

Uptake Submission Notes for Ecology Zine

Emily Capan

In this short piece, Emily Capan describes the uptake (learning) and writing processes that she engaged in while creating a zine about one of the P-CHAT terms, Ecology, which was also the topic of the interview in the previous pages.

This project all started because I wanted to create a piece that would either be a part of the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal (GWRJ)* or the Writing Program website. As someone who teaches in the Writing Program here at Illinois State University, I desired to both give back to the program and create something that would help my students better understand writing research. My primary goal for this project was to create an artifact that would help make the topic of P-CHAT (pedagogical cultural-historical activity theory) approachable for writing students who were starting to familiarize themselves with the theory. My next step was thinking about what different kinds of genres I could work with to help accomplish this goal. I wanted to work with a genre that I was already familiar with, that way I could be more confident in making sure that I was adhering to that genre's conventions. I have previously written a traditional article as well as co-authored an interview article for the *GWRJ*. For this project, I wanted to do something completely different. I thought about the various genres that I had worked with in all of the different classes that I had taken over my many years as a student. I decided to choose a genre that students might not be familiar with, but one that would be visually engaging and fun to read: zines!

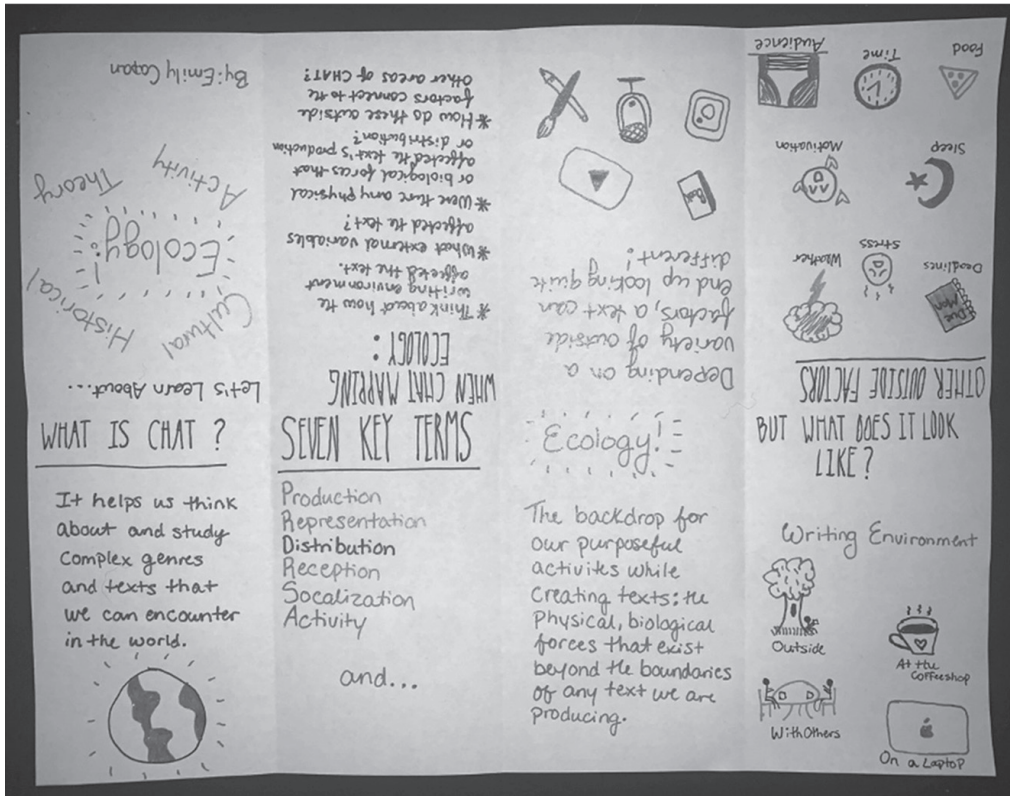


Figure 1: Emily's Zine project. Emily also made a video about her process creating the zine, which is available via the QR code in this article!

In a visual rhetoric class, I learned all about zines. A “zine” is a self-published small booklet that is intended to inform about a particular subject. We talked about their genre conventions and history before we made a zine of our own on any subject that we desired. I enjoyed working with this genre quite a bit because it is a highly multimodal genre. **Multimodal** refers to the use of multiple modes, or ways of communicating information, such as visual, aural, oral, tactile, spatial, alphabetic text, and so forth. Zines employ visuals, alphabetic text, and spatial rhetorics to get their message across about a specific subject. Traditionally, zines are only eight pages, including the front and back cover, and are made out of a single sheet of paper. Because of the zine’s limiting genre conventions of page number, there was no way that I was going to be able to cover all of P-CHAT. Therefore, I decided to home in on one of the seven aspects of P-CHAT: ecology. I chose this particular aspect because of my antecedent knowledge of teaching this theory to my own students. Ecology is one of the most difficult aspects, both to explain as the instructor and to comprehend as the student, due to its more abstract nature.

