Shakespeare-VR in the Composition Classroom

Kelly Williams, Meryem Yilmaz Soylu, Jeonghyun Lee, Manuni Dhruv, Alison Valk Writing and Communication Program, C21U, Georgia Tech Library

ABSTRACT

Students in Composition II courses at Georgia Tech learn communication skills through a multimodal or WOVEN (Written, Oral, Visual, Electronic, and Nonverbal) approach. The goal of the Writing and Communication Program (WCP) is to turn students into "savvy, sophisticated communicators who can work with the broad array of media found in the modern workplace." Today, virtual reality (VR) technologies are not simply a method of communication, but an essential component of the 21st technology toolkit. As such, expert researchers Meryem Yilmaz Soylu, Jeonghyun Lee, and Manuni Dhruv (C21U) collaborated with Emerging Technologies Librarian, Alison Valk, and WCP Brittain Fellow, Kelly Williams, to investigate (1) the impact of VR on student engagement, and (2) how multisensory, immersive VR experiences impact students' rhetorical awareness. To study these impacts, we administered pre- and post-surveys to approximately 50 students to gauge their comfort, experience, and level of engagement with VR in instructional settings.

OBJECTIVES AND APPROACH

During the collaborative lesson, students participated in classroom activities on Shakespeare's Hamlet using Meta Quest 3 headsets and Carnegie Melon's Shakespeare-VR application. Students examined Hamlet's famous "to be or not to be" speech in four different modes and media: written (original text), visual (film), oral (recorded live theatrical performance), and electronic (VR). Then, students assessed the extent to which these modes and media could effectively teach the concept of "psychological verisimilitude." They assumed the rhetorical role of an instructional technology consultant tasked with advising a high school English teacher on which mode/media would be most engaging for a specific, intended audience of high school English students. The lesson was composed of (1) a pre-activity on psychological verisimilitude, (2) a film station, (3) a theater station, and (4) a virtual reality station.

LESSON





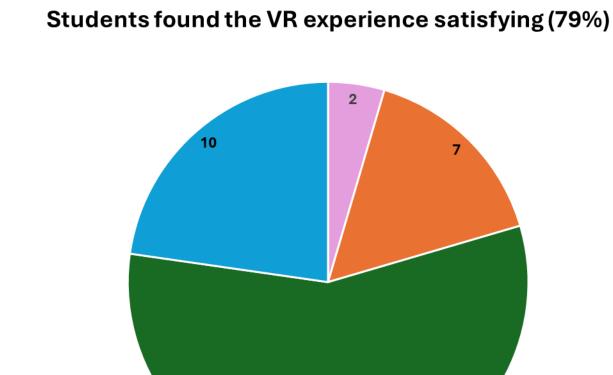




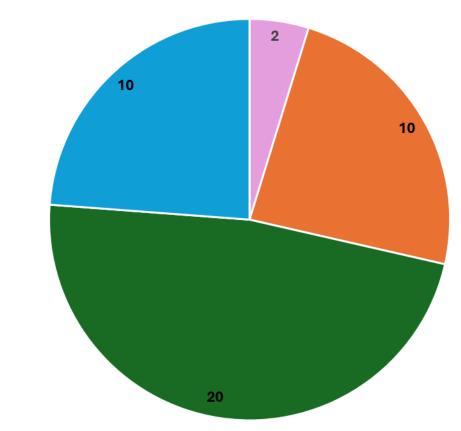


Clockwise (Images 1-2): students experience scenes from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in 360 degrees. Image 3: Williams instructs on the "learning outcomes of VR." Image 4: from left to right, Williams, Valk, and Yilmaz Soylu pose with Meta Quest headsets. Image 4: footage of Hamlet produced for virtual reality. Photos courtesy of Yelena M. Rivera Vale, Communications Program Manager, C21U.

RESULTS

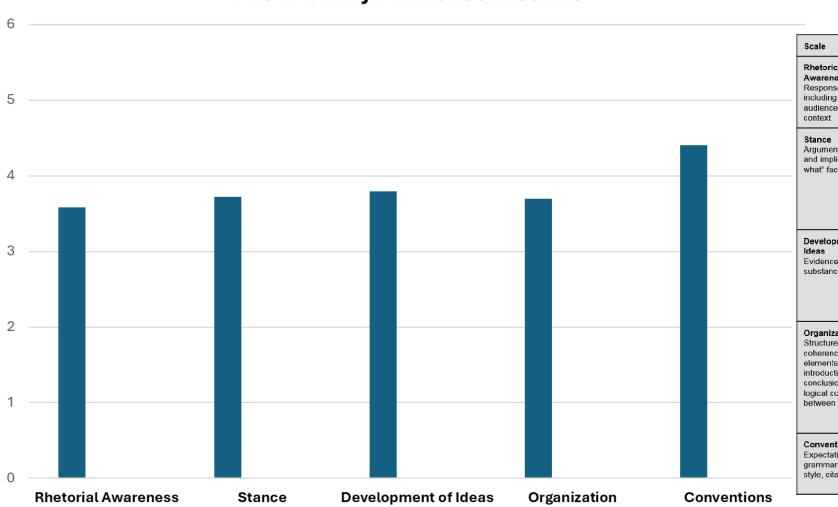






Somewhat disagree ■ Neither agree or disagree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Strongly agree

