Multimodality and Marginalized Millennials:

The Aesthetic Design and Transduction of College Writing in a 21st Century

'Underprepared' Medial Landscape

by

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the ways in which the incorporation of a multimodal social semiotic curriculum into a university composition class provided non-traditional options for learning that brought about agentive and empowering identity shifts in students who were labeled as academically underprepared for college level work. Building on a body of research that challenges the dominant discourse of deficit through a view of literacy and of learners as a complex and context-related social practice, this qualitative study employs ethnographic methods to track and document the self-affirming transformations in student's identities as manifested in their written, multimodal, and discoursal performances.

The data collected from this study indicates that students' perceptions of self and of potential for academic success within the University were influenced by prior institutional labels and were exacerbated by feelings of marginalization brought on by placement into a University support program. In order to counter the sense of deficiency that usually accompanies such labeling practices, a transformative pedagogical approach designed to invoke change was practiced with the aim to create a learning environment which countered the rigidity of an autonomous view of literacy and instead, embraced a view of literacy that was sociocultural and ideological in nature. To this end, curricular choices were made in an effort to offer students alternative, non-traditional methods of demonstrating their individualized ways of meaning making.

The data indicated that a multimodal infused pedagogy and interactions with multimodality served to reveal, track, capture, and document the ways in which identities shifted and changed with the resultant finding of an increased sense of academic achievement and agency in students as identity transformation took place. In addition, significant instances of students'

acquisition of agency through self-generated writing and consequent successful repositioning were documented. In light of these findings, I encourage and endorse the assimilation of non-traditional transformative and multimodal practices into the 21st Century college composition class.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Baldo, without whom I would not have had the inspiration, courage and strength to undertake such a challenge:

You were my strength when I was weak. You were my voice when I couldn't speak.

You were my eyes when I couldn't see. You saw the best there was in me.

You gave me faith 'cause you believed.

I am everything I am because you love me (warren. 1996).

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Chapter 1

1

Overview and Background

Introduction

In response to the increasing demand by political and public sectors to ensure that accountability and diversity are achieved, colleges and universities on both a local and global scale have, within the last few decades, implemented policy changes that have brought to their campuses a diverse population whose socioculturally based literacy practices are often viewed by the institution as constituting a deficit model. Consequently, programs variously designated as "remedial," "developmental," or "transitional" have been created to extend academic support, particularly in the area of writing, to these "underprepared" populations (Shaughnessy, 1977; Rose, 1989; Lillis & Scott, 2008). However, as the literature reveals, many of these students are not necessarily "at risk," "high risk," or "underprepared" in terms of cognitive abilities, rather, they are diverse not only in their social, cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds but also in the types of academic preparation they have received prior to their arrival at the university. Moreover, recent studies have indicated that a number of "nonintellectual learning factors" play a significant role in determining academic success (Larose, et al. 1998, p. 275), especially in the case of Millennials, which includes the current generation of college students and their predecessors born in the 1980's whose literacy practices, language, personalities, and cognitive functions mirror the technological nuances and advances that have come to define the twentyfirst century.

While, historically, remediation has been a mainstay of American post-secondary education dating back to the earliest colonial colleges (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000, p. 68), remediation as a post-secondary construct began its movement toward critical mass as a result of

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the compelling political and social issues of the 1960s, among which were the civil rights movement and the initiation of the open-admissions policy at the City University of New York (CUNY) (Kulik, et al. 1983). In response to a public outcry which demanded equal education for all, the "federal government supported the development of comprehensive support programs for disadvantaged students" (p. 398), an action that ultimately achieved its full realization with the advent of open-admissions colleges which "began establishing programs of developmental or remedial studies when students who previously would have been eliminated from college began entering open-admissions schools in staggering numbers" (p. 398). These numbers would continue to grow throughout the ensuing decades and into the twenty-first century as a new institutional directive calling for increased diversity brought many formally underrepresented groups (Arendale, 2005) to college campuses resulting in what has been viewed as an "epidemic of remedial education stretching from the Ivy League to public community colleges" (Remedial education: The high cost, 1995, p. 1, in Shaw, 1997, p. 285).

What is personally disturbing about this overview of a population so vast and yet so vulnerable, is that it is testimony to the fact that, despite the numerous research studies conducted within the last four decades that have successfully posited rebuttals to the medical deficit model, words like 'epidemic,' which are so clearly associated with disease and contamination, remain mainstays in the public and institutional discourse of remediation. While I do not dispute the urgency embedded in this language, I do, however, take issue with the inflammatory nature of its tone, as it serves to fuel the fire of societal indignation over a perceived malady which seemingly has no cure. Moreover, this population and the programs that house them become transmuted by this language into zones of contestation in which, often,

much valuable time and energy is expended on survival rather than invested in growth and development.

As a writing instructor and administrator for a university support program, my interest in the study of underprepared university students stems from a deep-seated passion about my role as a teacher and those many students with whom I have had the privilege of interacting. Although I had earned my B.A. in 1974, it wasn't until later in life that I returned to school to receive my M.A. At that point, I was 50 years old and lucky enough to immediately obtain my first academic job as an adjunct instructor working with basic writers at this University in a now defunct program. From the very beginning of my teaching career I was working with first-year college students whose writing skills were considered "basic" and the students themselves labeled "underprepared." It is now thirteen years later, and I have had the great good fortune to not only secure a more stable job at the University but also to continue to work with the same type of student population in a different program, for which I am the Writing Coordinator. It is these students—these individual stories—that have heightened my awareness of the necessity to continuously hone my craft by teaching me about the many ways in which learning takes place, how meaning is made, and just how dangerous perceptions based on the inflammatory discourse of remediation can be to both the instructor and the student.

At the onset of my classes in the literacy studies doctoral program, I read *Lives on the boundary* by Mike Rose (1984) in which his charge to educators to "challenge assumptions" regarding the perception of underprepared writers became my mantra throughout the years.

My motivation for heeding this charge is beautifully articulated by Rose (2011) in his recent presentation at AERA, "Rethinking remedial education and the academic-vocation divide," that he so graciously sent to me in advance of publication, in which he asked us to:

[c]onsider as well the image of the person that is created by the medical-psychometric discourse....It is an image tinted with abnormality and stigma and conveys a pretty undynamic and unnuanced mental life....This is where that remedial language of handicaps and differences has further insidious ramifications, for we have a societal tendency to meld poor academic performance with cognitive generalizations about class and race (Rose, personal communication, 2012, pp. 10-11).

I have never stopped challenging or considering. Therefore, responding to Rose's call to action has been, and continues to be, one of the driving forces behind both my pedagogical practice and theoretical orientation.

Learning Spaces

In general, the University writing class is a learning space that is unique in its ability to create communities in which identities and overall academic skills are thrust into high relief. Thus, for the educational ethnographer it provides the most glorious and resourceful "dig" of all. By delicately excavating, gingerly picking through the artifacts, brushing off the residual detritus of prior negative learning experiences and reassembling the sometimes fractured fragments, we, as teachers and learners, can come to better understand the culture in which our students' live as well as the lives lived within that culture. However, not all writing classes are created equal. For those infected by the discourse of disease, the writing class also can become the clinical environment that propels into further isolation those students whose symptoms appear to be incurable.

I have long been an ardent proponent of those students who have been tested, labeled, and marginalized by the system for a variety of reasons that often seem to have little to do with

actual cognitive ability. As a writing instructor for a university support program whose population is comprised of students like these, I have come to realize just how much untapped potential lies within each student and is waiting to be released by the right teacher, the right learning space, the right method, and the right perception in accordance of the individualized needs of the student. My fervent desire to provide these students with these "rights" is the focus of not only my work but also of my dissertation research.

Therefore, I believe that it is incumbent upon me in my unique position as a Writing Coordinator and instructor as well as a doctoral candidate, to take on a study that is both relevant and meaningful in its attempt to engage in a research process that engenders inquiry and the discovery of new knowledge about the pedagogical and curricular structure of writing classes taught within a university support program as well those students whose academic and personal development have been entrusted to me, de facto, for safekeeping. Moreover, I find further justification for my dissertation study in a communication recently sent to me by Mike Rose in which he told me, "You are also asking me if it's important to keep doing this work given what is happening with remedial courses, and I think that's all the more reason to do it. We cannot let these students become invisible..." (Personal Communication, 2012).

Problem

The problem that this study addresses is the still unresolved "crisis" regarding the perception of the cognitive skills of students who have been deemed academically underprepared for post-secondary work, especially in the area of writing, by virtue of assessment, consequent labels connoting the need for remediation, and institutionally mandated standardized test scores. It is a problem whose complexity cannot be overstated, as its scope goes beyond the individual student, the individual teacher, and the individual classroom and radiates outward into the larger

arena of political, institutional, and societal discourse. The magnitude and power behind this discourse is evidenced in the current movement to do away with "remedial" programs at the University level, and thus, demands a renewed and pressing need to justify their existence.

Moreover, despite the vast body of theoretical, ethnographic, quantitative, and qualitative studies that have addressed this historically ongoing problem(Rose, 1988; Astin, 1990, 1998; Grimes & David, 1999; Merisotis & Phipps, 2000; Mazzeo, 2002; Giroux, 2003; Brothen & Wambach, 2004; Attewell, et al, 2006; Haggis, 2006), there seems to be a dearth of literature that focuses specifically on the twenty-first century university support program, and virtually none that track the academic progress of the "underprepared" student writer across two sequential semesters in a programmatic setting such as the one described in this study. Furthermore, albeit a relatively new area of research, surprisingly, there also seems to be little in the literature regarding the underprepared college student who also falls under the heading of "Millennial" and the ways in which their technologically influenced learning styles appear to impact on the achievement of academic success. Although the introduction of multimodal social semiotics and its variegated tools and methods that facilitate the integration of communicative possibilities into every facet of learning has been promoted, researched, and heavily incorporated into middle school and secondary classes (Kress, G. and van Leeuweun, T., 1996; Jewitt, C., Kress, G., Ogburn, J. Tsatsarulic, C. 2001a, 2001b, 2001c; Jewitt, C., 2005a, 2005b, 2008b; Hull, G. and Greeno, J.G., 2006)Hull, G. and Stornaiuolo, H. 2010)there is comparatively less research on the ways in which these same possibilities can benefit greatly the "underprepared" tertiary student. Noted scholar and trailblazer in the study of basic writers, John Trimbur, concurs with my assessment of the literature, as he noted in a past email exchange:

... The other thing that struck me is the idea that we don't know that much about

"Millennial" students, esp. basic writers, and how the present moment weighs in on their sense of a future and the role of writing in that future. There are also, as you note, very interesting and important questions about [how] *sic* these students are represented (or ignored) by institutions in higher ed (Personal Communication, fall 2011).

Luckily, despite these noticeable gaps in the literature, there is, however, a strong extant body of research from the New Literacy Studies (Gee, 1991; Street, 1993; Colins, 1995) which engenders and supports the work of Academic Literacies (1998) and also has relational ties with the New London Group (1996) whose seminal work on the nature of multiliteracies gave rise to the broader notion incorporated by Multimodal Social Semiotics that takes into consideration not only the always relevant issues of identity, voice, and the individualized literacy practices of every student but also strategies for learning and meaning making that integrate the technological culture of the new Millennium in which today's college students are deeply immersed.

As my study is engendered by my theoretical framework, which is grounded in the research of the New Literacy Studies as well as multimodal theorists, I also examine the use of multimodal social semiotics as a powerful premise and effective tool that expands the perimeters of 'traditional' writing by allowing students to 'make meaning' through various modes/alternatives to written text. Through the employment of this methodology I identify and therefore, demonstrate the 'meaning making' capabilities of these students. This is the juncture at which the notions regarding the learning practices of the underprepared student who is also a Millennial becomes significant, as Kress, et al. (2001a) recognize that the possibilities for learning must be reconceptualized in a culture that is heavily saturated with technology. It is the technological interplay between students and their literacy practices that is the variable factor in

the teaching of writing in the 21st century, yet it is one that can be potentially mediated by the integration of a multimodal social semiotic approach to writing.

Education in the new millennium has come to what is, perhaps, one of its most significant crossroads, as society has formally entered a digital age in which traditional methods of teaching and learning have been challenged by the ubiquitous presence of technology. Yet this challenge need not be perceived as threatening, rather as an opportunity for reflection, reinvention, and reinvigoration of current designs for teaching and learning. Portable, compact, and "smart" electronic devices have begun to transform the landscape of learning in that they have facilitated instantaneous global communicative connectivity, created vast new communities through social networks, and most significantly, furthered the evolution of the written word which has now become a complex hybrid of alphabetic and social semiotic modes, or what Halliday (1978) refers to a "a discrete network of options" (p. 113) and conceptualized by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) as multimodal social semiotics.

Therefore, one of the primary focuses of this study is on the way in which these discrete multimodal options come into play within the locus of writing classes housed by a university support program whose population consists of students who have been labeled academically "underprepared" for college. In addition, the study expands its focus and depth by following the students' progress across the span of two consecutive semesters in this program.

Questions

In light of the above stated problems, the following questions will guide this research:

1. What are the effects of institutional, generational, and self-labeling on the identities and on the written performance of college students who are believed to be underprepared?

- 2. What effects do teachers' pedagogical practices and design of classroom environments have on the construction of student identity and the enhancement of writing skills?
- 3. What role can a multimodal social semiotic approach to learning play in the identity construction and written performance of Millennial university students who are considered to be underprepared?

Significance of the Study

In this dissertation I provide new insights, new perspectives, and new data about the population of students who are considered to be academically underprepared as well as new strategies for learning that value the many ways in which meaning is made. As the current institutional argument against the inclusion of variously prepared students at the college level is founded in twenty-first century discourse, then a twenty-first century view of this population and their previously untapped potential must be provided.

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Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework and Review of the Literature

The theoretical framework and related literature that informs this study includes four expansive, yet inter-related areas: The New Literacy Studies (Street (1992), Gee (1991), Heath (1983), into which are subsumed the complimentary theoretical and pedagogical applications of Academic Literacies (Lea and Street (1998), Discourse Theory (Gee (2008), and Theories of Multimodality (New London Group, 1996), a review of the literature on the concept of deficit, a discussion of 21st century literacies and the Millennial student, and a review of the literature on current research studies in the field of college composition which focuses on the student writer who has been labeled underprepared.

I will first examine the New Literacy Studies ideological model which redefines literacy in terms of social, cultural, economic, historical, and political factors. The related theoretical perspectives of Academic Literacies as well as discourse theory and identity formation are also discussed. I will then examine the work of the New London Group and other multimodal theorists which incorporates a multimodal social semiotic theory of meaning making, specifically in the area of writing studies. In order to locate these theoretic frameworks within a larger context, I provide a review of the literature regarding the concept of deficit as viewed through the medical model. This discussion will be followed by a review of current research in the field of post-secondary composition that focuses on both the Millennial student and those students who have been labeled underprepared.

New Literacy Studies

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in The New Literacy Studies (Street (1992), Gee (1991), Heath (1984), with its emphasis on an ideological model that supports an

ethnographic approach and incorporates social constructivism, socio-linguistics, discourse analysis, as well as the socio-historical, economic, and political factors that impact on the way "communities produce distinct ways of being, shaping distinct social identities by drawing on uses of spoken and written language in the course of everyday life" (Collier and Blot, 2003, In addition, the theoretical framework of this study also draws upon the related p.109). ideologies of Academic Literacies (Lea and Street, 1998) and the New London Group (1996) whose combined work expands upon the theoretical foundations of the New Literacy Studies in their inclusion, respectively, of a "multiliteracies" approach that acknowledges and incorporates the ubiquitous presence of technology and its effect on the literacy practices of 21st century students with a particular focus, in the case of Academic Literacies, on the literacies evidenced in post-secondary education "not directly associated with [academic] subjects and disciplines, but with broader institutional discourses and genres" (Lea and Street, 1998, p. 368). Moreover, much of the research done by members of the New Literacy Studies, Academic Literacies, and the New London Group, whether conducted independently or collaboratively, emphasizes the continuously changing and shifting nature of literacy, thereby demonstrating not only a theoretical interconnectedness but also their particular relevance to this study in terms of its focus on composition studies and underprepared Millennial students, as they consider social, political, historical, and cultural aspects as well as identity, voice, new technologies, both multimodal and digital, and their impact on reading, writing, critical and analytical thinking.

The New Literacy Studies (Street, (1992), Gee (1991), and (Heath, 1984), is a field comprised of anthropologists and sociolinguists whose emergence in the 1980s came in response to preceding research which had been done primarily by educationalists and psychologists who had defined literacy in narrow, linear, and unitary terms and that lent support to the political and

economic agendas of a governmental and educational system that also maintained "that literacy was an autonomous, neutral, and universal set of skills" (Street, 2003, p.xiii, in Collins and Blot, 2003). Recognizing the "issues of power" inherent in such an approach, The New Literacy Studies attempted to counter this autonomous model by introducing what Street (1992) termed, the 'ideological' model.

Proponents of the New Literacy Studies such as Street (1992), Gee (1991), and Heath (1984), endeavored to broaden the conceptual parameters of literacy, per se, which had previously been defined as the attainment of reading and writing skills that mirrored the traditional Western colonialist (and very white) mindset of those who held the institutional power, by integrating social, cultural, historical, economic, and political factors. In so doing, they refuted the idea of literacy as a single set of skills and, instead, proffered the concept of literacies" or "multiple literacies," based on extensive research and ethnographic studies that affirmed their social constructivist view and "the realization that communities produce distinct ways of being, shaping distinct social identities by drawing on uses of spoken and written language in the course of everyday life" (Collier and Blot, 2003, p.109).

It was the need to identify and examine more thoroughly these "structures of power" and their suppressive influences on literacy that was the impetus behind Street's (1992) broader views. As he stated, literacy was "already a social and ideological practice involving fundamental aspects of epistemology, power and politics: the acquisition of literacy involves challenges to dominant discourses (Lewis as cited in Street, 1992), shifts in what constitutes the agenda of proper literacy (Weinstein-Shr; Carmetti; Shuman in Street, 1992) and struggles for power and position (Rockhill, Probst in Street, 1992). In this sense, then, "literacy practices are saturated with ideology" (p.9).

It is this ideological saturation of literacy practices that underscores the dilemma faced by students who have been labeled academically underprepared, as their segregated placement within the university makes the notion of 'class' both a literal and figurative stigma. Moreover, these programmatic settings become sites of contestation regarding literacy acquisition, proper literacy, and power and position for both the students as well as the institutional hierarchy. It is the examination of these 'class' struggles and their subsequent effects on the underprepared student that is the primary focus of this study.

Academic Literacies

Academic Literacies (Lea and Street, 1998), which has theoretical and ideological roots in the work of The New Literacy Studies (Street, 1992; Gee 1991; Heath, 1984), and focuses primarily on writing studies within the university, asserts that the "literacy practices of academic disciplines can be viewed as varied social practices associated with different communities [and] also takes account of literacies not directly associated with subjects and disciplines, but with broader institutional discourses and genres" (Lea and Street, 1998, p. 368). Given the sociocultural and sociolinguistic nature of Academic Literacies, it is not surprising that one of its defining characteristics is an investment in research focused on the tensive relationship between the multiplicity of social practices inherent in the writing of post-secondary students and the more staid and traditional practices of the university. By drawing on findings from their own empirical research conducted within university settings, Lea and Street (1998) were able to examine "student writing against a background of institutional practices, power relations and identities, with meanings being contested between faculty and students," thereby emphasizing the "different understandings and interpretations of the writing task" (Russell et al., 2009, p. 400). What became apparent from these findings was the disconnect between the often hidden

expectations and requirements of the faculty, as institutional representatives, and those of the students regarding writing practices. In sum, Lea and Street's (1998) findings as well as those detailed by Ivanic (1998) in her book *Writing and identity: The discoursal construction of identity in academic writing,* indicate that an academic literacies model "is best able to take account of the nature of student writing in relation to institutional practices, power relations and identities, in short to consider the complexity of meaning making...thus offering an alternative to deficit models of learning and writing based on autonomous models of literacy" (Russell et al. 2009, p. 400).

