experienced and novices, will we become more comfortable and informed about technology and writing. In essence, I am arguing that we equate technological know-how with the rhetorical, literary, cultural, and other intellectual pursuits that drive our profession and upon which we currently base our professional relationships. These kinds of academic tools make us better readers, but they also make us better producers of new knowledge. In this sense, technology should be considered a keyword of professional WPA “work,” much in the way Bruce Horner defines work in relationship to other composition keywords like “students” and “academics.”

Otherwise, we allow intellectualism to become appropriated because we allow some other force the right to determine how we produce intellectual discourse within the computer setting. Typically, we ask our students to be aware of how rhetoric, representations, images, work, daily life, and the like are culturally and textually formed by a variety of conflicting forces (political, gendered, racial), so that our students may better control the consumption and production of such representations. We repeatedly ask students to think critically; we value a humanities-based education for teaching such critical thinking. How critical, however, are we being about the need to have some kind of control of technology usage and production? And how are

we currently applying that critical awareness, what Brian Huot and Pamela Takayoshi call being “technology *critics* as well as technology *users*” (4)? Even when WebCT founder Murray Goldberg promises that course control remains with the educators and not with his company, we must question his claim so that we can act appropriately.

But before you complain that using “pre-packaged” content forces you to relinquish far too much control, think again. While it is true that you can simply take this content and use it as a turn-key solution to your distance education needs (which can provide an almost instant, good-quality solution), the real beauty is that you don’t have to use it that way. Instead, if you choose, you can treat this content as a starting place. You can contextualize it to your teaching style and desired coverage. You can add content, change content, remove content, reorder content—whatever you want. You can select exams from the large databases and choose the set of tools you want to employ and decide how you want to use them. This is the beauty of the technology that does not so readily exist in textbooks. This puts control back into your hands—where it should rest (but of course takes time... .). (Goldberg)

Goldberg argues that control remains with the instructor because course content can be changed. Instructors cannot change the technological makeup of the program, however, or mix and match their technological needs with non-WebCT platforms, or break the print-based restrictions WebCT imposes on users. If that were possible, what would be the need for WebCT?

Not WebCT, Blackboard, PageOut, or any other managed software system represents the full potential of electronic communication. These packages represent corporate understandings of how to capitalize on higher education’s lack of cultural capital regarding technology. As educators, it is up to us to rectify that situation. We need to decide how we want to work in cooltown, whether we want to have control over the tools we use to teach or not. The WPA must deal more with how technology affects knowledge construction. Jeanne Gunner has argued that the WPA adopt a “post-unitary position” encompassing many intellectual positions. “Our self-representation has been a process of unraveling the assumptions implicit in and attendant to the unitary-figure model [the WPA represents]” (46). We need to append Gunner’s history of WPA identity formation with knowledge of technology. While we demand literary and rhetorical training to understand how “texts”

are constructed, we do not yet call for technology training to know how the computer networking systems contemporary textuality works from are constructed as well. Incorporating technology into our role as WPA will help alleviate this problem.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I thank Dennis Lynch, Jeff Grabill, Gregory Glau, Duane Roen, and Barry Maid for comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this essay.⁶

NOTES

1. See: http://infotech.monash.edu/coolcampus/coolvideos_cooltown_school.html for two of the company's promotional videos. The videos give some understanding about what this program entails.

2. See "What is Cool: Notes on Intellectualism, Popular Culture, and Writing" in *Ctheory*, May 10, 2002, "Writing About Cool: Teaching Hypertext as Juxtaposition" in *Computers and Composition*, September 2003, and my textbook *Writing About Cool: Hypertext and Cultural Studies in the Computer Classroom* (Longman 2004).

3. Along these lines, Blackboard has recently purchased Student Advantages, Inc., a program that allows students to receive discounts from more 15,000 merchants. The acquisition will allow Blackboard to channel specific products to students who use its services.