The next step in my writing process was to choose my materials. I mainly used what I already owned and had easy access to: a couple of sheets of white printing paper, colorful glitter gel pens, a pencil, and a black pen. I divided up my piece of paper into the eight panels that would eventually become the eight total pages of the zine. My first draft was all done in pencil. My intention with the first draft was to map out all of the information that I wanted to be in the zine, as well as what order I wanted to present that information. I decided that it was important to address briefly what P-CHAT was first, that way the reader had a bit of context moving forward. Then, I thought that it would be important to move a step further to give “ecology” a definition next. For both of these terms, I pulled from the resources on the Writing Program website. The next topic that I wanted to cover in my zine was what ecology “looks like” out in the real world, with real people writing real texts. When I talk about P-CHAT with my students, this is usually where I start as well: working from the more technical definitions to more concrete applications. I also know that many writing instructors, including myself, also engage in “CHAT mapping” where you take a text and use the seven different aspects of P-CHAT to analyze and explain how a text culturally situated. Therefore, the last thing that I wanted to include in my zine was a couple of questions that would prompt the student to think about the ecology of any given text.

Once my pencil draft was completed, I met with a few of my peers, who are also writing instructors, to get their feedback on my draft. I often find that while something that I write might make complete sense to myself, it may be unclear to someone else. Not everyone thinks like I do, and no one can see into my head to understand my writing and uptake processes. After having read my zine, my peers had a few suggestions for me, such as, “You need more examples on this panel of other outside factors that could affect the ecology of a text” and “Your questions about CHAT mapping ecology are pretty vague . . . could you be more specific about what you mean?” I wrote down all of their feedback and then asked them follow up questions based on their feedback, taking notes on that as well. Sitting back down with my zine draft and my feedback notes, I made a list of changes that I wanted to make for the final draft. I took out another sheet of paper and my trusty gel pens and got to work.

When writing the text in the final draft, I called upon some of my skills that I use when I am bullet journaling. “Bullet Journaling” is a genre of planner where the writer (usually) creates their own planning system in



Figure 2: QR code for Emily's video explaining her zine project.

a blank notebook using hand drawn fonts, doodles, themes, and spreads. Because I make my own bullet journal, I am used to drawing fun fonts and making my writing fairly legible. I also like to doodle in my bullet journal because I am not a naturally talented artist, so I decided to incorporate that skill as well for the visuals of my zine. I wanted to make sure that my zine was consistent and cohesive, and so I decided that the color green was going to be my theme for my zine. When I think about ecology, I think about science and nature, and that (for me) has an association with the color green. I also used quite a bit of purple in my zine, as that is a complementary color of green and would therefore add to the cohesiveness of the artifact. My doodles were similarly color-associated. For example, my doodle for stress was drawn with a blue gel pen because of the metaphor that if someone is upset, they are “blue.”

When I made all of the changes to my final draft, I was happy with the results. I think that the audience for this zine, students learning about P-CHAT, will find it helpful because it explains not only what ecology is, but what it looks like in the real world and provides multiple examples. It is also my hope that instructors will find it useful as well and could use this zine alongside discussions about genres, genre conventions, multimodality, P-CHAT mapping, and more! If I were to continue this project, I think that I could make it a series with a different zine covering each of the seven different elements of P-CHAT. The most challenging aspect of this project were actually these uptake notes! It is difficult to describe the “why” behind my decisions, as many times the decisions I make while writing are more subconscious. However, after writing about my uptake, I realized how integral the peer review process is for me and how much I rely on constructive feedback. Without it, my final artifact would have definitely not been as clear or effective. I will be more verbally appreciative to my peers after this project, knowing that they are a vital part of my creative process!

Emily Capan is a PhD student studying rhetoric and composition. Her research interests include multimodality, writing program administration and pedagogy, and risk and crisis communication. She loves all things pop cultural and fantastical, from *Star Wars* and *Lord of the Rings* to witchcraft and astrology. You can usually find her hanging out with her dog, Clover, reading a book, and listening to dance music or Machine Gun Kelly.