The implications of findings by Lea and Street (1998), Ivanic (1998) and later, Lillis and Scott (2008), whose research expands and enhances these earlier studies, are significant to this study in that they privilege diverse social practices, endeavor to mediate the power of the institutional discourse of higher education in its articulation and imposition of an autonomous model of literacy, "whereby literacy is viewed as a single and universal phenomenon with assumed cognitive as well as economic benefits," affirm the "complexity of meaning making" (Lillis and Scott, 2008, p. 11), and posit substantive alternatives to the deficit model of writing and learning.

Aside from the significant connections noted above, another aspect of Academic Literacies, whose work compliments my research, is its relationship to its American cousin, Writing Across the Curriculum. As Lea, Street, and their co-authors, Russell, Parker, and Donahue (2009) explain, "Both Academic Literacies and Writing Across the Curriculum took their impetus from widening participation, as it is called in the UK, or admission of previously excluded groups in the US....[B]oth WAC (in the 1970s) and ACLIT (in the 1990s) began as a

response to an influx of new students" (p. 396). It is significant to note that many of these "new students" were, and continue to be, viewed through the lens of deficit.

However, the combined methodologies and practices of Academic Literacies and Writing Across the Curriculum offer a great deal more to this study than their overt similarities detailed below by Russell, et al., (2009):

Ideologically both are oppositional, attempting to reform higher education and making it more open. And both use writing/literacy to resist deeply entrenched attitudes about writing, and about students and disciplines. Both attempt to move beyond elementary skills (and thus remedial or deficit) models of writing to consider the complexity of communication in relation to learning" (p. 396).

It was the shift by Writing Across the Curriculum, in the 1980s, from the dominant cognitive model of writing research to a cultural historical perspective examined through an increased use of ethnographic methods that paved the way, in the 1990s, for Academic Literacies and writing researchers on both continents to fundamentally 'overwrite' many of the more previously held rigid theories about the ways in which writing should be taught and performed (Russell, et al., 2009, p. 401). This groundbreaking work, as previously noted, was another significant step away from a deficit notion of "underprepared" students and their writing and toward a more expansive view of the ways in which meaning making could be expressed.

Specifically, these "ways" of meaning making have been evidenced through the use of multimodal social semiotics. As Russell, et al (2009) note: "...[I]n the last 10 years, North American Writing Across the Curriculum programs have begun to speak of themselves in terms of multi-modal "communication across the curriculum" (CAC), in part as a response to the

forward thinking stance assumed by the New London Group (1996) and its interest in new media, which was also influential for Academic Literacies" (p. 397).

Thus, it is through the related theoretic frameworks of Writing Across the Curriculum and Academic Literacies as well as the emphasis on multiliteracies espoused by the New London Group (1996), that this study seeks to explore the learning and meaning making processes inherent in the texts produced by Millennial students who have been labeled underprepared for university-level work.

Discourse and Identity

Much of the current research that is focused on the connections between literacy and discourse and identity has been generated by, and is consistent with, the work of The New Literacy Studies (Street, 1992, Gee 1991, and Heath, 1984) insofar as it is embedded within an ideological method that embraces social constructivism, employs an ethnographic research model, and, in particular, addresses issues of power and the impact of this institutional power on the literacy practices and subsequent identity formation of marginalized groups. Gee (1991), author of the term "The New Literacy Studies," shares Street's embrace of an 'ideological' method with a particular emphasis on power; however, as a linguist, Gee's primary focus is on the nature of 'Discourses,' which he distinguishes through the use of a capital "D," and defines "as ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing, that are accepted as instantiations of particular identities (or "types" of people) by specific groups." Thus, they are "socially situated identities" that are "always and everywhere social and products of social histories" (p. 3). Gee suggests that these "socially situated identities" are imposed by the "haves" on the "have nots." In other words, in order to attain more of the benefits, wealth, power, and normative status, the heretofore marginalized non-or not-so

literates must aspire to the standards set by an exclusive elite. As Gee states, "Discourses are intimately related to the distribution of social power and hierarchical structure in society" (p. 163).

It is Gee's (1991) work on the nature of Discourses, especially as they relate to power and hierarchical structures in the dynamic between teacher and student in the classroom, that makes his work so relevant to my research, as it is the perceived, and often imposed, "socially situated identities" that arise from these discourses, as well as the subsequent effects on learning, that characterize one of the central areas of inquiry addressed by this study. Although Gee's (1991) position on the relationship between discourse and identity is integral to my work as a researcher, it is important to note that it is located within a larger discussion regarding the relationship between literacy and identity which is reviewed at length by Moje and Luke (2009) in their article, "Literacy and identity: Examining the metaphors in history and contemporary research."

The related, yet individually nuanced theories regarding the relationship between literacy and identity are conceptualized by Moje and Luke (2009) as metaphors which they have categorized as "[i]dentity as (a) difference, (b) sense of self/subjectivity, (c) mind or consciousness, (d) narrative, and (e) position" (p. 416). While all five of these metaphors are relevant to my study in terms of their shared assertion that identity is social in nature, it is necessary in my role as researcher to make clear my specific perceptions about identity and the ways in which those perceptions potentially influence the interpretation and assumptions that will be detailed in my findings (Moje and Luke, 2009). Thus, the metaphor with which this study aligns itself, and is most closely associated with my theoretical framework, is the

"identity-as-difference metaphor," and more particularly, the "literacy studies from an identity-as-difference metaphor" (p. 419).

The predominant focus of the identity-as-difference metaphor is on "how people are distinguished one from another by virtue of their group membership and on how ways of knowing, doing, or believing held or practiced by a group shape the individual as a member of that group" (Moje and Luke, 2009, 419-420). However, embedded within this basic premise, are differing views regarding identity which depend on whether group membership has been "afforded" or "assigned" (p. 420). As Moje and Luke, (2009) explain, while "social psychological perspectives" assert that "individuals select themselves into social contexts that they believe afford them the opportunity to enact important identity encodings" (p. 420), the "literacy studies from an identity-as-difference metaphor," as actualized by Heath (1983), revealed "how individual students in school take up literate practices of schooling...and how they might or might not identify with those practices" (p.421). Moreover, Heath's (1983) findings "suggest that language and literacy practices [are] valued in different ways in different contexts, and thus children whose language and literacy practices d[o] not match school language and literacy practices [are] devalued and marginalized from school learning" (Moje and Luke, 2009, p. 421).

While Heath's (1983) groundbreaking study paved the way for further inquiry into what Moje and Luke (2009) have conceptualized as "literacy studies from an identity-as-difference" metaphor, current researchers such as McCarthey and Moje (2002) and Ivanic (1998) have endeavored to broaden the scope of Heath's work by not only continuing to examine the reflexive relationship between institutional power and the heretofore negative implications of this relationship on the identities of marginalized people but also by initiating teaching practices

that are agentive and libratory in their efforts to revalue and positively reconstruct student identities.

McCarthey and Moje (2002), in asserting that identity matters, engage the reader in a dialogue of inquiry and responses that addresses "the various theories of identity, the relationship between identity and literacy, and how identities and literacies are constructed within relationships of race, gender, class, and space" (p. 228). As teachers themselves, both authors are interested in ways in which their findings will offer teachers better insight into their students' performances and skills as well as a way in which to inspire agency in the student. In discussing these issues, McCarthey and Moje (2002) align themselves with the new literacy studies with their emphasis on social constructivism (with a nod to Vygotsky), discourse theory, and performance theory as well as with postmodernism, and hybrid theory.

However, it is Roz Ivanic (1998) who actualizes not only the ideology of The New Literacy Studies (Street, (1992), Gee (1991), and (Heath, 1984) but also Goffman's "social-interactionist theory of self-representation" in her book *Writing and identity: The discoursal construction of identity in academic writing.* In her embrace of a social-constructivist approach, Ivanic (1998) takes pains to stress that "identity is not socially *determined* but socially *constructed*" (p. 12). She goes on to explain that "[t]his means that the possibilities for the self are not fixed but open to contestation and change" (p. 12). In the studies contained within her book, Ivanic (1998) addresses issues regarding the relationship between theory and practice. She claims that "particular ways of thinking about writing and identity can be of use, even have a libratory power, for all of us as we write and help students to write in institutional settings." Further, Ivanic (1998) states that research studies such as hers, "enables us to see what otherwise

remains hidden beneath the surface of students' writing, revealing the complexity of the decision-making which they face, and the subtlety of their reasons for writing as they do" (p. 34).

As we can see, through the work of researchers such as Gee (1991), Heath (1984), McCarthy and Moje (2002), Ivanic (1998) and many more affiliated with the New Literacy Studies (Street, (1992), Gee (1991), and (Heath, 1984), inquiries into the connections between literacy and identity is, like identity itself, always in the process of shifting, changing, and redefining itself in order to come to a better understanding of what is clearly, a very complex relationship. Thus, it is through the theoretical approaches of the studies referenced above and their associated concepts of identity, that I will frame and inform my own research regarding the nature of "difference" as it applies to the manifestations of identity generated through the writing and discourse of post-secondary Millennial students who have been labeled underprepared.

Multimodal Social Semiotics/ The New London Group

In discussing multimodal social semiotics, it is necessary to identify The New London Group (1996) as the formal progenitor of this field of study. The New London Group came to the fore with the publication, in 1996, of its programmatic manifesto "A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures," which proclaimed their foundational stance that retained the social constructivist view of literacy espoused by the New Literacy Studies while also expanding upon its ideological view of literacies as multiple in nature. More precisely, the scholars who comprised the New London Group (1996): Courtney Cazden, Bill Cope, Norman Fairclough, James Gee, Mary Kalantzis, Gunther Kress, Allan Luke, Carmen Luke, Sarah Michaels, and Martin Nakata, proffered a "multiliteracies" approach to literacy pedagogy (later adapted by Academic Literacies), that takes into account the "multiplicity of communications channels and increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in the world today" (p. 1) To this end,

the New London Group (1996), through this unique collaborative effort, formulated a pedagogical stance which included a globalized perspective calling for "a much broader view of literacy than portrayed by traditional language-based approaches...and... account[s] for the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies" (pp. 1-2). This call to action was, as they claim, "a starting point of sorts, open and tentative" (p. 3); however, the response to this call has been rapid and expansive.

Due to the ubiquitous presence of technology in the 21st century, the foundational theories of the New London Group (1996) have developed into an ever broadening field of study which posits a multimodal approach to learning with a particular emphasis on the distinct "affordances" permitted by the semiotic modes of writing and image (Kress, 2000, p.339). These theories of multimodalities which "suggest[s] that learning is realized through the interaction between visual, actional and linguistic communication (i.e. learning is multimodal) and involves the transformation of information across different communicative systems ('modes'), e.g. from speech to image," is informed by social semiotics (Halliday, 1985) and its "conception of learning as *a dynamic process of sign making*" (Jewitt, et al, 2001 pp. 5-6). The symbiotic relationship between multimodal and social semiotic theory is further clarified by Jewitt, et al, (2001) in their following explication of the concepts behind social semiotics:

The conceptual framework of social semiotics accounts for how modes of communication (speech, writing, image, gesture, three-dimensional models, etc.) are used. This account is based on the assumption that communicative systems have evolved to satisfy societal needs and that modes such as writing or gesture are organized to function with respect to these needs, e.g. language, in Michael Halliday's phrase, is as it is because of its social uses" (p. 6).

An essential component of the above mentioned organization of multiple modes centers on the importance of "design" (Kress, 1997, 2000) in a "landscape of communication [that] is changing its configurations fundamentally" (Kress, 2000, p. 337). Kress (2000) defines "design" as "the intentional deployment of resources in specific configurations to implement the purposes of the designers" (p. 337). Therefore, design is seen by Kress as a "shift from older theories both of meaning and of meaning use to a position in which the work of the text maker is taken as transformative of the resources and of the maker of the text...[and] ...gives agency of a real kind to the text maker" (p. 340). Of this concept, Hull and Nelson (2005) note that, "in thinking of multimodal texts, it is obvious how useful the notion of design can become as a way to conceptualize the suddenly increased array of choices about semiotic features that an author confronts" (p. 229).

Although the term "author," as it is used above, is applicable in its general sense to anyone engaged in the creation of a multimodal text, I interpret it more specifically in relation to the student writers in my composition classes. However, Lauer (2009), supplies a definition that serves to encompass both interpretations:

As writing becomes an increasingly screen-based activity, the ways in which we write (from the grammar we use to the style, tone, appearance, and structure of our words, sentences, paragraphs, and pages) necessarily make more fluid and transitory the role we occupy as 'author' of a text. This change in the relationship of author to text, and thus in the way in which meaning can be communicated through text, was facilitated by technological advancement that allowed for a shift from the static medium of the page to the more fluid medium of the screen (p. 227).

It is precisely due to this 'shift' that the concept of multimodality made its way into the composition classroom, and as Lauer (2009) informs us, "[d]efinitions of just about everything tend to adapt to the variety of audiences to whom they are being delivered" (p. 228). Thus, as a college writing instructor and not a semiotic theoretician, I appropriate Kress's (1997, 2000) notion and accompanying definition of design and redefine it in terms of the language of the composition community. In this way, design comes to refer not only to the physical layout of the page but also to the structural components of organization and process that are embedded in composition pedagogies and upon which an academic essay is built.

The importance of design to the process of conceptualization is significant in its implications for use in the writing instruction of variously prepared college students, especially the current generation of technologically savvy and visually oriented Millennials. While many of these students are adept in the practices inherent in the use of technology, virtually creating new literate social practices, they often have little practice with the design, or organizational process, associated with academic writing. Regarding this disparity, Considine, et al., (2009) make the following observations:

For Millennials, technology and media are intricately interwoven in their lives. This generation lives in an environment where reading and writing, through digital media as well as traditional texts, are pervasive. Thus, we have argued that reading and writing are a pervasive part of Millennials' everyday life...The ensuing contradiction is the disconnect between the literacy skills that they develop in their social environment and the literacy environment of the school. Evidence suggests that Millennials are still lacking the academic literacy skills that are the foundation of further

success in school and in adult life (p.479).

However, the ability to potentially bridge this gap is offered through the affordances of a multimodal curriculum, especially in the area of composition, as students could potentially, not only "see" the pieces of the puzzle fall into place but also come to better understand the underlying concept of writing through the process of creating their own individual design. In so doing, they would be drawing on the more easily conceived and familiar out-of-school literacy practices with which they are already acquainted. To clarify, I am not merely speaking in terms of brainstorming techniques such as clusters or visual maps. Rather, I refer to the use of visual components (signs, symbols, pictures, font, color, and more) all of which are now readily available through digital technology, as an integral part of the traditional written text. As Hull and Nelson (2005) assert, "it is through an informed, intentional process of design on the part of the individuals, making creative use of available preexisting designs and resources, that meanings, selves, and communities are powerfully made and remade" (p. 229).

Furthermore, with regard to other in-class activities based on actual multimodal presentations, there is the potential for better understanding of abstract concepts that will ultimately become the alphabetic written text, as "images, written text, music, and so on each respectively impart certain kinds of meanings more easily and naturally than others" (Hull and Nelson, (2005), p. 229). This point is particularly salient to my study, as the so-called underprepared Millennial, born and bred in a visually oriented world, dependent on spell-check and a too readily accessible and often misleading online thesaurus, is sometimes limited in his or her ability to adequately articulate abstract concepts and ideas in the idealized language of Academic Discourse—or, as Gee (2008) might note—their primary Discourses do not quite mesh with the dominant Discourses of academe. This point is reaffirmed by Kalantzis, et al.,

(2003) who tell us that, "[i]ndeed, the new communications environment is one in which the old rules of literacy need to be supplemented. Although spelling remains important, it is now something for spell-checking programs, and email messages do not have to be grammatical in a formal sense..." (p. 22). To this end, Blake Yancey (2004) affirms the value of a multimodal pedagogy, and asserts, "[w]hen teachers can literally *see* what goes on in a student's ...processes, they can better guide each student's particular journey as a writer" (p. 39).

Thus, it is suggested that when multimodality becomes part of a writer's repertoire, intended meaning can be more clearly conveyed, the writer's voice can be heard, and identity valued. And, although the integration of multimodality into students' writing will, inevitably, result in a wide range of differences between each text, which often "is taken as an indication of pupils' failure to correctly read (or reproduce) the stable messages encoded in teacher's communications and is underpinned by this conception of learning" (Jewitt, et al., 2001, p. 7), a true multimodal pedagogy could serve to counter this construct. This pedagogical approach "suggest[s] that an alternative way of understanding the variation between pupils' texts is to read "variation" as the pupils' shaping of meaning in what is for them the most apt and plausible way, reflecting their interests, with the resources available to them in a specific context" (Jewitt, et al., 2001, p.7).

The implications for the integration of a multimodal approach to college writing are, as noted above, rich with potential. Moreover, for the Millennial college writer who is thought to be underprepared, the less prescribed and more widely inclusive approach offered through multimodal social semiotic theories offers tangible, liberatory, and egalitarian ways through which the notion of deficit can be repudiated. Therefore, within this study, I will look to the various theories of multiliteracies as authentic and agentive resources which,

through transmediation, can be reappropriated in a variety of ways within the curriculum of a college writing class. I will particularly be looking at the ways in which visual representation of the topic to be addressed becomes one of the initial steps in the writing process and what, if any, are the ways in which the visual lends itself to the overall understanding, conceptualizing, and production of the final written product. Also to be considered will be the ways in which students communicate ideas, themes, messages, and arguments through the production of nontraditional communicative "texts" that are composed not strictly through the written word, but are predominately multimodal in nature.

Review of the Literature on Deficit

The body of literature accrued over the past decades concerning college students who are considered to be underprepared abounds with a multiplicity of terms and definitions which attempt to encapsulate what many political and educational voices have decried as a virulent malady that has permeated and contaminated the American higher educational system. Born of a contentious debate that embodies ideological and theoretical components and centered on a discourse of power, the issue of remediation is being discussed with renewed vigor as "remedial education has emerged as a flash point for competing ideologies regarding access to—and, indeed, the purpose of—higher education" (Shaw, 1997, p.286).

Considering the innumerable and ambiguous variables that are embedded in the textual and social notion of deficit, this literature review examines prevailing negative assumptions about the abilities of students who have been labeled academically "underprepared" for college. These assumptions will be viewed from a sociocultural perspective and from relational notions of identity and will consider the historical events as well as the political and institutional decisions that have conspired to create these assumptions. This is important to my research, as it

helps to contextualize my study within a long-standing social, cultural, and historical framework that has marginalized and bestowed deficit-laden labels on students based on misconceptions of cognitive ability which are embedded in an autonomous and idealized model of what it means to be a "traditional" student.