Post-Activity Worksheet Results



Scale	Basic (1)	Beginning (2)	Developing (3)	Competent (4)	Mature (5)	Exemplary (6)
Rhetorical Awareness Response to situation, including purpose, audience, register, and context	Overlooks two or more aspects of the situation or assignment, and thus does not fulfill the task	Overlooks at least one aspect of the situation or assignment and thus compromises effectiveness	Attempts to respond to all aspects of the situation or assignment, but the attempt is incomplete	Addresses the situation or assignment in a complete but perfunctory or predictable way	Addresses the situation completely, with unexpected insight	Addresses the situation in a sophisticated r that could adversional discourse on the situation of the situat
Stance Argument, significance and implications (*so what" factor)	Involves an unspecified or confusing argument; significance is not evident	Makes an overly general argument; significance is difficult to discern, or not appropriate to the rhetorical situation	Makes a simplistic or implicit argument, or multiple arguments that have no clear connection to one another; gestures towards significance, but does not fully develop it	Makes an explicit and straightforward argument that does not oversimplify the problem or question; explores at least one implication of the argument in depth	Makes a complex, unified argument that clearly articulates a position or stanco; explores multiple implications of the argument	Offers an inve expert-like arg that clearly art a sophisticator position/stance explores multi implications of argument in a compelling ma
Development of Ideas Evidence, analysis, and substance	Claims requiring support are not backed by necessary evidence; lacks analysis of major pieces of evidence; content is not substantive	Evidence and/or analysis is weak or contradictory; does not account for important evidence that could support or disprove the argument	Evidence provides minimal but necessary support to each point; attempted analysis is not sufficient to prove the argument	Evidence and analysis are substantive; they support the argument and related claims, but are mostly predictable	Evidence fully supports and proves the argument and all rolated claims; evidence is always paired with compelling analysis	Evidence and analysis are p nuanced, fully developed, an together to en the argument,
Organization Structure and coherence, including elements such as introductions and conclusions as well as logical connections between points	Lacks unity in constituent parts; fails to create coherence among constituent parts; contains major argumentative holes or fallacies	Uses insufficient unifying statements; uses few effective connections; some logical moves necessary to prove the argument are absent	Uses some effective unifying claims, but a few are unclear; inconsistently makes connections between points and the argument; employs simplistic organization	States unifying claims with supporting points that relate clearly to the overall argument and employs an effective but mechanical scheme	Asserts and sustains a claim that develops logically and progressively; adapts typical organizational schemes for the context; achieves substantive coherence	Artifact is orga to achieve ma coherence and momentum; connections a sophisticated a complex when required
Conventions Expectations for grammar, mechanics, style, citation	Involves errors that risk making the overall message distorted or incomprehensible	Involves a major pattern of errors	Involves some distracting errors	Meets expectations, with minor errors	Meets expectations in a virtually flawless manner	Exceeds expe and manipulat conventions to advance the argument

CONCLUSIONS

Overwhelmingly, students had a positive response to the VR lesson. As shown above, 79% of students found the experience satisfying and 72% reported high levels of engagement. A majority of students (83%) did not experience any technical issues. Many students found the experience enjoyable and effective as is. No major complaints suggest that issues were not universal. In their post-survey, some students did offer helpful recommendations for future iterations, such as (1) more hands-on, interactive elements instead of primarily passive experiences like videos, (2) clearer onboarding instructions to avoid confusion, or a pre-session tutorial video that could help maximize hands-on time during class, (3) more time allotted for experimentation with the VR, perhaps several class periods dedicated to the activity, and (4) offer more opportunities for VR to be more collaborative, allowing them to engage with peers, rather than individually. In their post-activity write-up, the instructor utilized an abbreviated version of WCP's common feedback rubric (pictured above) to assess students' rhetorical awareness via the following prompt: discuss the ways in which the meaning and overall effects of dramatic artworks relate to the physical conditions of performance (the type of theater, the lighting, proximity to the audience, etc.)... Your audience for this short piece of writing is a high school English teacher trying to decide which performance (VR, film, theatrical) would best teach their students the concept of psychological verisimilitude. Students are approaching competency (level 4) in four criteria and maturity (level 5) in the last criteria.

REFERENCES

"Courses." Writing and Communication Program. Accessed March 24, 2025. https://wcprogram.lmc.gatech.edu/courses.

Wittek, Stephen. "Shakespeare-VR: virtual reality in humanities education." Carnegie Melon Department of English, 2019. https://shakespeare-vr.library.cmu.edu/.

CONTACT

Kelly Williams, Marion L. Brittain Fellow, WCP (kduquette3@gatech.edu)
Meryem Yilmaz Soylu, Research Scientist, C21U (msoylu6@gatech.edu)
Manuni Dhruv, Graduate Research Assistant, C21U (mdhruv6@gatech.edu)
Jeonghyun (Jonna) Lee, Director of Research in Education Innovation, C21U (monalee@gatech.edu)

Alison Valk, Emerging Technologies Librarian (alison.valk@library.gatech.edu)