4. For example, one can locate on the Internet free bulletin boards or web portal software and install them locally on school servers without having to purchase the managed system. Performing this task requires some knowledge of technology but does not demand that one be a computer expert or technology administrator. The required knowledge to do so must be taught within initial WPA training or continued education.

5. See the following website for more information and additional links regarding how these programs are being used in my teaching practicum: <http://englishweb.clas.wayne.edu/drupal/>

6. Since this essay was written, Hewlett Packard has removed its literature on Cooltown from the Web. The implication is that the project failed. One can guess as to why (no reason is given anywhere on the HP site), but I would suggest that the failure stems from an inability to merge new media with new educational demands. We can understand the metaphoric value of HP's failure and seriously consider educational failures regarding technology, writing program administration, and writing. One such failure can be found in the pedagogies endorsed by platforms

still active on the market, WebCT and Blackboard. They are not financial failures, but pedagogical ones.

WORKS CITED

- Aarseth, Espen. "We All Want to Change the World." *Digital Media Revisited: Theoretical and Conceptual Innovation in Digital Domains*. Ed. Gunnar Liestøl, Andrew Morrison, and Terje Rasmussen. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003.
- Coleman, Anthony. "School Gets Cool." *m-pulse: A Cooltown Magazine*. 28 Dec. 2002. <<http://www.cooltown.hp.com/mpulse/0901atschool.asp>>.
- Coleman, Anthony. "School Gets Cool." 28 Dec. 2002. *m-pulse: A Cooltown Magazine*. 30 Dec. 2002. <<http://www.cooltown.hp.com/mpulse/0901atschool.asp>>.
- Frank, Thomas. *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1997.
- Gunner, Jeanne. "Identity and Location: A Study of WPA Models, Memberships, and Agendas." *WPA: Writing Program Administration* 22.3 (Spring 1999): 31–54.
- Goldberg, Murray. "Message from Murray: Publisher Beginnings." 2 Jan. 2003. WebCT. 9 Nov. 2000 <<http://www.webct.com/service/ViewContent?contentID=2339455>>.
- Hewlett Packard. "A Future Called CoolTown." 15 Mar. 2001. 17 Mar. 2001. <<http://www.hpl.hp.com/news/cooltown.html>>.
- Horner, Bruce. *Terms of Work for Composition: A Materialist Critique*. Albany: State U of New York P, 2000.
- Huot, Brian and Pamela Takayoshi. *Teaching Writing with Computers*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003.
- Liu, Alan. *Voice of the Shuttle: Laws of Cool Page*. 20 Dec. 2000. <<http://vos.ucsb.edu/browse.asp?id=2715>>.
- McGraw-Hill. "Develop a Course Web Site, Now. FREE!" E-mail to riceje@ud-mercy.edu. 4 Dec. 2002.
- Miller, Richard. *As If Learning Mattered: Reforming Higher Education*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1998.
- . "From Intellectual Wasteland to Resource-Rich Colony: Capitalizing on the Role of Writing Instruction in Higher Education". *WPA: Writing Program Administration* 24.3 (Spring 2001): 25–40.
- Nelson, Cary. *Manifesto of a Tenured Radical*. New York, NY: New York UP, 1997.
- "Our History." *Blackboard.com*. 3 March 2004. <<http://www.blackboard.com/about/history.htm>>.
- Readings, Bill. *The University in Ruins*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1996.

“Cooltown Videos.” 10 Dec. 2002. <<http://www.cooltown.hp.com/cooltownhome/cooltown-video.asp>>.

“Terms of Use.” McGraw-Hill Companies. 6 Dec. 2002. <<http://www.mcgraw-hill.com/copyrttm.htm>>.

“WebCT Learning Transformations.” WebCT. 3 March 2004.

<http://www.webct.com/webct/viewpage?name=webct_css>.

“WebCT Whitepaper: Leveraging Technology to Transform the Educational Experience.” WebCT. 1 Jan. 2003. <<http://webct.com/Communities/library/iteminformation?source=browse&objectID=4464759>> 2 July 2001.