While the motives that gave rise to this social misconception that conflates cognitive deficit with underprepared were ostensibly well-intentioned, the literature indicates that the political and institutional policy makers who, respectively, set the standards for inclusion in this "remedial" population and who implemented the curriculum which housed them may have had a slightly different agenda in mind. Mindful of their societal and constituent-based charge to provide "equal access and equal opportunity" (Astin, 1990, p. 472) to all as well as their accountability for maintaining standards of excellence in education, both the political sector and the educational institution took great pains to avoid becoming fully complicit in any action that could potentially taint either their political viability or "threaten their sense of academic excellence" (Astin, 1998, p. 16). As Astin so tellingly states: "It goes without saying that the underprepared student is a kind of pariah in American higher education..." (p. 13). Therefore, there is an inherent risk in the assignation of so many students to remedial type programs based on high stakes test scores, high school grade point averages (GPAs), and/or class rank, measures which much of the literature decries as arbitrary, ambiguous, and inherently exclusionary in nature and in practice, (Astin, 1990; Giroux, 2003; Mazzeo, 2002; Rose, 1988), yet are firmly upheld by policy makers and higher education leaders who are far more concerned with maintaining "social hierarchies and legitimate[ing] inequality" than they are with the development of pedagogical practices that are socially relevant, egalitarian, and humanistic in nature (Giroux, 2003, p.10). However, by employing the questionable practice of standardized measurement, the number of tertiary students labeled remedial or underprepared often becomes disproportionate to the numbers of those who are considered to be "traditional" students; thus, it is inevitable that finger-pointing will begin and the blame for what is perceived to be massive societal lack of preparedness must fall on someone or something (Raab & Adam, 2005).

Mindful of this potential censure, the political sector, assisted by its powerful and insidious sidekick, the media, was quick in its response to this "problem" of remediation (Mazzeo, 2002, p. 21) and even quicker in its attempts to shift the site of contention to the educational arena. Thus we find that, despite the institution's Herculean efforts to escape complicity in what Bruno V. Manno (1996) disparagingly refers to as a "swamp of remedial education" (p.78), the political camp was initially successful in wagging the condemning finger of Uncle Sam at the post-secondary institution for its failure to "cure" this social ailment as well as for the rising costs incurred by remediation. Moreover, Manno's venomous attack is only one of many such accusatory political diatribes issued against higher education and those students who are believed to be "academically unqualified" (p. 79). Foremost among these was the 1975 Newsweek cover story written by Merrill Sheils, that informed and inflamed the nation about the reasons why "Johnny Can't Write" and hurled the academic world headlong into what became known as the "literacy crisis" (Rose, 1989).

Although the educational system initially bore the brunt of the blame for this crisis, ultimately, the political sector, as primary overseer of and policymaker for this system, was also, in the eyes of American society at large, accountable for this critical issue. As Giroux (2006) explains, "education is already a space of politics, power, and authority" (p. 17). Consequently, as Giroux further explains, "Cynicism about politics and skepticism about education have become mutually reinforcing tendencies that to be understood must be analyzed in tandem" (p.

65). Ultimately, when duly analyzed from this perspective, we see in the literature that both the political and institutional voices become co-conspirators in an elusive scheme which employs a rhetoric that ascribes to a discourse invested with power, yet cloaked in ambiguity. Moreover, we begin to understand the many euphemistic appellations of the remedial populations and the programs that house them as well as the proclivity toward viewing the socially constructed literacies of these students in terms of a deficit model. In other words, by resorting to the rhetoric of deficit which makes the claim, "It's them—not us," and thereby positions the student as "problem" (Haggis, 2006), the political and educational policy makers attempted to deflect the blame for what ultimately came to be viewed as an entirely student centered cognitive deficiency rather than a complex social issue in which they, themselves, were key players (p. 5).

For, as McDermott and Varenne (1995) point out in their article, "Culture as Disability," it is society, or "culture" as they term it, that not only accounts for what are perceived to be deficits but also creates the context through which political and educational policy makers are able to obfuscate their culpability in perpetuating, and ultimately concretizing, what both Graff (1997) and Gee (2008) refer to as the "literacy myth". As McDermott and Varenne (1995) explain:

An analysis of the cultural construction of institutional occasions for the creation and display of various disabilities...reveals not broken persons but identifications neatly tuned to the workings of institutions serving political and economic ends through formal educational means (p. 344).

In order to better understand this complex and dysfunctional relationship it is necessary to include in this review the concept of ideology as it relates to discourse analysis. Ideology in its most basic form can be explained as a belief system (Gee, 2008; Shaw, 1997), a concept in

and of itself that is relatively benign and can be used with much positive efficacy, as we will see later in this review. However, when this term is viewed through the lens of Marxist philosophy which was deeply embedded in the American social and educational system throughout the decades from 1960 through 1980, the larger and more pernicious aspects of ideology as an elitist and self-serving construct which expressed the "social and political ideas of those groups with the most power, status, and wealth" in an effort to "retain and enhance their power," becomes clearly visible (Gee, 2008, p. 28). Both Gee (2008) and Shaw (1997) delineate the ways in which this aberrant ideological stance became inextricably linked with educational policy and the full-throttle push toward the view of remediation as a poor-man's malady at odds with, and detrimental to, not only the interests of the powerful elite but also to a society whose view of reality has been "inverted" by the discourse of these power-brokers and their desire to "organiz[e] society and its institutions so as to encourage ways of thinking and behaving...that better reflect the interests of the rich and powerful than the way things actually are or should be" (Gee, 2008, pp. 28-9). Astin (1998) elaborates on this 'inverted' notion of reality and its tendency to instill anxiety, paranoia, and tap into 'hidden' beliefs in a society mesmerized by the hypnotic tones of the voice of power: "Much of our fear of remedial students and much of our unwillingness to get involved in educating them can be traced to our uncritical acceptance of this belief and to the fact that most of us are not even consciously aware of the power and scope of its influence" (p. 12).

As indicated above, the way in which any ideology becomes a predominant cultural view is through its use of language as a promotional tool and, as a consequence, "Sometimes vocabulary becomes politicized by assuming a different meaning or value because a small group within society has affixed a positive or negative status with the word" (Arendale, 2005, p. 67).

Arendale (2005) goes on to claim that, "This is most powerfully displayed by some policy makers at the local or state level who promote a negative stereotype of remedial education" (p. 67) Furthermore, language and its implicit message are always embodied in a particular discourse that reflects the historical, political, social, and economic context in which it was created. As Gee (2008) explains:

The whole point is to see the multiple ways in which language becomes meaningful only within Discourses and how language-within-Discourses is always and everywhere value-laden and "political" in the broad sense of "political" where it means 'involving human relationships where power and 'social goods' are at stake (p. 183).

Sadly, there is, perhaps, no more apt way in which to view the bearers of the variegated terms of remediation that abound in the literature than as "social goods," victims of "social constructions that have strong negative connotations" which imply that "there must be something 'wrong' with the student who needs to be 'remedied'" (Astin, 1998, p.13). Yet, as Astin and many other scholars argue (Grimes & David, 1999; Merisotis & Phipps, 2000; Brothen & Wambach, 2004; Attewell, et al, 2006; Haggis, 2006), there is something inherently "misleading" about "the use of categorical terminology to describe a phenomenon that is relativistic and arbitrary" (p. 13). To confirm this stance, one need only scan the numerous more commonly used, yet equally stigmatizing reductive labels that are bandied about in the literature such as: ineducable, remedial, basic, at-risk, high-risk, developmental, non-traditional, and underprepared. The cavalier distribution of these terms is not only 'misleading' but also extremely detrimental to the identities of the bearers of such damning appellations. Hull et al. (1991) discuss the far-reaching implications of this discoursal vagueness when they note that, "A

great deal of research has shown that students whose teachers expect them to do well, tend to do well, while students whose teachers expect them to do poorly, do poorly. These finding hold firm, even in cases of mistaken placement or misinformation" (p. 317). It is the increased probability of 'mistaken placement' in an atmosphere charged with the power laden Discourse of political and institutional frivolity to which Schrag (1999) alludes when he makes the claim, "The broader problem...is defining just what remedial education is, deciding where it should take place, even agreeing on what it should be called" (p. 70).

The conflation, or rather the interchangeable use of these terms is, indeed, a "broader problem," particularly so for those students whose individualized, yet extremely varying levels of college readiness has been assessed and categorized under the connotatively negative umbrella heading of remediation; an umbrella whose base is held firmly by the hegemonic hands of the institutional and political policymakers who find it in their best interests to maintain and support a "negative stereotype" of remedial education (Arendale, 2005). As Shaw (1997) reminds us, "...to many pundits, remediation has become a code word for the evils of affirmative action and the 'anti-standards' ideology of liberals and other progressive educators" (p. 286). Yet, a look at the literature written on this topic by some of these so-called "liberals" and "progressive educators" clearly indicates that remediation, as viewed through the lens of the politically and institutionally prescribed medical model of deficit, is itself distorted and clearly in need of a new "prescription."

David Arendale's (2005) scholarly article, "Terms of endearment" and Parker, Bustillos, & Behringer's (2010) literature review, "Remedial and developmental education policy at a crossroads" are but two of many recent attempts to parse through and explicate this seeming polyglot of exclusionary labels. Both works reveal that for the past hundred years or so,

remedial is the term that has been most commonly used in higher education to define students who were perceived as having cognitively based deficits and thus, lacking the basic skills necessary to succeed at the postsecondary level. However, despite efforts in the 1970s by some postsecondary organizations to reconfigure and redefine the scope of remediation by advocating for the use of the alternate term "developmental," a term which shifts the view from that of deficit to one of a more positive and ongoing "process of development, growth, progress...an unfinished process of learning" (Parker et al. 2010, p. 4), the "U.S. Department of Education and some other education agencies...continue using the historic term 'remedial education' to describe the same types of services that are commonly viewed as part of developmental education as well as more traditional remedial activities" (Arendale, 2005, p. 72). This blind adherence to the ideology and language of the deficit model indicates either a very unlikely inability on the part of the policymakers to comprehend the complexity of this issue, or a purposeful unwillingness to 'remediate' their "inappropriate vocabulary choice" (p. 67). However, when one considers the contentious and heated debate that has taken place over the past decade regarding the viability of remedial education, it would appear that the latter of these two stances is a more accurate reflection of intent on the part of the policymakers.

The ideological battle waged by opposing camps over this issue has resulted in a massive body of literature regarding efforts to minimize, redirect to the confines of the community college, or "dismantle—affirmative action, bilingual education, and other social and educational programs that directly affect this country's most vulnerable populations" (Shaw, 1997, p. 285), most of whom fall into the unforgiving category of remedial. Furthermore, Shaw states that "the rhetoric emerging from mainstream, non-academic print media is based on an exclusionary, meritocratic ideology...aimed at *closing* doors and reducing educational opportunity for large

portions of 'unqualified' students" (p. 278). Lest there be any doubt about the implications of these efforts, political and educational watchdog, Bruno Manno (1995), adds to the vituperative rhetoric with his adamant claim that "the politics of race and ethnicity has destroyed the institution" (p. 48). Mazzeo (2002), however, in more measured tones, attempts to locate the source of this mass anti-remedial movement when he informs us that:

high levels of remediation have become defined as a policy problem....as politicians and the media have decried the increasing number of college freshmen who are underprepared for college and the added financial burden they place on state education systems.

Many citizens and policy makers see remediation as paying for the same education twice (p. 21).

In light of Mazzeo's explanation, it would appear that money, rather than social consciousness is the platform on which most policymakers have built their argument. However, Attewell et al. (2006) manages to broaden the scope of what they refer to as a "politically contentious issue" (p. 886) by noting additional facets of this ideological stance which point to the very existence of remedial and development programs as an indictment of today's college students whose supposed lack of academic strength deems them "unsuitable to be admitted into college in the first place" (p. 887). Moreover, as Attewell et al. note, the presence of so many of these students in colleges and universities has been interpreted as an indication that admission standards have been lowered and curriculum 'dumbed down' in order to assure their retention and ultimate attainment of a degree p. (887). It is accusations such as these that lend credibility to observations made by Parker et al. (2010) which suggest an underlying agenda behind efforts on the part of colleges and universities to rid themselves of the problems associated with underprepared population. As they note, "if remedial education is deemed to be specific only to

the two-year college, the four-year institutions are taken 'off the hook' for educating students who may knock at their doors in need of academic support" (p. 20).

The response to this meritocratic elitism and its inherent gatekeeper mentality has been fast and furious, charged with the electricity of humanism, egalitarianism, and a shocked outrage at the circumvention of democratic principles which were meant to guarantee equal opportunity for all. To this end, Henry Giroux (2006), perhaps the most outraged and outspoken of these respondents, issues a call to action, "an appeal to collectively address material inequities involving resources, accessibility, and power in both education and the broader global society while viewing the struggle for power as generative and crucial to any viable notion of individual and social agency" (p. 66). Other, less outspoken, but like-minded respondents have entered the discussion by deconstructing the claims of the opposition along practical and ideological lines. Merisotis and Phipps (2000) refute the claims of excessive costs by challenging the accuracy of such data, noting the absence of many important and mitigating variables whose inclusion would provide a more accurate representation of the situation. Their extensive and detailed report on the subject leads them to conclude that, "Hard evidence regarding the costs of remediation nationwide is elusive" (p. 75). Parker et al. (2010), referencing an in-depth analysis and critique of these studies conducted by Bettinger and Long (2009), agree with their findings that many of the studies regarding remedial education provide "too simplistic of a view to a complex issue" (p. 21). And Mazzeo (2002), in stronger language, goes so far as to claim, "such data are notoriously unreliable" (p. 22).

However, the greater concern over these misleading studies is not the dollar amount, but the ultimate cost to society if support programs are discontinued and access to postsecondary education is denied. As Merisotis and Phipps (2000) note, "As a society, we have little choice

about providing remediation in higher education, with the goal of increasing functional literacy. Abandoning remedial efforts in higher education and therefore reducing the number of people gaining the skills and knowledge associated with postsecondary education is unwise public policy" (p. 79). Alexander Astin (1998) adds to this discussion with his firm assertion that "no problem strikes me as being more important than the education of the so-called underprepared or 'remedial' student" (p. 12). He further states that, "Providing effective 'remedial' education would do more to alleviate our most serious social and economic problems than almost any other action we could take" (p. 12).

These arguments become increasingly relevant in light of studies that reveal the vague and ambiguous ways in which college readiness is determined, labels affixed, and access denied. Throughout the literature, repeated reference is made to college 'standards' and 'college-level' work as the yardsticks against which preparedness is measured and remediation determined. Yet, even though the frequent usage of these terms implies that these standards actually do exist and represent a common and understood construct among institutions, no such criteria appear to exist. As Attewell et al. (2006) report: "Exactly what constitutes 'college-level work' is by no means clear" (p. 887). In fact, we are informed by Merisotis and Phipps (2000) that "[R]emedial education is in the eye of the beholder. Rather than being based on some immutable set of college-level standards, remedial education, more often than not, is determined by the admissions requirements of the particular institution" (p. 72). The absurdity of this situation is made increasingly clear by Astin (1998) who states:

Most remedial students turn out to be simply those who have the lowest scores on some sort of normative measurement—standardized tests, school grades, and the like. But where we draw the line is completely arbitrary: lowest quarter,

lowest fifth, lowest 5% or what? Nobody knows. Second, the 'norms' that define a 'low' score are highly variable from one setting to another (p.13).

The arbitrariness of exactly where that line is drawn has been, and continues to be a problem, due to the enormous power that these measures have over the lives of so many. Considering the amorphous nature of these measures, it is not surprising that there has been such strong opposition to the use of standardized tests as the supposed determiners of 'readiness.' In fact, the consensus among many researchers seems to be that these tests provide little in the way of valid academic predictive information (Armstrong, 1999; King et al. 1994). Armstrong (1999) effectively articulates this position when he reveals that his non-exclusionary study of a broad range of students showed "little or no relationship between test scores and student performance in class" (p. 36).

These research findings are quite provocative, especially at a time in history during which more and more college students have been deemed underprepared and said to exhibit lack of college preparation in at least one of the basic skills (Byrd & MacDonald, (2000). The literature indicates that "nearly every community college and university in the United States admits students who are not ready for the level of academic work expected of them" (NCES, 1996, in Brothen & Wambach, 2004, pp. 16-17). Brothen and Wambach (2004) estimate that over three-quarters of all higher education institutions as well as one hundred percent of all community colleges provide remedial coursework, statistics in and of themselves that raise questions concerning the definition of what, exactly, constitutes the difference between an underprepared student and the 'traditional' student. Merisotis & Phipps (2000), recalling the long-standing history of remediation in higher education as well as the massive influx of underprepared students into colleges and universities in the twentieth century under the G.I. Bill and the Open

Admissions policy, address this issue and tellingly reveal that, "...those halcyon days when all students who enrolled in college were adequately prepared, all courses offered at higher education institutions were 'college level,' and students smoothly made the transition from high school and college never existed. And they do not exist now" (p. 69). In light of this information, it would appear that in many, if not most situations, factors other than cognitive ability, factors which tend to elude test-based evaluation, play a key role in the determination of under-preparedness.

Yet, in spite of the seemingly obvious evidence that stands as an indictment of standardized testing and its inability to accurately show any definitive proof of predictive power, policy makers and institutions of higher education not only continue to base their selection process on the results of these tests but have also invoked more rigid standards (Mazzeo, 2002, p. 20). This is a dangerous trend, as current, more informed research has substantiated findings that indicate that "nonintellectual learning dispositions are as important as intellectual assets in predicting the success of college students" (Larose, et al, 1998, p.275). As Byrd and MacDonald (2000) observe, "Standardized-test-based admissions may overlook nontraditional students' historical and cultural background that might include strengths as well as deficits related to readiness for college" (p. 22).

To clarify this statement, we look to researchers such as Ley and Young (1998) who suggest that the seeming differences between underprepared and regular admissions students "may be in less obvious discrepancies between the personal psychology and metacognition of the two groups...in the way they plan, organize, monitor, evaluate, and even think about the learning process" (p. 47). Larose et al. (1998) add to the list of non-intellectual factors by noting that "academic success in college not only depends upon the intellectual characteristics and assets of

entering students but also on such variables as their capacity to adapt to their new college environments, their personal motivation and involvement regarding learning, and their relationships with peer as well as faculty members" (p. 276). Moreover, another unaccounted for factor are the number of students who fall into the category of underprepared as a result of their socioeconomic status. Students who come from low-income households often lack familiarity and experience in negotiating the requisite paperwork for college admittance as well as with the maturity and social skills that would facilitate the transition into upper level work and its accompanying life-style (Raab & Adam, 2005). These feelings of inadequacy perpetuated by the policy makers and higher education institutions not only evoke anxiety in the student but also contribute to the phenomenon of self-fulfilling prophecy in which the student accepts the label of underprepared and feels unmotivated and helpless to compete with peers who are deemed more competent and worthy and who believe that they have neither the intelligence nor the chance to successfully compete in an environment that is so foreign to them. Larose et al. (1998) confirm this phenomenon when they refer to the "three personal systems" which "intervene in the learning process for students, regardless of their intellectual aptitudes: the belief system, the behavioral system, and the emotional system" (p. 277). Referencing the work of Ellis and Grieger (1978) and Beck (1976), Larose et al. further explain that the fundamental claim of this model is "that a student's emotional and behavioral disturbances are caused by irrational beliefs about oneself and the world and that these faulty cognitions negatively affect academic performance" (p. 277).

This thinking once again reflects McDermott and Varenne's (1995) sense of a growing "culture of disability" in which these 'experts' have created and enforced "an assumedly stable set of tasks and a theory of cognitive development...against which people of named different

kinds might be distinguished, measured, documented, remediated, and pushed aside" (p. 337). Alluding to the work of Thomas et al, 1998, McDermott and Varenne note that:

... one version of the grounds for simplicity is that such theorizing is part of wider-scale institutional and political agendas, in particular, that it has been handy for the governments of modern, ideologically rationalistic, class-divided, industrial, and information-based states to isolate individuals as units of analysis and to record the working of their minds for public scrutiny and control. The contemporary nation state is above all a record keeper, much more than it is a container of culture or an organizer of learning" (p. 337).

As Mc Dermott and Varenne, themselves, argue, "It takes a whole culture of people producing idealizations of what everyone should be and a system of measures for identifying those who fall short for us to forget that we collectively produce our disabilities and the discomforts that conventionally accompany them" (p. 337).

Considering the above testimony, perhaps the only thing that standardized tests clearly do show is the great divide that exists between the autonomous, cognitive reductionist view of education held by some policy makers and higher education leaders and those whose ideological stance supports a sociocultural approach to literacy learning which endorses a broader perspective that reaches beyond inauthentic testing situations and instead, embraces the social, political, economic, cultural, and historical factors that play such an important role in constructing the social and academic identity of each student (Gee, 2008; Hagood, 2010). As Luke (2003) explains: "A social constructivist view of knowledge and learning implies that learning occurs in situated sociocultural contexts and that knowledge is apprehended and appropriated in and through social interaction, dialogue, negotiation, and contestation" (p. 398).

The shift from the solely cognitive view of literacy to the social constructivist approach in the 1960s and the 1970s, introduced a new and broader perspective of the ways in which meaning making and literacy learning took place (Rose, 1988). To this end, Luke speaks of social constructivism as the "last great breakthrough in the social sciences to have a direct impact on literacy research...not only with the linguistic features of literacy but also with theorisation of the constitutive force of text and discourse in the construction of knowledge and power, identities, and institutions" (p. 401).

The literature indicates that the social constructivist approach to literacy rose to the fore seemingly in conjunction with, and as a response to, the initiation of the Open Admissions policy in the 1970s which resulted in a massive influx of students whose diverse backgrounds and varying levels of academic preparedness rendered them "true outsiders" in the unfamiliar world of academia and, as such, "unacquainted with the rules and rituals of college life, unprepared for the sorts of tasks their teachers were about to assign to them" (Shaughnessey, 1977, pp. 2-3). Ironically, even as their defenders began to rally in support of these 'outsiders,' it is also at this point in time that the term "underprepared" made its way into the mainstream discourse. However, seven years after CUNY initiated the first college open-admissions policy, Mina Shaughnessy (1977) published her pedagogical masterpiece (and essential primer for writing instructors) *Errors & Expectations*, which offered a socioculturally based rebuttal to the indictments against the supposedly "underprepared" students with whom she worked at CUNY (p. 1).

As Shaughnessey (1997) explains, "one of the first tasks these students faced when they arrived at college was to write a placement essay" (p. 2), the results of which not only shocked the collective body of teachers that were assigned to work with these students but also compelled

them to reevaluate their heretofore belletristic, idealistic, and very conventional notions of writing instruction. Initially appalled by their perception of what Shaughnessey refers to as the basic writing (BW) of these students, considering the writers themselves to be "irremediable," "illiterate," and "ineducable," this historical body of educators ultimately became the strongest proponents of social constructivism as they came to realize that "BW students write the way they do, not because they are slow or non-verbal, indifferent to or incapable of academic excellence, but because they are beginners and must, like all beginners, learn by making mistakes" (p. 5). In this way, both Shaughnessey and her teaching cohort were able to contextualize and thereby understand the difficulties faced by their students and "how the sources of those difficulties can be explained without recourse to such pedagogically empty terms as "handicapped" or "disadvantaged" (p. 4). Therefore, it was through the pioneering efforts of Shaughnessy, and the other great groundbreakers in the field of basic writing that we owe the introduction and application of the sociocultural approach to literacy learning and its ideological challenge to the notion of remediation and the deficit model.

The centrality of writing in the broader context of remediation is articulated by Rose (1985) who states:

Writing seems central to the shaping and directing of certain modes of cognition, is integrally involved in learning is a means of defining the self and defining reality, is a means of representing and contextualizing information (which has enormous political as well as conceptual and archival importance), and is an activity that develops over one's lifetime. Indeed it is worth pondering whether many of the 'integrated bodies of knowledge' we study, the disciplines we practice, would have ever developed in the way they

did and reveal the knowledge they do if writing did not exist (p. 18).

Moreover, Gutierrez et al. (2009) in their comprehensive review, "Re-mediating literacy: Culture, difference and learning for students from non-dominant communities" make particular note of the field of writing and its dedicated and visionary scholars, particularly those such as Rose (1985, 1988, 1989); Hull et al. (1991); Hull & Rose (1989, 1990) "who produced a seminal body of work that sparked a critical conversation about writing pedagogies organized around exclusionary, deficit, and narrow discourses of literacy and literacy learners and around those of intelligence" and whose "antecedent work" was "among the first to reflect and bring a sociocultural analysis to rhetoric and composition studies, with a focus on the effects of remedial instruction on writers' development" (p. 228). The significance of this collective body of work cannot be overstated, as these studies "help to illustrate the limits of remedial education and to signal the problems of broader deficit approaches to addressing the range of literacy needs of students" (p. 228).

Although initially led by Shaugnessey (1977), Rose (1985), Bartholomae (1986), Hull et al. (1991), and so many other strong and insightful scholars from the field of writing, resistance against the medical notion of deficit and the efforts to replace it with literacy as a social practice was reinforced, strengthened, and ultimately encompassed by the previously discussed work of The New Literacy Studies (NLS) (Street, 1992; Gee, 1991; Heath, 1984). Yet, despite the groundbreaking insights and methodologies provided by the above referenced theoretical frameworks and the scholars who embrace them, as well as the progress made in challenging assumptions about underprepared students, remediation, which by its very nature is a "social construct," seems to be "surprisingly resilient" and "re-emerges" in various incarnations which

reflect the times, trends, and technological advances of each new generation (Rose, 1988, p. 267).

The Millennial

In light of this dire prediction, this review examines the literature regarding the emergence, in the twenty-first century, of a new type of college student, dubbed the 'Millennial,' in recognition of their coming of age in a century characterized by its immersion and near inundation in a sea of technology and its subsequent impact on literacy, especially in the area of writing. It is significant to note, that reference in this study to the "Millennial" student is specific to students identified by this nomenclature in the literature, and does not necessarily reflect more generalized references to students of the 21st century. This specificity arises from a view of the term "Millennial" as one of the newest in a series of socially constructed labels that, much like the term "underprepared," has come to carry with it a negative or deficit connotation.

The popularity of the term "Millennial" arose from the generational research conducted and detailed by Howe and Strauss (2000) in their bestselling book, *Millennials Rising*.

According to these authors, the Millennial Generation is comprised of anyone born "in or after 1982" who will, "over the next decade…entirely recast the image of youth from downbeat and alienated to upbeat and engaged—with potentially seismic consequences for America" (p. 4). At least that was the prediction made in the year 2000, when America and the rest of the pre-Facebook/social networking world was standing on the precipice of the new Millennium. Howe and Strauss (2000) singlehandedly created a new mythos built around a generation whose purported optimism, adherence to rules, acceptance of authority, orientation toward team-work, and levels of achievement seemed to be clear indications of their inevitable academic and professional success. Yet, as the first decade of the 21st century swiftly passed and the first and

second wave of Millennials arrived on college campuses, new studies were conducted whose findings seemed at odds with those of Howe and Strauss (2000).

A central factor that has come to light is the failure of Howe and Stauss (2000) "to deal adequately with the demographics and social reality of race, ethnicity and class in American society" (Wilson and Gerber, 2008, p.30). This "inadequacy," if true, not only provides false representation of the data but also invalidates the study. However, what becomes even more significant to my study is the purported misrepresentation of the demographics associated with the corpus of students who are, ironically, typically marginalized and perceived as underprepared or deficit, due to their demographic status.

In addition to this startling discovery, other inconsistencies have been noted. Positive traits like focus on achievement seem to have unexpected negative outcomes in that multitasking Millennials "feel stressed in ways that many of their parents never felt at the same age" (Howe and Strauss, (2000), cited in Wilson and Gerber, (2008), pp. 32-33). Moreover, as Tim Clydesdale (2007) notes, so close are their family ties, "[t]hese young people put their core identities in "lockboxes" which even the most values-challenging intellectual experiences cannot penetrate" (p. 4). This latter information, if true, could pose potential problems for this researcher, as identity is a key component of this proposed study, and those supposedly impenetrable "lockboxes" could supplant the more readily accessible "tool kits" of identity about which Gee (2008) speaks. However, such is the challenge of research. What I believe to be true and what I believe to be false regarding this population, must be held in abeyance so as to prevent the tainting of data with any personal bias.

The above mentioned omission of data, negative turns in health, and lack of identity formation are serious indications that the study performed by Howe and Strauss (2000) and

commented on by Clydesdale (2007) may be less than accurate in its glowing account of Millennials. Yet the most serious indictment of Howe and Strauss' (2000) work rests on their assessment of the academic abilities of Millennials. Arum and Roksa (2011), in their research driven book, *Academically adrift: Limited learning on college campuses*, see today's college students as "poorly prepared...for highly demanding academic tasks," and, contrary to the glowing account of these abilities proffered by Howe and Strauss (2000), the research conducted by Arum and Roksa (2011) indicates that today's students, "enter college with attitudes, norms, values, and behaviors that are often at odds with academic commitment" (p.3). Others, like Taylor (2006), when speaking of these students, use terms like "disengaged" and "entitled," and note their lack of maturity and responsibility as well as their disrespect for academic authority and rules (par. 5).

Overall, this is a complex picture of the so-called Millennial university student and one that warrants a cautious view, especially if the ascribed more negative characteristics of this generational description become interwoven into the already deficit notion of underprepared students. Therefore, the idiosyncrasies attributed to the Millennial must be seriously examined when speaking in terms of the relationship between 21st Century literacy and learning practices and the college writer who has been labeled underprepared. Primarily because the literature on the Millennial student is so dynamically divergent and lacks any clearly established middle ground, I consider the above information to be preliminary to any substantive research, and greatly agree with DiLullo, et al., (2011) who cautions: "A disservice is done to any student

cohort when they are globally defined with a single set of character traits. Within any generation, there is diversity and in the Millennial Generation there is considerable diversity in background, personality, and learning style" (p. 11). Taylor (2006) too, iterates the need to shift

away from a globalized view of the Millennial to one that echoes the theoretical framework of this proposed study in that it acknowledges and affirms the multiplicity of identities and traits inherent in any given generation. As Taylor (2006) notes:

Multiple learning styles, student preferences, and our obligation to bring about student learning by any means necessary all suggest that we must offer students multiple options for learning, especially in how they access the information they are obligated to bring to class, how they demonstrate their personalization of the applications, and how they develop meanings (p. 53).

Taylor (2006) has succinctly articulated the foundational stance of this study, as I examine the doubly labeled underprepared Millennial writer in light of the above-mentioned multiple learning styles and individual student preferences as well as the ways in which information is accessed, how personalization or identities, are demonstrated in the applications of this information, and, significantly, the ways in which meanings are demonstrated through the observations made, interviews conducted, and artifacts produced.

21st Century College Composition Studies and the "Underprepared" Student

21st century research studies in college composition continues to focus on the nature of writing itself as well as on ways in which proficiency in this area can be achieved in a landscape of learning that has seen, throughout the last few decades, a widespread decline in students' writing skills (Sperling and Warshauer Freedman, 2001; Lillis and Turner, 2001; Lillis, 2003; Beck, 2008; Addison and James McGee, 2010). Prompted by mandates from governmental and educational institutions (Coker and Lewis, (2008); Miller and McCardle, 2010) to address and rectify this widespread problem, composition researchers have undertaken numerous studies about writing that span the educational spectrum from kindergarten through post-secondary and

graduate levels and beyond, into the workplace (Miller and McCardle, 2010). While the predominate research focus is on adolescent writing skills, studies at all age levels have dealt primarily with pedagogical and curricular strategies, techniques for application, and methods of intervention (Coker and Lewis, 2008).

Despite the diversity in age and grade level addressed in these studies, most are collectively uniform in their sociocognitive and sociocultural theoretical underpinnings. As Sperling and Warshauer Freedman (2001), in their review of research on writing note:

Research grounded in sociocognitive and sociocultural perspectives, which has been especially prevalent in the past decade, has gone a long way to connect our thinking about...students' linguistic and cultural diversity, and to connect our thinking about writing instruction and learning to the range of language and literacy practices that shape students as writers and as learners in school (p. 386).

Furthermore, and not surprisingly, many of these studies reflect an increased emphasis on the ubiquitous presence of technology in the 21st century and its subsequent influence on the writing of today's academically and culturally diverse students (Bezemer and Kress, 2010; Evans and Po, 2007; Merchant, 2007 Anderson, Atkins, Ball, et al., 2006; Archer, 2006, 2010; Hull and Nelson, 2005;).

These trends in current composition research reflect not only my theoretical framework which is grounded in a social constructivist (Street, 1992; Gee, 1991; Heath, 1984) and multiliteracies approach to literacy (New London Group, 1996) but also provides the impetus for my research. However, although the literature seemingly abounds with inquiries into these trends, there have been relatively few quantitative or qualitative studies that have been conducted in the last twelve years at the college and university level concerning the above-mentioned areas

of interest in conjunction with the writing skills of the college student who has been labeled "underprepared," "basic," "developmental," "deficit," or "at risk." It should be noted at this time that in order to avoid confusion about the populations under discussion, I preface the review of the literature that follows by noting my hesitancy in using the more generalized term, "21st century literacies," as interchangeable with the term "Millennial" which has, in the last few years, become a label imbued with deficit connotations akin to those associated with the classification of "underprepared" (Reith, 2005; Wilson and Gerber, 2008; Arum and Roksa, 2011). To further clarify, unlike the term 21st century literacy/ies which encompasses all educational levels, the term "Millennial" has been, within the last decade, ascribed exclusively in the literature to college level students.

Furthermore, despite the tendency in the literature to conflate terms such as basic, developmental, remedial, and at-risk with the term underprepared, it should be noted that, although these labels are relational in the discourse of the institution, in actuality, wide variations exist regarding methods of access to and preparation for higher education. Consequently, studies conducted on these varied populations are not necessarily mutually exclusive in their focus or location.

The "Social Turn" in Composition Studies

Despite what has been called the "social turn" (Trimbur, 1994) in education and composition research and the nearly univocal claim that the so-called "traditional" college student no longer exists (if, indeed one ever existed at all) (Cox, 2008; Faulkner, 2011) the college writer who has been labeled "underprepared" continues to face a great many challenges as they enter the enclave of higher education. As Cox (2008) reveals in her study of the "disconnect between college professors' expectations of students and students' actual

performance" (p. 5), primary among these challenges are the unknown and unexpected perceptions of the faculty with whom these students will interact as well as the institutional view of their marginalized status (Cox, 2008). Although Cox's study does not have as its immediate focus either the student labeled "underprepared" or composition studies, her all-encompassing research on the "fear factor" that plays an instrumental role in determining the academic success of today's college student, probes deeply into significant areas related to my own research. Additionally, Cox's (2008) "inside-out" research stance is consistent with my own role as teacher researcher and the shared belief that:

...classroom-level tensions generated by increased access to higher education suggest the need for an inside-out approach to reinventing college. Responding to the realities of today's students will, in turn, better serve the ideals of postsecondary opportunities and equity (pp. 13-14).

Furthermore, by including an overview of *all* typologies in her consideration of the factors that work to impede a student's academic advancement, Cox (2008) attempts to level the playing field for those students labeled as "underprepared." Asserting that both students' and instructors' perceptions are often at odds, especially in situations in which labels have been affixed to students' abilities, either an undermining of confidence or active resistance (Kill, 2006) in the student becomes manifest which attests to the power of discourse and its subsequent effects on identity formation (Cox, 2008; Kill, 2006).

In an earlier study Durst (1999), too, takes up the issue of conflict and negotiation between student and instructor; however, his primary research focuses on how this dynamic is played out within "traditional" first-year college composition courses. Although Durst's (1999)

study precedes the chronological boundaries of this review by one year, I elect to include his research due to its prescient anticipation of issues that have arisen in the decade that followed as well as the powerful implications of his work on the field of composition research. While Durst's (1999) oft-cited study, rooted in a critical literacy approach "which refers to widespread attempts in the field to open up instructions and theory at a variety of levels to issues of justice, oppression, and diversity" (p. 4) is far more political in nature than my proposed study and does not specifically deal with students who have been labeled academically "underprepared," its efforts to pose questions and examine situations regarding perceptions, marginalization, and effectiveness of teaching methods in the area of college composition are similar to those addressed in my research. Moreover, Durst's role as director of a first- year university writing program provides a shared research perspective with my own, as I, too, undertake my study in an effort to not only improve the writing skills of the students enrolled in the program but also to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the theoretical, pedagogical, and curricular aspects of the program itself. Our differences lie in the populations with whom we work, as I am charged, in both my role as administrator and as researcher, with the responsibility to attempt to mediate the negative effects on the students' identities that are associated with their programmatic placement and subsequent academic labeling.

Although large scale studies such as the Harvard Study of Undergraduate Writing authored by Sommers and Saltz (2004) and the Stanford Study of Writing conducted by Fishman, Lunsford, McGregor and Otuteye (2005) contributed greatly to the field of composition research in their respective studies on confidence levels of the novice freshman writer and the integration of performance theory into composition classrooms, neither study focused on the student writer considered to be underprepared.

Oddly enough, in an educational climate in which the quality of writing and the issue of remediation are "hot" topics, the research of Webb-Sunderhaus and Amidon (2011) is one of the few studies (a term loosely applied to this hybrid overview) of what the authors refer to as, "basic," writing that have been conducted at the university level. Even so, despite their promising title, "The Kairotic moment: Pragmatic revision of basic writing instruction at Indian University-Purdue University Fort Wayne" (IPFW) the underlying purpose of Webb-Sunderhaus and Amidon's (2011) "revision" of their basic writing program has more to do with stabilizing attrition rates than with uncovering particular insights into the nature of students' learning and writing practices. This study differs significantly from my study in that students in the IPFW are subject to multiple placement tests upon entering the universities. However, no matter how they place on the tests, the students are not mandated, but are free to elect to take part in the basic writing program. Therefore, Webb-Sunderhaus and Amidon's (2011) findings that there "is a great deal less student dissatisfaction with the new basic writing course" (p.8), is hardly surprising. Neither is their discovery that students' whose writing skills are assessed as weaker as well as those students who lack confidence in their writing need more than one semester of basic writing in order to increase "their generic knowledge as broadly and deeply as possible" (p. 5).

However, although Webb-Sunderhaus and Amidon's (2011) study does not provide much in the way of any nuanced insight into students' perceptions, identities, or societal backgrounds, it does offer an interesting perspective on programmatic reinvention pertaining to curriculum.

As the authors explain:

Utilizing the theoretical model of Bartholomae and Petrosky's *Facts, Artifacts,* and Counterfacts: Theory and Method for a Reading and Writing Course, the new

basic writing course stresses the connections between reading and writing, as both are foundational skills for success in college. All instructors of the course...now share a common theme, texts, and assignments...[however]...the theme is chosen by the instructors and changes every year" (p. 7).

As writing program coordinator and researcher, the innovations to curriculum suggested by Webb-Sunderhaus and Amidon (2011) offer interesting aspects that may be considered as my research progresses. Although the commonality of curriculum combined with an independent and authentic instructional approach may prove to be an effective model for future program development, this issue exceeds the scope of this particular study. However, the integration of more reading into the writing curriculum and the discussions generated by such efforts offers more potential for examination of students' perceptions, identities and processes involved in meaning making.

Reading in the Writing Class

Interestingly, the trend toward making stronger connections between reading and writing in the basic or underprepared university writing class— a practice which has already been implemented in the United Kingdom through the Academic Literacies approach (Lea and Street, 1998)— has become increasingly noticeable in the literature. Research in this area argues for the integration of reading into in the basic or underprepared college writing classroom as a means of creating strategies for improved familiarity and understanding of textual nuances, development of critical thinking skills, as well as a metacognitive understanding of the writing process through methods of revision (Hogue Smith, 2010; Goen and Gillotte-Tropp, 2003), especially those revision practices that incorporate technology through the employment of the "track changes feature of Word" (Hogue Smith, 2010). Due to the increased opportunities for

what Goen and Gillotte-Tropp (2003) refer to as, "active interaction with texts in meaningful contexts" (p. 98), when reading is introduced into the basic or underprepared college writing class collaborative skills are developed and writing classrooms become sites of "community building" (Goen and Gillotte-Tropp, 2003).

Practices of Community Building

Community building is another thematic thread that runs through the literature on the college writer considered to be underprepared. Sonja Launspach (2008), in her study of small basic writing groups, focuses on students' participation and their emergent conversations, seeing this "talk" as a way in which to facilitate the acquisition of academic discourse in both oral and written domains. Similarly, Carter (2006), drawing on the literacy as social practice ideology espoused by the New Literacies Studies (Street, (1992; Gee, 1991; Heath, 1984) invents what she calls a "pedagogy of rhetorical dexterity" which, as she demonstrates through her study with basic college writers, "teaches writers to effectively read, understand, manipulate, and negotiate the cultural and linguistic codes of a new community of practice based on a relatively accurate assessment of another, more familiar one" (p. 94).

The focus on "community building" (Launspach, 2008), and "communities of practice" (Carter, 2006) emphasizes the transformation of basic college writing classes into learning spaces that are authentic and empowering and which stand in stark contrast to the isolative 'skills' approach formerly practiced in these classes. Interestingly, it is Mary Jane Curry (2003), an educator from the United Kingdom, who evaluates the 'skills' approach used to teach basic writing at a United States community college and finds it "insufficient" (p. 12). Drawing on experiences gleaned from her work in Higher Education in the UK, Curry (2003) provides the

link to further studies in this area that practice the Academic Literacies (ACLITS) (Lea and Street, 1998) approach to writing.

Academic Literacies and the Non-Traditional Writer

As the ideological and theoretical underpinnings of Academic Literacy (Lea and Street, 1998) have been previously examined and discussed in this study, excluded from this review are studies in broader contexts of Academic Literacies that seek to expand the perimeters of its research to encompass topics such as: "course design across the broad curriculum of higher education" (Lea, 2004), Further Education, which takes up the issue of "literacy practices in...lives beyond college" (Ivanic and Satchwell (2007, p. 101), and the "socio-political dynamics of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) (Turner, 2011). Instead, this review examines the studies in this field that focus more specifically on writing in higher education (HE) and the underprepared, or, as they are known in the UK, "non-traditional" student (Lillis and Turner, 2001; Lillis, 2003; Lea, 2004; Lillis and Scott, 2008).

Recent research on writing in Academic Literacies has focused on many of the same issues addressed in composition studies conducted in the United States, particularly the disconnect between instructors' expectations and perceptions and those of the students (Lillis and Turner (2001; Read and Francis, 2001). Furthermore, this research examines the confusion experienced by non-traditional students when confronted by the taken-for-granted "conventions" of the academy (Lillis and Turner, 2001). Stating that the authoritative "discourse of transparency, whereby language is treated as ideally transparent and autonomous" (p.58) is, in actuality, distancing and oblique, Lillis and Turner (2001) as well as Read and Francis (2001) argue for a deconstruction of this privileged academic language in favor of a more student-centered, socially situated introduction into academic discourse. Lillis (2003) extends this

conversation by "calling for dialogue, rather than monologue or dialectic to be at the centre of an academic literacies stance" (p. 192) and attempts to implement this practice by "outlining some design implications (Kress, 1998, 2000) of a dialogic approach to student writing pedagogy" (p. 192):

- Talkback not feedback on students' written texts
- Open up disciplinary content to 'external' interests and influences
- Open up academic writing conventions to newer ways to mean (pp. 204-205).
- Discourse and Identity in College Writing

Imbedded in, and generating from the discoursal aspects of an Academic Literacies approach to writing, is the issue of student identity and how it is socially constructed and evidenced in the linguistic and stylistic choices of students' writing as well as how these identities will shift and change over time (Burgess and Ivanic, 2010; Colyar and Stich, 2011; Ivanic and Satchwell, 2007; Gee, 2005) not only in the college classroom but also in the workplace (Ivanic and Satchwell 2007). An interesting twist to the connections between discourse and identity is provided by Callahan and Chumney (2009) in their study which compared the "efficacy of remedial writing instruction for underprepared students...in two institutions, an urban community college and an urban research university" (p. 1620). By examining the institutional and faculty discourse as well as the perceptions of the students' abilities, or lack thereof, Callahan and Chumney's (2009) findings revealed that:

Despite their inferior status relative to those in college-level composition courses, remedial students at TU (4-year institution) were taught to have a commanding relationship to the academic capital at stake in college. In their exit interviews,

TU students spoke confidently about their ability to succeed in college, demonstrating that their habiti included a disposition for college success in which they began to view themselves as having control over their college outcomes...

Conversely, students enrolled in the remedial composition class at FCC (community college) assumed a subordinate position in the field of power...

Consequently, FCC students viewed their college trajectories as determined by outside forces such as their instructor and the transfer requirements prescribed by FCC (p.1661).

Although each of these above cited studies reflect one or more of the aspects of my research study in relation to discourse and identity, only Colyar and Stich (2011), drawing on a theoretical framework consistent with the New Literacy Studies (Street, 1992; Gee, 1991; Heath, 1984), provide an approximation of the locale, population, and points of inquiry that I will be addressing in my proposed study. Specifically, Colyar and Stich (2011), focus their research on a "remedial summer bridge course" designed to assist students who are considered to be "at risk," or "academically underprepared for postsecondary enrollment" as they ready themselves for the transition into college (p. 121). Furthermore, by "explore[ing] remedial students' academic identities" using "discourse analysis to examine students' written assignments" Colyar and Stich (2011) share my particular focus on "student identities relative to remedial experience" (p.121).

Multimodal Social Semiotics in the College Composition Class

The connection between oral and written discourse and identity has been a well-documented area of the research, yet one that continues to broaden its scope in light of the effects of 21st technological innovations and applications on local and global literacy (Jones and Lea,

2008; Merchant, 2007; Anderson, Atkins, Ball, et al., 2006; Ivanic, 2004; Lankshear and Knobel, 2003). Studies have been conducted in the last twelve years on the nature of digital literacy and classroom writing which focus almost exclusively "on hybridity and fluidity in digital texts, building on a research tradition which foregrounds issues of meaning making in text production, and in particular how meanings are negotiated and contested through engagement with a range of literacy practices" (Jones and Lea, 2008, p. 208). However, although this research focus informs my study, the particular inquiry to be examined in my study is that of multimodal social semiotics as a means of not only incorporating technology into the college writing class but also as semiosis (Kress, 2005), a means of aesthetic expression and conduit for better understanding of subject matter (Bezemer and Kress, 2008; Anderson, Atkins, Ball, et al., 2006).

As Anderson, Atkins, Ball, et al., (2006) note:

In recent years, scholars and teachers in both the broad field of Composition Studies and the more specialized arena of Computers and Composition Studies...have begun to recognize that the bandwidth of literacy practices and values on which our profession has focused during the last century may be overly narrow. In response, a number of educators have begun experimenting with multimodal compositions, compositions that take advantage of a range of rhetorical resources—words, still and moving images, sounds, music, animation—to create meaning" (p. 59).

Based on the above premise, Anderson, Atkins, Ball, et al., (2006) conducted their own research in an effort to identify the ways in which Composition teachers and programs incorporated multimodality into the curriculum of their writing classes. Acknowledging many

limitations of their research which includes a less than effective use of survey-style inquiry and a poor response ratio, Anderson, Atkin, Ball, et al., (2006) did ascertain the following implementations of multimodality into post-secondary composition classes:

- static images like graphics, photographs
- static words and images like print advertisements, flyers or other documents
- animated images like Quicktime movies
- animated words and images (no audio) like video blogs or Flash movies
- audio-only texts like soundscapes
- interactive texts (with audio) like Flash movies or DVDs (p. 75).

Additionally, they were able to gather a list of specific assignments which included "hypertext essays, visual arguments, technology autobiographies, audio documentaries...image poems, PowerPoint photo essays, brochures, virtual/digital maps, professional portfolios, graphical/relational databases, collages, and interactive Flash essays" (p. 75).

Although the survey style study conducted by Anderson, Atkins, Ball, et al., (2006) illuminates the ways in which multimodality has been incorporated into post-secondary Composition classrooms, studies of the activities themselves have not yet been actualized. As the authors themselves, state: "[I]n 2005, when this survey was designed and conducted, a clear snapshot of who was teaching multimodal composing (at the postsecondary level)...in the United States had yet to be reported" (p. 60). Moreover, after publication, in 2006, they again note the dearth of research studies as a limitation of their own research, but express "hope that it would help others to jumpstart similar needed inquiries on multimodality and writing studies" (p. 81). Unfortunately, although this appeal has been somewhat realized in studies conducted at the

adolescent level (Hull and Katz, 2006; Stein, 2006; Hull and James, 2007; Hull and Nelson, 2008), it has been less generously responded to at the postsecondary level.

However, what does exist at the postsecondary level is perhaps, best exemplified in the work of Arlene Archer, (2006, 2010) at the University of Cape Town in South Africa. Employing an Academic Literacies approach, Archer's (2006, 2010) research examines, respectively, "multimodal ways of addressing unequal discourse resources within the university with its economically and culturally diverse student body...[a]s a way of harnessing the resources that the students bring with them" (p. 449) as well as "implications for the ways in which we teach 'academic literacies' practices and writing as multimodal composition to students" (p. 201) by "explor[ing] the influence and incorporation of the visual into student texts in Higher Education, looking at the semiotic weighting of modes, conventions and functions of images, visual/verbal linkages and visual composition" (p. 201).

Archer's (2006, 2010) research at the post-secondary level clearly resonates with many of the inquiries posed and the trajectory outlined in my own study. However, I feel compelled to pay homage to the above-mentioned studies conducted in the field of adolescent writing and multimodality (Hull and Katz, 2006; Stein, 2006; Hull and James, 2007; Hull and Nelson, 2008) as their implications for practice exceed age and grade level boundaries. Certainly, Hull's work with various collaborators: Katz, 2006, James, 2007, and Nelson, 2008, on the Digital Underground Storytelling for Youth (DUSTY) project, although predominately focused on urban youth and not conducted within the formal setting of a classroom, poses significant inquiries relevant to my own study. This powerful, longitudinal study encompasses nearly the entire scope of this study in its incorporation of diverse learner's in varied settings or landscapes of learning both physical and technological, that afford the marginalized a place in which the

utilization of a multimodal approach to writing expands meaning making, provides agency through aesthetic engagement, and enhances the identities and possibilities previously foreclosed to them.

Acknowledgement also must go to Stein (2006) whose work with marginalized students in South Africa demonstrates the egalitarian properties of a multimodal social semiotic approach to meaning making and writing. Moreover, my research focus in this proposed study is reflected in Stein's (2006) own position:

In mainstream classrooms, certain forms of representation are dominant and valued, like standard forms of written language. Students who do not perform 'to standard,' for whatever reasons are labeled as 'deficient.' In this book, I challenge the idea of the dominance of a single form of representation (p. 3).

The Millennial Writer

Studies in postsecondary Composition and the Millennial student are virtually non-existent, as are studies in college composition that explore the so-called underprepared Millennial writer. What does appear in the form of study regarding Millennials is research focuses on teaching strategies (Wilson and Gerber, 2008; Pinder-Grover and Groscurth, 2009; Stewart, 2009) and psychological investigation into "characteristics unique to most Millennials" (Bourke, 2010).

However, an online search rendered one study from the discipline of Computers and Composition that examines Millennials and "the roots of...disjuncture and the pedagogical implications that arise when instructors incorporate digital texts into composition classes" (Evans and Po, 2007). Although written by college composition instructors and indeed, helpful in

providing a solid foundation for the reintroduction of reading into the writing class as well as insight into Millennial's initial resistance to digital texts, unfortunately, this study failed to offer any insight into the actual writing practices of either the Millennial student or the Millennial student who is considered to be underprepared for college-level work.

Summary

As the literature review above attests, although research in the field of college composition has, in the last twelve years, addressed multiple features of this proposed study, no research currently exists that provides a combined focus on the importance and subsequent effects of teacher/institutional-student reciprocal perceptions, settings, and multimodal social semiotics on the writing skills of the Millennial student who has been labeled underprepared for college level work. Therefore, due to the continued influx of variously prepared students into colleges and universities whose writing skills are thought to be sub-standard, it is my position that my research study would not only serve to fill a substantial gap in the literature but also provide a much needed baseline of reference for further research into this population.

Chapter 3

Conceptual Framework

Introduction

The research that informs this dissertation study was undertaken in an effort to obtain data that would challenge negative assumptions about the academic abilities of the first-year university students with whom I worked, and by extension, the consequent institutional and related self-affixed labels that they carried, through investigation into their marginalized status within the university program that served them, the classes in which they sat, the teacher with whom they interacted, and the subsequent effects of these in situ conditions on their identities and academic performances. Concomitant with this investigation, a multimodal social semiotic approach to learning was employed within the classroom pursuant to the belief that such a methodology would transform and broaden the dominant academic parameters in which literacy is traditionally realized.

My interest in pursuing such research arose from the multiple roles that I played within this setting which included that of administrator, advisor, instructor of Literature in an interdisciplinary course, writing instructor, and, most importantly, perpetual learner. Much like the students, I assumed many identities within this academic structure, each of which provided unique perspectives on both the students and the institutional setting of the program itself. It is from these multiple vantage points, particularly as a practitioner and as researcher, that I engaged in this study in an effort to further inform these perspectives.

However, in accordance with my theoretical framework which has, at its core, the social nature of literacy and the necessity for a reciprocal and reflexive discourse between the

researcher and participant throughout the research process, I was mindful of Street's (2005) caveat which cautions:

Researchers, instead of privileging the particular literacy practices familiar in their own cultures, [should]now suspend judgment as to what constitutes literacy among the people they are now working with until they are able to understand what it means to the people themselves, and from which social contexts reading and writing derive their meaning" (p. 419).

The adherence to this stance was of particular importance to my role as researcher, as I was working with students whose literacy practices were viewed by the academic culture in which this study took place as "unfamiliar" and the students themselves, "underprepared." Through my previous interactions with this population I have come to realize that, upon entrance to the university—the enclave of academe—so to speak, these students are often frustrated and stigmatized by institutional attempts to, remediate, if not totally devalue, them and their multiple ways of speaking, writing, and meaning making.

It is this belief that gave impetus to my dissertation study, as I undertook research that provided insight into the ways that students' socially constructed identities and sense of selves as writers were evidenced in their writing and multimodal creations as well as in their public and private discourse by focusing on language use, ways in which meaning was made and practiced, the student-teacher dynamic, the overall impact of identity on literacy and, conversely, the impact of literacy on identity. My research adopted the preferred method and design of literacy research in that it was qualitative in nature and employed an ethnographic-type approach. This method and design, in conjunction with my primary role as practitioner researcher, allowed me to "incorporate a wide range of data in order to explore how resources are used for meaning

making and communication in academic (related) contexts," and also, through my choice of setting and participants, to place strong "emphasis on addressing inequalities" and "direct attention towards the practices in which texts are embedded" (Lillis and Scott, 2007, p. 21).

Hopefully, my research has added to the above referenced literature by virtue of its unique focus and subsequent findings. It is my hope that these findings will not only help to shape and inform our knowledge as teachers so that we may better assist our students with their transition into the academic world but also shape and inform the knowledge of the academic world into which they transition.

Design and Method

In keeping with the social constructivist nature of my theoretical framework, in this study I used research methods adapted by those working in the field of literacy studies, particularly Academic Literacies, which are described by Lea (2004) as "qualitative in nature and of an ethnographic type, adopting language-based methodologies drawn from social linguistics" (p.740). Lea further states that,

...[t]hese methodologies have enabled researchers to look in depth at students' and tutors' interpretation of student writing in higher education. Close textual analysis of, for example, student writing or tutor feedback on that writing, has provided a rich source of data which complements interviews and notes from fieldwork observation (p. 740).

Additionally, as Mortensen and Kirsch (1996), reveal, "Qualitative approaches to research—ethnographies and case studies in particular—continue to gain prominence in composition studies as researchers strive to enrich our understanding of literacy in its myriad cultural contexts" (p. 1). Therefore, as my research focused on the socially situated practices of

students labeled as underprepared within the setting of a university composition class, the utilization of ethnographic methods in conjunction with qualitative case study methodology provided the most appropriate tools for providing, as accurately as possible, a thorough, descriptive, and detailed report of the in situ behaviors, practices, discourses, identities, and perspectives of the participants observed. These methods were important to my research study due to their ability to go beyond providing a descriptive and detailed report, for as Barton et al. (2007) explain, "[e]thnographic research seeks to understand the meaning in participants' practices from their own perspectives. It looks for patterns and systematicity in situated practice across cases, but also remains sensitive to the uniqueness and distinctiveness of each setting" (p. 38). The utilization of qualitative case study methods also adds to the rigor of findings elicited through ethnographic research in that it "facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources. This ensures that the issue is not explored though one lens, but rather a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood (Baxter and Jack, 2008, p. 544). In addition, as Baxter and Jack (2008) note, qualitative case study methods "supports the deconstruction and the subsequent reconstruction of various phenomena" (p. 544). As my research has demonstrated, employment of these combined research approaches has enabled this researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the "how" and "why" (Baxter and Jack, 2008) associated with the multiple phenomena of identity manifestations and transformations as well as in situ learning developments in both a defined contextual environment and within the broader contexts of individual case studies.

It is taken as a given that an ethnographic entry into the "field" of study entails long hours devoted to observation, note-taking, recursive reflection, personal interviews, compilation

and coding of data, and the search for elusive, unexpected, and sometimes contradictory patterns. However, the personal and interactive aspect of the ethnographic method as reflected in my positionality as the researcher was, undoubtedly, the most efficient and effective means through which the first-hand knowledge that informed my research was gathered. Chiseri-Strater (1996), in reflecting upon her own work as a composition researcher, supports this view when she states: "the ethnographer's stance-position-location affects the entire ethnographic process: from data collection, theory construction, and methodological understanding, through the creation of the narrative voice and overall writing of the ethnography" (p. 117).

Throughout the research process I remained mindful of my need to incorporate into my methods and design the key ideology of academic literacies research which Lillis and Scott (2007) describe as a, "transformative interest in meaning making set alongside a critical ethnographic gaze focusing on situated text production and practice" (p. 13). Moreover, I was conscious of the need to maintain "a commitment to staying rooted in people's lived experience and... to explore what may be at stake for them in specific contexts" (p. 13). Thus, my ideological stance in undertaking this research adopted an academic literacies approach that considered the "situatedness of the researcher and influences that affect[ed] her or his perspective," that valued self-reflexivity "as a way of understanding the ethics and methodology of the research context" (p. 119), and was transformative in nature.

To reiterate, the research design of this study was qualitative in nature and employed combined ethnographic and qualitative case study methods. Because my study took place in the social setting of an academic environment and aimed to "seek to understand and interpret how the various participants... construct the world around them" (Glesne, 2006, p. 4), a qualitative approach afforded the opportunity to observe and to make inquiries in an effort to obtain a

holistic and generalized view of the potentially complex phenomena that unfolded. Furthermore, the inquiry driven nature of qualitative research helped to locate this researcher within an initial zone of neutrality, or what Glesne (2006) calls, an "exploratory, open mindset" (p. 5). These foundational notions, in addition to the generative capabilities of qualitative research, helped me to broaden my perspective and understanding as a researcher, identify patterns that might have previously gone unnoticed in past interactions and classroom situations and, overall, substantially informed the research undertaken.

Role as the Researcher

While there are many ways in which to approach an ethnographic study, I chose to conduct my study in the predominant mode of practitioner researcher in the classes that I taught, as this stance embodied my main role within this study and was most compatible with the inherently social constructivist nature of my theoretical framework. Yet, in order to lend clarity and support to my chosen role, I wish to discuss the various arguments offered in defense of my somewhat controversial research stance as practitioner researcher. To begin, I offer an explanation of the debate surrounding this role, as presented by McWilliam (2004):

To many of its advocates, practitioner research occupies a moral high ground of inquiry, a fresh and unadulterated space for engagement with educational activity free from the pomp, pretentiousness and claim to 'purity' of traditional scientific inquiry. To its critics, it continues to be a blot on the landscape of inquiry, a bastardisation of science, either pure or applied (p. 113).

Regarding this debate, I aligned myself with advocates of practitioner research such as Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) who not only support such research but also expand upon its basic tenets through their conceptualizing of what they have defined as "teacher research" which is, as they tell us, "systematic, intentional inquiry by teachers about their own school and classroom work" (pp. 23-24) obtained through both empirical and conceptual research. Moreover, they argue against the traditional view that research into teaching should be "outside-in," that is, generated at the university and then used in schools" (Lytle and Cochran-Smith, 1994, p. 23) by asserting that,

[I]mplicit in all versions of teacher research, no matter how disparate, is the notion that knowledge for teaching is "inside/outside," a juxtaposition that calls attention to teachers as knowers and to the complex and distinctly nonlinear relationships of knowledge and teaching as they are embedded in local contexts and in the relations of power that structure the daily work of teachers and learners in both the schools and the university" (p. 23).

I see my role as practitioner researcher as having been undertaken not only for the knowledge gained that served to edify my own teaching practices but also for the potential benefits to the students as well as the related emic implications in terms of educational and societal reform. McWilliam (2004) articulates my stance when she states that teacher research has, "more potential to give voice to the voiceless, amplifying rather than submerging marginal populations and projects" (p.114).

Finally, in light of my inquiries into the potential for learning afforded by 21st century multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996; Kress, 1997, 2000; Cope and Kalantzis, 2000), I borrow from the "'pragmatic' arguments" of Anderson and Herr (1999) which "focus more squarely on the ways in which [practitioner research] is more responsive to new modes of knowledge production" (p. 114). Yet, my research interests depart from theirs in that I do not

pursue "an emergent scholarship that is more readily aligned with problem solving for industry and commerce" (p. 11).

This being said, in the role of practitioner researcher, I had the opportunity to become part of the social setting in which my study took place, and from that vantage point I was able to "learn firsthand how the actions of research participants correspond to their words; see patterns of behavior; experience the unexpected, as well as the expected; and develop a quality of trust, relationship, and obligation with others in the setting" (Glesne, 2006, p.49). It is precisely because of my immersion in the setting that was observed and the trust-based relationships that eventually formed, that I was mindful of the need to leave behind all former biases and to remain objective in apprehending and recording the phenomena that unfolded. Admittedly, I was, and still remain biased in terms of my belief that the students with whom I worked were not cognitively deficient, but merely diverse not only in their social, cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds but also in the types of academic preparation they had received prior to their arrival Although this belief guided me in my pedagogical, curricular, and at the university. methodological approaches to my students and to this study, I was always mindful of the need for cautious "reflection upon my own subjectivity" when recording and processing my data (Glesne, 2006, p. 37).

While enacting my role as practitioner researcher, I was cognizant of the fact that even though the site of observation was my own classroom, I did not assume the privilege of "entry." Rather, in order to gain access to both participants and sites, I explained the nature of my study and reassured all involved that I did not seek entry in order to formulate judgment; instead, I simply wished to observe and learn. It is only when a rapport was established and access

granted that I assumed my role as practitioner researcher and began the ethnographic process of observing and recording my findings.

My choice of role within the framework of this study was a vital component of this research, as it was the means through which I negotiated my way through the various social spaces which comprised the shifting landscape of my research.

Data Collection

Data collection associated with my role as practitioner researcher within this study employed ethnographic methods. Like Glesne (2006), I use the term ethnographic "somewhat interchangeably with qualitative to refer to practices that seek to interpret people's constructions of reality and identify patterns in their perspectives and behaviors" (p.9). The observations and consequent interpretations obtained through these practices were documented within my journal in as much detail as the particular situation allowed, for, as Glesne (2006) asserts, "the journal is the primary recording tool of the qualitative researcher" (p.55). Thus, my field journal became the primary receptacle of data collection, or the "thick" descriptions recorded in "the field," that formed the basis for subsequent analysis, findings and documented results (Glesne 2006).

Yet, Glesne (2006) further notes that there are many ways in which the "journal" can be conceptualized (p. 55). Other researchers who utilize ethnographic methods such as Chiseri-Strater (1996) and Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) acknowledge the value of the field journal. However, they make particular note of what is referred to as the reflective journal or personal diary. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) expand on the nature of this tool, especially as it is utilized in practitioner research:

Journals are accounts of classroom life in which teachers' record observations, analyze their experiences, and reflect on and interpret their practices over time.

Journals intermingle description, record keeping, commentary, and analysis.

Similar in some ways to ethnographic field notes, journals capture the immediacy of teaching: teacher's evolving perceptions of what is happening with the students in their classrooms and what this means for their continued practice.

Furthermore, because journals stand as a written record of practice, they provide teachers with a way to revisit, analyze, and evaluate their experiences over time and in relation to broader frames of reference. And they provide access to the ways that teachers' interpretive perspectives are constructed and reconstructed using data from their classrooms (p. 26).

My purpose in foregrounding the differences between the more distanced objectivity associated with use of the traditional anthropological field journal and the more subjective and reflexive methodology associated with the personal journal as employed by teacher researchers and composition researchers is not merely to justify or validate my reflexive stance but to lay the foundation for my inclusion of the "personal, interpersonal, institutional, pragmatic, emotional, theoretical, epistemological and ontological influences on [my] research and data analysis techniques" (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003, p. 413). Also, by demonstrating the consistency of my research approach which was overtly subjective, or more aptly, "naturalistic, contextual and holistic" (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2007, pp. 557-558) in its choice of design and methods, role as researcher, data collection and data analysis, I attempted to make more transparent to myself and the reader the complexities of the choices made in recording and reporting the observed locations, situations, researcher-participant relationships, voices of the participants, as well as the "interpersonal and institutional contexts of research" (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003, p. 418) that constitute the study.

Thus, whether one refers to their recording tool as a field notebook or reflective journal or, like myself, prefers a hybrid combination of both is not pre-ordained, but a matter of personal choice that compliments the type and purpose of the research undertaken. However, what does appear to be immutable in assuring the "trustworthiness" of the data is the "use of multiple data-collection methods...commonly called *triangulation*" (Glesne, 2006, p. 36). Triangulation requires that the data collected through different methods retain an inherent relationship, a type of checks and balances system, to guard against any individual internal threats to validity (Glesne, 2006, p. 36). Techniques suggested by Glesne for optimal data collection are those that "(1) elicit data needed to gain understanding of the phenomenon in question, (2) contribute different perspectives on the issue, and (3) make effective uses of the time available for data-collection" (Glesne, 2006, p. 36).

This particular method of data collection helped me to describe and document in my field journal a substantial amount of strictly observable data gleaned from class sessions upon which I later reflected in my personal journal. This dual note-taking method based on observations, discourse, readings, practices, reflections, moments of successes and failures in my attempts to engage and encourage students, initial attempts at analysis, as well as the many inquiries that arose organically from these moments guided me in the conceptualization and construction of the emergent patterns and areas of interest that I pursued in this research study.

In addition to the data collected and reported in both my field and reflective journals, I conducted both formal and informal interviews which were digitally recorded and transcribed, collected artifacts in the form of writing assignments and multimodal projects, email exchanges, personal or class-oriented reflection journals, pictures, and videos. As I met with the selected participants outside of the classroom for one or two interviews throughout the course of the

semester, I created generalized guides for discussion to ensure not only that data collected from the participants over the course of the study was consistent in its focus but also was able to be subtly adjusted so as to consider the uniqueness of each participant and situation. That is, the interview process helped me to explore each participant's background, beliefs, perceptions of themselves, and situations related to the nature of this study, as well as a view of their academic future. Ultimately, these interviews became opportunities for "the joint construction of meaning" (Mishler, 1986, p. 53), as both the participants and I engaged in a form of transactional meaning-making, collaboratively discussing and reflecting upon the emerging data as well as postulating theories.

Finally, in keeping with the reflexive nature of my methodology I remained cognizant, throughout the process of data collection that, "[t]heory, data and interpretation feed into each other as the research continues" (Barton, et al., 2007). And, while "[e]thnographic representations attempt to produce a holistic picture of the complexity of the situation through writing and other means...lived experience is never reducible to any representation of it" (Barton, et al., 2007).

Context

This study was conducted at a private, mid-size, liberal arts university located in the southwest section of Long Island, New York. The communities bordering the university vary widely in terms of socioeconomic status, from low-level to the west and mid-level to the east. Of the approximately, 13,000 students who attend this university, some come from these neighboring communities and others from diverse socioeconomic locations on Long Island and within New York state. Many more who attend live in states located predominately on the

northeast or southeast portion of the United States, while a few are drawn from a variety of international locations.

The University houses the usual array of liberal arts departments, but has recently added a bioethics program, a school of medicine, and a school of engineering. Degrees are awarded at the undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral levels. Also, within this enclave, is a program that houses students whose grade point averages (GPAs) and/or standardized test scores did not meet the criteria for entry into the main population of the University. Although the program is considered by the University to be transitional in nature, the students are generally thought to be underprepared for full immersion into the more rigorous structure of the university at large. The students gain entry into this specialized one-year program through an interview process in which program faculty and administrators attempt to gauge the college readiness of each applicant. Once admitted, the student attains freshman standing, and contractually commits to complying with the curriculum and policies of said program.

The curriculum of this program is designed so as to allow the student the opportunity to earn 30 freshman credits through successful completion (grades of "C" or better) of the requisite program classes which included a 6 credit interdisciplinary core class, a 3 credit program affiliated seminar, and two 3 credit writing classes, one taken in the fall semester and one in the spring semester. The additional 15 credits are earned in "main" campus departmental or distribution-type classes that have been, to a great extent, pre-selected by the program coordinators. This pre-selection is commensurate with the program's efforts to maintain awareness of students' academic progress by initiating outreach to all instructors who teach these particular classes. Further efforts to safeguard against any student "dropping through the cracks," so to speak, include, but are not limited to: the integration of a study-skills component into every

core class, internal advisement provided by the team leader of each student's interdisciplinary core class, "open" office hours which enable students to meet with an administrator for academic and/or personal reasons every day of the week at selected times, and sporadic informational orientation sessions. It is within the context of this programmatic setting that my study took place.

Participants

The primary participants of my study were selected from each of the two writing classes that I taught in the fall 2012 semester and who continued the study with me into and throughout the spring 2013 semester. I forestalled the selection of my participants until I had met the students and was able to gain some insight into the identities that were current at that time, thereby making what Glesne (2006) refers to as a "purposeful" choice (p. 34). Moreover, I was mindful of the need to negotiate my status with the students who comprised each class section. It was imperative that once approached, the students' did not feel compelled to say "yes" to my request, but willingly and openly agreed to participate, because they, too, had a vested interest in what the findings would reveal. In the interim, I continued to take many descriptive and reflexive notes and to collect artifactual data from all of my students which enabled me to give rich, detailed examples of class assignments, the range of skills and personalities in the class, and to provide detailed examples of the identity shifts of a number of individuals within the group, the discussions of which makes up the body of Chapter 4.

By early October of the fall 2012 semester I was ready to choose my specific participants. My rationale for choosing particular students was aligned with the criteria associated with "purposeful sampling," a method that Enriquez (2014), acknowledging the work of Bogdan and Biklen 2003; Marshall and Rossman 2010; and Seidman 2005, explains as one that "considers

the range of students who fit the purpose of [the] study and the maximum variation of student demographics" (p. 109). These criteria also facilitated my desire to allow for as many patterns as possible to emerge from the data. However, as I intended to conduct a longitudinal study over the course of two sequential academic semesters I was mindful of the fact that retention in college, especially in this type of program, is always an issue and that some of the participants may not be returning in the spring semester. There was also the concern that class scheduling conflicts would eliminate others.

Therefore, I initially selected a sample size of four students which was comprised of two white females: Adrienne and Mischka, and two males, one white, Sean, and one African American, Ray (pseudonyms), who collectively offered a gender balanced and representational microcosmic sample of the cultural, experiential, and educational diversity of the program's population and on whom I focused intensive attention. However, in November of the fall semester, Ray was forced to drop out of school due to financial issues. Thus, in order to maintain as much of a sample balance as possible, I made the decision to reduce the number of participants to two specific students, one female, Adrienne, and one male, Sean, who would become the focus of my qualitative case studies. The reduction of my sample to two students enabled me to engage in a more intensive study of the individualized ways in which interactions with a transformative pedagogy and multimodally infused writing assignments helped to bring about and to realize student identity shifts as we moved throughout the academic year together.

The Key Players

Adrienne

Despite her placement in the program, Adrienne was a high-achieving student with a professed and demonstrated interest in writing. I did not know when I began the study with her

that Adrienne had been born in Russia, taken away from her birth mother and placed in an orphanage, and subsequently adopted just short of her fifth birthday by American parents. Her transition into the American school system was emotionally stressful not only because of the need to adapt to different customs but also because she had not yet mastered the English language. Consequently, Adrienne was labelled as a non-achiever early on in her education, a factor which caused her to be somewhat withdrawn but which also nurtured her imaginative and very creative story telling as well as her affinity for classic British literature.

Sean

Sean, on the other hand, was American born and bred and had grown up on Long Island, New York. He seemed to always have had a natural proclivity for sports and had played on various sports teams throughout elementary and high school, finally settling on Lacrosse as his sport of choice. However, while Sean was considered to be "high-achieving" as an athlete, more often than not he was considered to be a "low-achieving" student. He had been placed in a pull-out reading class from first through third grade and soon thereafter was diagnosed as having Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder.

Sean had come to the University through an athletic scholarship, but like most first-year athletes, he was not often in the starting line-up and suffered his share of physical injuries. Sean's previously affixed deficit-associated labels along with the disequilibrium of his role of student-athlete played havoc with Sean's academic life at the University. However, when Sean was on his game, he was great. It was those moments of almost pure brilliance demonstrated by Sean that drew my attention.

Qualitative Case Studies

It is on data drawn from the individualized qualitative case studies of these two contrasting students, Adrienne and Sean, that the findings of this research are based. Adrienne and Sean exhibited unique histories, learning styles, and identities that provided contrasting views of first-year college composition students who have been considered to be underprepared for academic work. Thus, the employment of purposeful sampling enabled me to stay consistent with my research focus and my belief that the social, historical, political, and economic histories of the individual student should be acknowledged and valued in every learning situation.

Ethics

As a practitioner researcher in the classes that I taught, I realized that I would have to walk a fine line in terms of ethical behavior, as I was aware that I would initially be viewed by the students as an authority figure in possession of the power. Therefore, I was mindful that my invitation to participate in my proposed study was free of any intent, action, or language that could have been perceived as intimidating or coercive. Moreover, I made every effort to be truly non-judgmental and free of any biases as I engaged in this process. As Barton, et al., (2007) state, "ethnographic researchers always attempt to remain sensitive to their own role as participants in the research, constraining their idiosyncrasies with systematic fieldwork strategies, but also recognizing the importance of their own positioning and resources in understanding and interpreting the data" (p. 38). To this end, I believe that my reflexive stance as well as my reflective journal helped me to safeguard against any breach of ethics regarding my attitude and behavior as I proceeded with my study. As Watt (2007), in speaking of the effectiveness of her own reflexivity and journaling practices points out, "A researcher must be cognizant of the state of his/her ongoing relationships with participants and how this might be

influencing the outcomes of a study" (p. 88). Watt further notes that her journal entries alerted her to "an ongoing concern with maintaining rapport and causing no harm" (p. 88).

In terms of "causing no harm" I also remained mindful that the location in which I was working consisted of a small community of learners and faculty who frequently interacted with each other. Therefore, I adhered to strict standards of confidentiality, so as to avoid any violation of the rights of the students or faculty who have shared privileged information with me.

I obtained informed consent from all participants who volunteered to take part in this study. The aforementioned consent form was constructed in a way commensurate with the University's Internal Review Board standards. Students were able to withdraw from the research at any time. Furthermore, before submission and prior to publication, every effort was made to allow each participant to review and comment upon the research-in-progress as well as the final document. Lastly, I submit as an embodiment of my ethical stance, an excerpt from Barton, et al. (2007) which asserts that, "from an ethical perspective, working collaboratively with participants and responding to their needs and perspectives is at the heart of a person-respecting approach to social scientific research" (p. 39).

Data Analysis

In this study I analyzed data using the process of thematic analysis which is consistent with qualitative research in the social sciences (Attride-Stirling, 2001), and is summarized by Glesne (2006) as follows:

Data analysis involves organizing what you have seen, heard and read so that you can make sense of what you have learned. Working with the data, you describe, create explanations, pose hypotheses, develop theories, and link your story to other stories. To do so, you must categorize, synthesize, search for patterns, and

interpret the data you have collected (p.147).

Through my extensive reading on the role of researcher, I have come to realize that the analysis of qualitative data is, perhaps, one of the most daunting, yet extremely critical phases of any research study. This is particularly true in my case since I have, as noted above, chosen to employ the now more widely used, yet still debated, reflexive approach in my research (Ortlipp, 2008). Ortlipp (2008) sees this debate regarding the use of reflexivity as located within the issue of bias and "a lack of agreement on how much researcher influence is acceptable, whether or not it needs to be 'controlled,' and how it might be accounted for" (p. 695). As Mauthner and Doucet, (2003) attest: "While the importance of *being* reflexive is acknowledged within social science research, the difficulties, practicalities and methods of *doing* it are rarely addressed" (p. 413). Of said difficulties Miles (1979) further notes, "...the most serious and central difficulty in the use of qualitative data is that methods of analysis are not well formulated" (p. 591).

Admittedly, a single, unitary defined method of qualitative data analysis does not appear to exist. However, an examination of the extant literature on reflexive practices and methods of qualitative data analysis indicates that there are certain elemental procedures and ideologies that seem consistent across all such research. Primary among these are a collaborative approach which "acknowledges, draws on and makes available the experiences, resources and understandings of those directly situated in the area of study" (Barton, et al., 2007, p. 40), thus, ensuring that the "research will be grounded, relevant and useful to the situation that is being researched" (Barton, et al., 2007, p. 40). Furthermore, data drawn from these varied experiences, resources, and understandings is collected through 'multiple methods' as a way to provide "multiple forms of evidence rather than a single incident or data point in the study" (Creswell and Miller, 2000, p.125). An additional validity measure inherent in a reflexive methodology

calls for the researcher to "report on personal beliefs, values, and biases that may shape their inquiry" (Creswell and Miller, 2000, p. 127). This information is usually provided early on in the study so as to allow readers to obtain a clear perspective of the researcher's position as "they reflect on the social, cultural, and historical forces that shape their interpretation" (Creswell and Miller, 2007, p. 127) and inform their analyses. Commensurate with reflexive reports and qualitative methods, "[d]ata collection and analysis are interwoven from the outset" (Miles and Huberman, 1984, p. 25). Integral to the ongoing reflexive analysis is "member checking," a process which "consists of taking data and interpretations back to the participants in the study so that they can confirm the credibility of the information and narrative account" (Creswell and Miller, 2000, p. 127). In sum, the processes noted above represent the basic, agreed upon methods of data analysis employed by qualitative researchers, and which have served as guidelines for analysis of data collected from my study. What follows below, is a more detailed and personalized account of these methods.

Not surprisingly, the consensus of opinion seems to indicate that the establishment of methods for data analysis is antecedent to actual data collection as they are inextricably woven into the fabric of the entire research design (Ortlipp, 2008; Barton, et al., 2007; Freeman, et al., 2007; Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2007; Watt, 2007; Glesne, 2006; Mauthner and Doucet, 2003; Pillow, 2003; Finlay, 2002b; Macbeth, 2001; Creswell and Miller, 2000; Chiseri-Strater, 1996; Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993; Maxwell, 1992; Miles, 1979). As Barton, et al. (2007), explain:

It is therefore essential to make explicit our theoretical position and how this shapes our research principles and our overall methodology as well as the specific methods used in the research. It is crucial to explain how we generated

the data in order for readers to understand what the data represents, and any claims we make from it (p. 39).

Transparency regarding the processes, methodologies, and generation of data was therefore absolutely essential in laying the foundation for the validity and reliability of the resulting analysis and findings of my qualitative research and was provided in detail in my reflective journal. Pillow (2003), contextualizes these claims by posing the rhetorical question: "If traditional measures of validity are not useful to qualitative researchers, then what are we left with to discuss and determine whether out data and analyses are 'accurate?' (p. 179). In light of this problem, Pillow (2003) posits a solution by invoking the reflexive approach, the stance that I Of this, she states, "Thus, reflexivity becomes important to have assumed in this study. demonstrate one's awareness of the research problematic and is often used to potentially validate and legitimize the research precisely by raising questions about the research process" (p. 179). By way of further explanation, Glesne (2006) states that, "Data analysis done simultaneously with data collection enables you to focus and shape the study as it proceeds (p. 148). Watt (2007) concurs, and expands on this statement by noting "Since analysis takes place throughout the entire research process, a study is shaped and reshaped as a study proceeds, and data is gradually transformed into findings. (p. 95).

Indeed, one can foresee that a qualitative approach to research, which is generative by nature, combined with a reflexive methodology that is collaborative by nature as well as inquiry-driven, entails considerable revisionist properties, which enabled me "to gather different types of data and allow[ed] [me] to see complexity, multiple values, different positions, opposing perceptions, and different identities in different contexts" (Barton, et al., 2007, p. 39). Thus, it provided ongoing internal measures through which I was able to constantly reassess the data.

These procedures were vital to my research as I often attempted to concretize in words intangibles like perceptions, feelings, and notions that were quite often sensory and ephemeral in nature. Pillow (2003), drawing upon research from Altheide & Johnson (1998) and Ball (1990), elaborates on the value of this process by explaining that, "Listening and writing with reflexivity are often described as tools to help situate oneself and be cognizant of the ways your personal history can influence the research process and thus yield more 'accurate,' more 'valid' research' (p. 179).

Additionally, performing and recording the process of self-reflexivity acted as a safeguard against the more negative propensities inherent in an 'insider' stance relating to power and knowledge. While Moss (1992) concurs with the above-cited benefits of reflexivity in the data analysis process, she takes great pains to caution against certain aspects of reflexive ethnography that may occlude, misrepresent, or omit important aspects of the observed data. Speaking from personal experience, Moss (1992) points out that "There is a tendency for insiders to overlook patterns because they are not unique or strange or new" (p. 167). That is, as a teacher researching an area of study in which I have had much prior experience, I had to guard against taking for granted that what appeared to be routine was unimportant (Moss, 1992). Instead, I looked at every situation as new and unique. Furthermore, Moss (1992) cautions that "Ethnographers may also have a tendency to rely on their own knowledge for a great deal of data" (p. 167). Her advice, which I wholeheartedly embraced, is that "[e]thnographers must be careful to actually listen to and see the community, rely on informants, and draw conclusions from actual data collected during the study; basically, ethnographers should not be major informants" (pp. 167-168). In light of this information, I collected and analyzed data with a careful eye toward what was actually taking place and avoided omission or prediction based on

prior teaching experiences. I had to see with new eyes and produce a faithful and truthful reflexive analysis of my own thoughts and actions in order to help me to continually refocus the lens through which I viewed all data gleaned throughout my research study.

Therefore, as shown above, although literature does exist upon which I was able to draw for guidance, I was essentially charged with the responsibility of not only employing a reflexive and subjective analytical schema that was compatible with my research and data collection methods and which ensured that accuracy of interpretation and overall validity was achieved but also potentially contributing to an area of research methodology that is still relatively underexamined (Attride-Stirling, 2001). As Attride-Stirling (2001) adamantly asserts:

There is also a need for greater disclosure in qualitative analysis, and as this research tradition gains prevalence, we must ensure that it does so as a learned and robust methodology. This can only be achieved by recording, systematizing and disclosing our methods of analysis, so that existing techniques may be shared and improved, and new and better tools may be developed (p. 386).

In light of my decision to conduct data analysis through a qualitative approach imbued with a reflexive methodology, the process of analysis began as soon as the first sets of data were collected. Again, due to the subjective nature of qualitative data analysis, the approaches to the organizational aspects of data analysis tend to vary according to the source (Glesne, 2006; Attride-Stirling, 2001; Chiseri-Strater, 1991; Miles and Huberman, 1984; Miles, 1979). However, despite the varied subjective approaches to what Glesne (2006) refers to as an ultimately "idiosyncratic enterprise" (p. 153), there appears to be unanimity regarding the

necessary features that should be included in any qualitative data analysis (Glesne, 2006). These are identified by Glesne (2006) as "coding, categorizing, and theme-searching" (p. 154).

Therefore, I began the analysis through a preliminary process in which data was coded, emerging patterns were discerned, and themes identified. Realizing that data analysis is an on-going, cyclical process, I continually reevaluated and added to the analysis by, "shuttle[ing] among reduction...conclusion-drawing/verification for the remainder of the study" (Miles and Huberman, 1984, p.24). Furthermore, throughout the study, I consistently added to my knowledge base through continued reading of the literature pertinent to my research.

In addition to analysis of observational and reflexive data, many of the artifacts that were analyzed consisted of oral interviews and discussions as well as student papers and multimodal projects, all of which were essentially discoursal in nature (Gee. 1996). Therefore, consistent with my theoretical framework which is embedded in The New Literacy Studies (Street 1992, Gee 1991, Heath 1983), I utilized aspects of Gee's (1996) model of discourse analysis as the primary tool of analysis for these artifacts. This analysis focused on many aspects of the students' writing which included a sense of understanding of the topic, the ways in which this understanding was communicated, and indications of students' individual voices and identities as well as the ways in which these voices and identities changed throughout each semester. Similarly, analysis of all multimodal projects, using the combined methodologies of Gee's (1996) discourse analysis and Kress's (2000) notion of design, further focused on student's understanding of the writing process and the particular assignment as well as on what the students' "said," how they "said" it, and what the basic text of the project "said" about them in terms of identity, rather than artistic ability. It is important to stress that I did not analyze the

data in terms of letter or numerical grades, as I did not want to impose an institutional method of assessment on this data.

In the second semester, I had a keener sense of the direction of my study and continued to refine my methodologies and techniques. I was able to add new dimensions to my interpretive frame which assisted me in establishing a classroom environment that was more finely attuned to the emerging identities, perspectives, inquiries, and needs of not only my participants but also every student in the class. I was able to create assignments that were responsive to these issues and, consequently, gathered more data from the ensuing written and multimodal responses. I continued to conduct interviews which had become less formal and more conversational.

Finally, as the academic year came to a close, I entered into the concluding stages of my fieldwork and continued the process of full data analysis which was documented through the commonly used qualitative method of the analytic narrative (Ortlipp, 2008; Glesne, 2006; Mauthner and Doucet, 2003; Pillow, 2003). Incorporated into this analytic narrative were segments which were written and recorded throughout in my reflective journal (Glesne, 2006).

Timeline

I began gathering data from the two classes that I taught in the fall 2012 semester, a process which continued on into the spring 2013 semester. The process of coding, categorizing, and theme searching (Glesne, 2006) began with the collection of data in the fall 2012 semester and remained ongoing throughout the duration of my time in the field which was completed at the end of the spring 2013 semester. Once this process was completed and my findings were obtained, I began the more formal process of dissertation writing at the end of the spring 2013 semester and continued on throughout the 2013-2014 academic year, with the intention of defending the dissertation during the fall 2014 semester.

Conclusion

On a global scale, I am hopeful that my dissertation study will shed new light on the issue of deficit, a much contested area of literacy research. On a more local scale, I believe that the reflexive methodology used in my proposed study has informed my own teaching practices by expanding my knowledge base as well of the knowledge base of those students with whom I have interacted in the past and those with whom I will work in the future. Knowledge is power and thus provides agency for students who have, for far too long, been devalued by labels which circumscribe their personal and academic identities. Yet, proof of this knowledge has sometimes eluded many researchers, due to the vague criteria used to gauge such a nuanced, individualized characteristic. Therefore, through the inclusion of a multimodal social semiotic approach to learning—and to writing, in particular—this study has provided tangible evidence, through artifact and discourse, of the undeniable knowledge base of its participants.

Moreover, I seek to further legitimatize the type of research in which I engage. Of practioner (teacher) research, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) so eloquently and ardently aver:

Because teacher research emerges from praxis and because it preserves teachers' own words and analyses, it has the potential to be a particularly robust method for understanding whether and how preservice and in-service teachers construct their knowledge and theories of practice, how these may change and develop over time, and the impact of these on teaching and learning (p. 35).

Additionally, in terms of qualitative and reflexive research in general, this study seeks to contribute answers to the "problem" identified in Miles and Huberman (1984), as "an insufficient corpus of reliable, valid, or even minimally agreed-on working analysis procedures for qualitative data" (Miles, 1979).

Chapter 4

Practicing Transformative Pedagogy in the College Composition Class

"...our transformative pedagogies must relate both to existing conditions and to something we are trying to bring into being, something that goes beyond a present situation" (Greene, 2000, p.51).

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss my use of a transformative pedagogy as the framework through which the data for this research was obtained. My conception of a transformative pedagogy is based on a very literal interpretation of the term transformative, in that it is a pedagogy designed to bring about change; change that inspires agency rather than complacency; change that challenges assumptions and pre-conceived notions about what constitutes normalcy and academic preparedness; and change in the curriculum of a college composition class from one that is traditionally autonomous and fixed to one that reflects 21st century ideological and technological changes as well as the identities and individualized literacy practices of each student.

To this end, I talk about the role that environments play in bringing about these changes. Because I believe that a singular standard and prescribed method of teaching is not adequate for the widely diverse range of personalities and learning styles that are embodied by any one group of students I strive to create aesthetically engaging and dynamic learning spaces in which assignments are more identity-friendly and move beyond the traditional written text into the spaces where students lives are lived. I draw attention to this environment, as it is one in which pedagogy and curriculum are designed in such a way as to ensure that all students might have a more equal chance at decoding the complexities of what has been, and still remains, the prescribed academic discourse of the University. As I will show, these are places in which the primary objective is to

"enable our students to live within the arts, making clearings and spaces for themselves" (Greene, 2000, pp. 134, 135). Thus, I discuss how interaction with the arts is the stimulus for imagination. I further go on to demonstrate through the data that when imagination is released, identities too, are released, transformed, and often actualized within the clearings and spaces that Greene (2000) talks about. As Greene (2000) further states: "To tap into imagination is to become able to break with what is supposedly fixed and finished... to see beyond what the imaginer has called normal or "common-sensible" and to carve out new orders in experience. Doing so, a person may become freed to glimpse what might be, to form notions of what should be and what is not yet" (p. 19).

In this chapter, I focus on the way in which I achieve these clearings and spaces in a composition class by drawing on Kress's (1997) concept of multimodality and the ways in which my incorporation of a multiplicity of aesthetic semiotic modes such as literature, film, and art serve to emphasize the concept of design. Design, or "the use of different modes—image, writing, colour, layout—to present, to realize, at times to (re-)contextualize social positions and relations, as well as knowledge in specific arrangements for a specific audience" (Kress, 2010 p. 139), is the primary concept of multimodality. As demonstrated in the data that follows, I discuss the following primary processes of design: transformation, which "operates on the forms and structures within a mode" (Kress, 2003 p. 36), transduction, or "the shift of "semiotic material"...across modes" (p. 36) and synaesthesia, the "conceptual linking that takes place "inward...between modes" (Kress, 2010 p. 128), all of which are realized in the overall improvement of writing skills. As Kress (2003) notes: "In design, resources are transformed in any number of ways—whether in new combinations of modes or in the constant transformative action by signmakers in producing newly made signs" (p. 169). Thus, in this chapter I explore the ways in which the signmakers—the students—use design as the process through which they come to an understanding of an unfamiliar concept or topic. By transforming their thoughts into images via various modes, they begin to *see* these concepts more clearly. Yet, it is in the design—the choices made regarding the layout and construction of the images—that the pieces of the puzzle, so to speak, come together. While the results of this design process may stand on their own as a communicative piece, I will discuss data that demonstrates how the use of the design process is effective in the improvement of writing skills, particularly as a pre-writing tool as well as a recursive process that inevitably leads to the practice of revision, a necessary step in the writing process, yet one that is frequently omitted by students due to the shift from more time intensive hand written drafts to the comparative ease and expediency of computer based writing. Furthermore, the data will show that when transformation and transduction occur and the design process becomes part of the repertoire of the student writer, overall conceptualization, organization, and development of the assignment at hand becomes clearer, more coherent and far more substantive. In this way, we see that, much like students' identities, writing is itself, a transformative process.

Importantly, in this chapter I also bring to light a significant and less discussed 'affordance' of a multimodal infused pedagogy through my discussion of the ways in which interactions with multimodality not only reveal students' identities but also serve to capture and document the ways in which identities shift and change. As Kress (2010) notes, "The sign which the sign-maker has made gives us an insight into their "stance" in the world, with respect to a specific part of the world, that part framed by the interest of the sign-maker... In doing that they give us an insight into the subjectivity of the sign-maker" (p.77). Moreover, as Rowsell and Pahl (2007) note, "...text making [i]s a process involving the sedimentation of identities into the text, which can then be seen as an artifact that reflects, through its materiality, the previous identities of the meaning maker" (p. 388).

Primarily because of the population with whom I work, I also will talk a great deal about the effects of power and labels on identities as I move through each of the following sections. While some students enter the program already burdened by pre-affixed labels, others are trying to come to terms with the label of underprepared that has just been imposed on them due to the selection process of the University. Therefore, I focus much of my discussion on how the immersion into an aesthetically enhanced multimodal curriculum brings about self-affirming and agentive transformations in students' identities. It is Kress (1997), who sees in multimodality a theory of language that, "envisages the possibility of productive, transformative action by an individual, child or adult, in relation to language or literacy" (p. xvi); one which "forces our attention away from seeing competent adherence to rules as sufficient, and to focus on a concern with the competent development and enactment of *design*" (p. xvii), and in so doing, forces our focus away from deficit and toward capability.

The Writing Class as Site of Transformation

As the university writing class is the primary setting from which the data to be analyzed in this chapter is generated, a preliminary overview of its essential components is warranted. Although my pre-research organizational plan for each class is predicated on achieving the same goals in terms of improved writing skills, valuing identity (in opposition to pre-affixed labels), and aesthetic engagement through the use of the affordances of technology/multimodality, the diversity and nuances evidenced in each setting are unique, as are the students. It is important to consider real situations in real time. As Kress, (in Cope and Kalantzis, Eds. 2000), suggests, "a new curricula of communication...requires the orchestration and remaking of these resources in the service of frameworks and models expressive of the maker's intentions in shaping the social and cultural environment" (p. 160). Therefore, in keeping with Kress' vision as well as the true

nature of a transformative pedagogy I allow myself the flexibility to adjust the syllabi when necessary (a matter that will be discussed in detail later in this chapter), to accommodate the trajectory of class discussions and students' needs for clarification while still retaining the foundational assignments which provide the substantive data that is discussed in this chapter.

Consequently, the foundational assignments as well as the day-to-day class activities included in the syllabi for these classes were carefully thought out. Examples of the assignments and activities that will be discussed in this chapter include a personal interview, multimodal representations of two museum exhibits accompanied by a written reflective process analysis, a literacy narrative based on the concept of labeling, a tripartite multimodal sequence focused on reading strategies, and a final multimodal presentation. These content choices were gleaned from previous pilot studies and constitute the best and most informative practices that embody my ideologically centered theoretical framework (Appendice C). All choices were made in an effort to counter the rigidity of the more traditional academic approach to a composition curriculum that focuses primarily on precision, skills, clarity, and format, but which often lacks the transparency necessary in order for first year students to fully understand instructors' definitions and expectations regarding these key concepts (Lillis and Turner, 2001). In this chapter I discuss the uncertainty felt by students in the face of a new and unfamiliar discourse and how this uncertainty is often mistakenly perceived as deficiency by instructional adherents to a privileged view of literacy who also hold a privileged position of power. I talk further about how these misperceptions are, much like a self-fulfilling prophecy, internalized by the student, subsequently causing negative identity shifts which are reflected in academic behavior and performance. Gee (2008), in his discussion of the inherent power attributed to what he refers to as a privileged Discourse, supports this view by rearticulating Rose's (1989) belief that, "Once in a lower track...a child almost always stays there, and eventually behaves in ways that appear to validate the track the child is in" (p. 60).

Thus, the curricular choices discussed above were made in an active effort to offer students alternative methods through which their writing skills could become stronger as well as to minimize the negative effects on students' identities that often accompanies instructor misperceptions and are generally exacerbated by enrollment in a program that is, itself, marginalized within the University setting.

Deficit and Labels

I have mentioned above that these students are enrolled in a program that is, itself, marginalized within the University. While this programmatic marginalization is not the result of any mal-intent on the part of the University, it does, however, reflect the inherent power of the institution. It is a complex power that, on the one hand, grants much desired access to a noted private university, yet, on the other hand, reminds the students, through their placement and requirements, that their entry into this privileged domain is granted and not earned. Initially grateful for their acceptance, few students demonstrate any awareness of their phantom secondary status. However, as the weeks pass and their immersion into their new habitus becomes deeper, gratitude often turns to resentment or silence regarding the new identity that has been imposed upon them (field notes, 11/13/12). Although I had gingerly touched upon this issue in one-to-one interviews with the participants who will be discussed in the case studies to follow, no such sentiments were ever expressed during the course of the study. It was only after this study was completed that several participants confided that they never willingly disclosed their inclusion in this program to roommates or peers, fearing that they would be viewed as 'different' (field notes, 11/13/12).

As per this program's requirements, an in-class writing sample was obtained at the onset of the semester in order for me to be able to gauge the strengths and weaknesses of the students' writing. Interestingly, prior to my appointment as Writing Coordinator for this program, this essay was referred to as a 'diagnostic' essay. Recognizing in this terminology the remnants of the medical discourse of deficit, I advocated for and achieved the more egalitarian term 'sample' essay for this initial writing event. Because this essay is written cold, so to speak, and under the duress of time restraint I do not consider it to be an authentic product and, therefore, will not extrapolate upon its results in this study. Yet it is necessary to discuss the anxiety, fear, trepidation and identity confusion that most of the students experience when attempting to engage in what they perceive to be their first high-stakes foray into the world of academic discourse. It also is a time of self-conflict and doubt, as they wonder if the self that has been exposed and consigned to the written word will be judged and found wanting. As a case in point, I turn to a discussion of Jamie (all students' names have been replaced by pseudonyms).

As one student after another dropped off their completed essays on my desk, one student, Jamie, bent low and whispered to me, "Don't laugh when you read my essay." Initially, I was taken aback by this request, not sure if I had heard him correctly, or if he was joking. I asked him to please repeat what he had said, and when I looked up Jamie was leaning forward on the desk in an obvious attempt at confidentiality. The look in his eyes, his physical demeanor, and the tone of his voice all signaled that he was both very serious and very anxious about the quality of his writing (field notes, 10/4/12). This was a clear indication that someone, somewhere, sometime had made him feel inadequate about his writing; so inadequate that he had never been able to free himself from that feeling.

This incident reflects Ivanic's (1998) notion of the autobiographic self, of which she

states:

All our writing is influenced by our life-histories. Each word we write represents an encounter, possibly a struggle, between our multiple past experience and the demands of a new context. Writing is not some neutral activity which we just learn like a physical skill, but it implicates every fibre of the writer's multifaceted being (182).

Ivanic's (1998) words testify to the powerful link between writing and identity, as both are imbued with the markers of experience that have either lifted us up or brought us down. There can be either much freedom or much pain expressed in our representations of self. Unfortunately, in my classes, too often I see the pain, the fear, and the reluctance to engage in what should be a libratory and agentive enterprise.

Word Power

I had selected "The Power of Words" as the class theme which overtly suggested that we would be focusing primarily on the communicative nature of words carefully chosen and designed in such a way as to create a cogent and cohesive essay. However, as I explained to the class, this was only one aspect that we would be considering. I wanted us to jointly explore the ways in which words not only empower but also disable when they are used carelessly. Moreover, we would discuss and write about situations in which the absence of words, or silence in the face of wrongdoings, was as devastating as words cruelly spoken. Ultimately, we would consider the concept of words as labels, which would be followed by an essay in which the students would reflect on and analyze the accuracy of their own, socially imposed Millennial label. Although these concepts were rather easily understood, the students had more difficulty with my suggestion that oftentimes—even in a composition class—visual representations could successfully enhance, and occasionally, even

replace traditional text. I pointed out that the multimodal visual representations that we were going to create were affordances of technology that actually belonged in a 21st century college composition class and had the potential to ultimately make their writing stronger, clearer, and more satisfying. In this chapter I discuss the data that demonstrates the ways in which the students came to understand and effectively use multimodality as well as the effects of this understanding on their personal and academic identities.

Emergent Themes:

Ultimately, from the data there emerged three significant themes: (1) evidence of generational, institutional, and/or self-labeling prior to, and/or concurrent with, the onset of the study; (2) multimodality as a means of engagement, empowerment, and enhanced writing skills as well as a medium through which identity is revealed, tracked and captured, especially in Millennial students; and (3) identity, extant, and in transition

Identity/Unpacking Toolkits

I know that first impressions tend to linger for both the student and the teacher; therefore, on the first day of class I endeavored to establish a rapport with the students as soon as possible. As I called out each name and tried to match the face that accompanied it, I engaged in a little friendly banter with each student. Some students smiled and responded cheerfully, as if relieved, while others seemed more composed, perhaps even steadfast, in their reluctance to expose any hint of their identity (9/4/12). Despite my efforts, a few will keep their identities in what Clydesdale (2007) refers to as "lockboxes" (p. 4), throughout the semester, but most will come to form a community of co-learners who feel safe enough with each other and with me to speak openly, honestly, and uncensored about themselves and the topics that we discuss in class.

After the obligatory reading of the guidelines for the class as stated on the syllabus, the students were given a personal interview questionnaire, the answers to which were handwritten and completed in class (Students text-based work is presented herein in as originally written. No changes have been made). The interview contains fourteen questions that are designed to reveal in writing what has not been spoken aloud (Appendix A). The questions inquire about career goals, self-evaluation of reading and writing skills, the processes employed when engaged in the acts of reading and writing, engagement with technological devices, frequency of use of these devices, perceived technological proficiency as well as the overall affect (if any) of technological interaction on reading and writing practices. Some answer the questions in great detail, but most are brief. Yet, all give away information about themselves more freely than in the initial exchange at the start of the class. It is in the analysis of this data that I realize that for many students writing is a cloaking device, something more personal, yet less intrusive than the spoken word.

The Survey

Of the fourteen questions asked in the personal survey, those that revealed a great deal about students self-perceptions in terms of identity, labels, and the use and effects of technological devices, topics that are the focus of this research, provide the most revelatory preliminary glimpses into the students themselves and the role played in their lives by technology. In what I consider to be the key question, "If identity were a 'toolkit,' what would your toolkit consist of?" I embedded the word 'toolkit,' a liberal comingling of the terms 'tools' and 'kit' that are used by Gee (2008) to describe foundational aspects of his concept of 'big D' Discourse, or "ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing, that are accepted as instantiations of particular identities or "types of people" by specific groups" (p. 30). In this respect, 'tools' refers to "tools of inquiry [that] are primarily relevant to how people build identities and practices and recognize identities and practices that others are building around them" (28), and

'kits' which contain "words, things, clothes, values, attitudes" (41) that denote facets of our socially situated identities and which we daily draw upon, much in the way that a craftsman reaches into his toolbox to choose a particular tool for a particular situation. Therefore, although I was well aware that many, if not all, of the students would be unfamiliar with the context from which this word was extracted, I was hopeful that the way in which the term was interpreted would reveal as much about the students' identities as the answers themselves. Similarly, throughout this dissertation, students' texts appear in the original, so as to preserve the unique aspects of each student's identity and authorial voice.

As predicted, the interpretations of the term 'toolkit' varied from student to student in each class section, yet in the majority of the responses, the variations did not interfere with meaning. Some students chose to speak directly about their identities, offering answers that testified to a high level of self- confidence: "I have strong knowlege in a large array of tatics, my critical thinking and debate skills make me keen to learn more" and "Most people that I speak to call me articulate and descriptive." However, one student, Mack, who chose to answer in this vein, seemed to be self-deprecating, yet steadfast when writing about his identity. In the quote that follows, Mack reveals this quasi-ambivalence when he writes: "My toolkit would hold many different things. My identity is different but the same in many ways. In this case, I can do many jobs with my toolkit. A joke to an artist, an artist to a dolt sometimes. In the end, my identity is filled with curiosity and respect to explore all things that interest me, despite societys views." In his response, Mack indicates that he thinks of himself as neither a joke nor a dolt. Rather, he thinks of himself as an "artist," a title that he uses twice and which seems to be chosen in an effort to minimize the joking, doltish side of his identity and to instead, emphasize the passionate and altruistic characteristics of his artistic sensibilities. Furthermore, Mack takes care to provide evidence that he understands both the literal and figurative meaning of the question through his reflective discussion of his identity which, he acknowledges, can change with the assistance of his

toolkit, or personas, in order to "do many jobs." Mack also is savvy enough to realize that his answer will be internalized by me, as the reader and the instructor, as a first impression. Therefore, he sends me the message that he is a curious and respectful student. Yet, despite the confidence displayed in the above responses, Mack reveals some underlying insecurity when he closes with the statement, "despite societys views." Although this parting aside could be evidence of a rebellious streak, its placement at the end of a very upbeat response suggests otherwise. Rather, it hints at the many times that Mack may have either acted as, or been perceived of as the "joke" or "dolt" that he refers to in his initial description of himself. It may also refer to his desire to "explore all things that interest me," things that might be more artistic than academic in nature, an interest which, ironically, mirrors the conflict between the autonomous and ideological views of what constitutes value.

In returning to the data produced by the query regarding identity, I find that other students answered this question by listing material items such as: "piano, computer, phone, bowling-ball"; "headphones, laptop, phone, TV"; "Pen/paper; A classic novel; A smile; Innovation." Still others listed character traits that reflected not only their basic identities: "humorous, good speller, modest, honest person; and caring person and genuine person" but also their cultural and ethnic backgrounds: "My toolkit would consist of a Hispanic flashlight, an ambitious phillip screwdriver, A Black carribean hammer, Brooklyn screws"; "My ID and my Spanish songs." Some answers were clever and humorous, others were spare and straightforward. Only one student offered the very literal answer: "a hammer" and "a nail." Yet another student, Sean, provided an answer that was basic, yet complex and, at its core, very telling: "Hammer, tape messure, screw driver, nails/All tangable items that can be used for building. However, looked at as intangible, they build a strong character." In Chapters 5 and 6, I discuss the ways in which the

complexity and duality evidenced in this answer and in subsequent assignments and interviews mirrored the complexity and duality of the student himself. As in Sean's case, it took quite a few class interactions before I was able to differentiate between the identities the student's chose to enact within this particular academic setting and the more authentic identities that were revealed by the students in their verbal and written accounts.

Technology and the Marginalized Millennial

In her study of children's engagement in digital literacy practices, Marsh (2006) speaks of children's "multimodal communicative practices" (p. 34) and notes that their "relation to popular culture, media and new technology [is] of central importance in identity construction and performance" (p35). Therefore, in order to obtain an initial glimpse of their identities and to gain perspective on the in-and-out of class technological activities of Millennials, I returned to the aforementioned questionnaire in order to seek out the students' personalized responses to their engagement with technology. What I found in these responses was that use of technological devices, like the computer and cell phone, took up a considerable portion of most of the students' days. The cell phone was the primary device of choice with usage ranging from one hour to twenty hours a day spent texting, tweeting, accessing social sites, and making the occasional call, with a class medium of roughly six hours per day. Although activity on the computer accounted for roughly two to four more hours of technological engagement, the consensus of student answers seemed to indicate that computer usage was primarily reserved for homework, research, playing video games, and accessing the news, rather than for participation in social network sites or as a means for the creation of self-initiated, imaginative, and artistic products. In terms of technological interaction, the differentiation between cell-phone and computer usage was noteworthy insofar as it evidenced a proclivity toward the technological device that afforded the

most convenience and immediacy, character traits often attributed to Millennial students. The preference for a convenient yet less creative interaction with technology also sheds light on many of the responses that I discuss below.

While the answers regarding usage were relatively straightforward, self-reports in terms of the question, "Do you consider yourself to be technologically savvy? That is, other than creating text-driven documents, do you know how to design and create imaginative products such as artwork, posters, film, etc.?" produced a myriad of responses. Many of the students responded to this question with an unqualified "Yes," and wrote statements such as: "Yes, I consider myself to be technologically savvy." Approximately, one third of the students responded "No," and said so in relatively short statements like "No not at all"; "No I don't consider [myself] to be technologically savvy," and "No, I am not technologically savvy." Interestingly, only one student chose to leave the question unanswered, and a second look at his survey revealed that the only other question that he had chosen to skip was another technologically based inquiry regarding his These particular omissions gave me pause due to their singularity in this cell phone usage. University setting. They also brought to mind a familiar issue that I had dealt with before when teaching basic writing courses at a nearby community college. It is a generally held belief that all of today's Millennials have access to every form of technology. However, in reality, many do not. Although almost every college and university has computer labs where students can type up and print out their assignments, the usage of this equipment is limited and thus does not provide frequent opportunities for technological exploration. This student's non-answer reminded me that the effects of marginalization often go beyond a label.

The remaining participant answers were more complex, in that they displayed either an inward sense of ambivalence about their skills or a hesitancy to conflate the notion of raw technical

skills with imaginative, creative, and artistic abilities. Consider the following samples: "Im am no where near tech savvy. Yes somewhat, I like to take projects to next level to help out presentation by adding artwork/creativity"; "Technology is tricky therefore I am not techno, savvy, however I do use window filmmaker, Prezi, Power Point"; "I like and use a lot of technology, but I don't really create artwork or anything because I am very uncreative (or I consider myself to be). Other than that, I can build computers. I built my first one two years ago"; and "I can do a little graphic design, film and some text-driven document stuff, but no where near to being a pro."

It is through these answers that the students provide a deeper view into their nascent collegiate identities and self-perceptions as well as their expectations and anxieties. In many ways, these particular responses are indicative of Gee's (1996) notion of Discourses in which "[w]e often enact our identities by speaking or writing in such a way as to attribute a certain identity to others, an identity that we explicitly or implicitly compare or contrast to our own" (p 18). That is to say, those students whose responses indicated a hesitancy to be thought of as 'technologically savvy,' yet whose listed abilities far exceed those of the more self-assured and self-proclaimed 'technologically savvy' students, reveal an undervaluing of self which will prove to borne of prior labeling and a learned lack of self-esteem. Moreover, embedded in this Discourse are echoes of a socially constructed value system that determines who or what is considered to be "adequate." "normal," "good," or "acceptable" (Gee, 2011, p.19), and is, therefore, an indication that these students have learned to position themselves as social goods or commodities that are 'worth' less. However, it is also possible that the way in which the question was worded was confusing, or the perceived expectations projected onto the words in terms of personal proficiency, creativity, and imagination, were intimidating. Yet, in spite of their hesitancy, what became undeniably evident as the semester progressed was that these students clearly possessed technological abilities that exceeded those associated with what is generally considered to be a basic skill level. In fact, when given the same survey at the onset of the spring semester, the majority of the students from the fall who had opted to continue their studies with me were more confident and assertive in their responses. A prime example of this phenomenon occurs in the following responses from Mikey, who claims in the fall of 2012, "Yes I consider myself technologically savvy, But I don't know how to create pictures and using art programs. Never found an interest." However, in the spring 2013 semester he responds to the same question stating: "Yes, especially after the 1st semester. The multimodality project."

What Mikey is referring to is his multimodal response generated by our class visit to a Political Cartoon exhibit at an on-campus museum in the fall semester, which I will discuss at greater length below. Mikey's newly realized abilities as well as a deeper sense of confidence in those abilities not only attest to possession of a skill-set that was initially disavowed but also is representative of a larger phenomenon taking place that centers on that fragile, yet pivotal moment when possibilities are envisioned in the realization of imaginative enterprise. This example also serves to underscore the validity of identity in transition as well as growth of perspective and self-confidence when an aesthetically rich and multimodal learning environment is created which nurtures and attends to this growth.

The Medium and the Method

Our visit in the fall to see the Political Cartoon exhibit at the University's library, and later, our spring visit to experience the University's "50/50 Celebration," brought to the fore far more than the technological savvy I had inquired about just a few weeks earlier, at the beginning of the academic year. Aside from the students' multimodal responses which I will presently discuss,

there are a number of factors that made these trips notable. For all of us these were journeys that took us out of the everyday space of the classroom and into environments that were designed to provide visitors with a full-on aesthetic experience. As noted above, the environments in which students become more willing participants in their learning are those that stimulate the senses. In this respect, the settings in which the exhibits were held provided perfect models, in that the spaces, lighting, ambiance, and arrangement of artifacts served to transform what could have been a mundane assignment into an aesthetic adventure, or what Greene (2002) might see as an opportunity for the students to enhance and change their perceptions of the world and of themselves.

I discuss these particular environments because they serve to locate in space and time moments in which the shift in students' identities begins to take place and becomes more clearly manifest through communicative body language, or "...organized sets of semiotic resources for meaning making" (Jewitt 2008b p. 246) such as: "...gesture, gaze, interaction with objects, body posture, [and] writing" (p. 249). Jewitt states that these performances reveal "the complex multimodal identity work that students are engaged with..." p. (249). Through ethnographic notes taken, respectively, during the fall and spring visits, I attempted to capture these non-verbal modes as the students viewed the familiar world of cartoons with new eyes and became engaged with the unknown, more abstract works of the 50/50 exhibit. In agreement with Jewitt et al., (2000) that "[a]ction and image are not mere illustrations to language, rather each realises specific representational work" (p. 327), I contemplated the meaning behind the various tableaus set before me. I noticed that the students' faces, their glances, and the ways in which they positioned their bodies toward the works under investigation as they moved about taking notes not only suggested that authentic

engagement, connectivity, and a healthy dose of puzzling were taking place but also attested "to meaning as it is made through the situated configurations across image, gesture, gaze, body posture, sound, writing,...speech, and so on" (Jewitt 2008b, p. 246). For example, I observed six students, five males and one female, gathered around a chest-high glass case containing original sketches of a few of the earliest samples of American political cartoons (pictured below). Although they appeared to be a group, it was clear from their positioning and lack of vocal and physical interaction that each student was engaged in an individual pursuit of meaning. Four of the students have converted a piece of the library's environment into a working area, or desk. Two are engaged in the process of writing in their notebooks which are placed on the glass surface; one is reading, perhaps also processing and revising his work, while the female student seems to be lost in reflection, which is demonstrated by the placement of her left elbow on the glass surface which is, in turn, supporting her lowered head. Two other male students are standing upright with notebooks held in their hands as they write. It is to be noted that all heads are lowered and all sets of eyes are focused on the particular text that each student is creating. Furthermore, I did not observe any of the usual conversation or distracting activity that oftentimes occurs when the students have gathered into groups for an in-class activity. On the other hand, I have often observed the facial and bodily gestures that each of these students display when they are deeply involved in the reflection and creation process and therefore, recognize the process that I see before me, here in the library exhibit area (field notes, 9/4/14).

In order to lend credence to my interpretation of this configuration of students as evidence of meaning making in progress, I suggest that gestures, even when not accompanied by speech, fall within the realm of semiotic resources, and as such may be

considered to be modes of communication. As Jewitt (2008a) asserts, "Multimodality is concerned with signs and starts from the position that like speech and writing, all modes consist of sets of semiotic resources—resources that people draw on and configure in specific moments and places to represent events and relations" (p. 357). Moreover, from a socio-cultural perspective, the reading and analysis of these modes requires that they be considered within the material, physical, social, and environmental context in which they were captured. Jewitt (2008b) expands upon this aspect by noting that, "[h]ow a mode has been used, what it has been repeatedly used to mean and do, and the social conventions that inform its use in context shape its affordance" (p. 247). In light of these statements, my analysis of the scenario detailed above is rooted in the assertion that gesture, body language, gaze, glance, action, and activity are modes of communication. Moreover, my basis for interpretation rests on previously acquired knowledge of how these modes have been formerly used by these students in the classroom.



Furthermore, if one were to expand on Jewitt's (2008) theorizing, the above data would suggest that these performances involving gesture, gaze, body posture, writing, and

other situated configurations are, in fact, images, images as substantial as the photo above, and as such form a semiotic network that demonstrate semiotic resources in play (358).

In addition, the segue from the sedentary seat of learning in the classroom into the broader interactive learning spaces of the exhibits gave the students agency and opportunities for assuming different identities. For example, moving around in groups of twos or threes, leaders emerged like Shay and Leslie who, along with their fellow detectives fearlessly came forward to begin the search for clues to meaning, while other groups, like those headed by Alex and Mikey, took authorial stances as they pieced together the stories behind the works. Many, like Jamie, assumed authority as they drew on their own, specialized knowledge and helped the rest of us to better understand the political undertones of a cartoon which referenced the tentative relationship between the United States and North Korea. When we finally gathered together again as a group to discuss the exhibit what I witnessed was an enthusiastic and informed exchange of ideas among a community of students whose identities were visibly shifting before my eyes (field notes, 10/23/12).

Ultimately, in addition to colorful, informative, and creatively designed visual interpretations of the works which they had encountered, the students, in their accompanying essays demonstrated analytical, critical, and abstract thinking as well as a deepening engagement with the thematic content of each exhibit, reflecting not only on the processes involved in their multimodal assignments but also on a number of the current and very relevant issues addressed by the cartoons. For example, Mack, in his usual forthright manner, tackled the issues of the economy and the government, boldly stating: "America's upward motion is not even moving because it is OUT OF ORDER. Why is it out of order? The answer is that all of these BAD

things are going UP when they should be going DOWN. The government is not fixing the problem and as a result the forward movement to get us back on our feet, as a nation is not even happening." Much along the same lines, our political guru, Jamie offered his own spin as he reflected upon the upcoming election and the state of the nation, asserting that "This cartoon was showing how the presidential candidates had left behind there histories and values, and the race was now between only the men themselves, and not about the people they wanted to help in the country."

While still retaining a perspective on the political, Leya seemed to be revealing a bit of her current student identity as she honed in on the many cartoons that dealt with education. As she tells us: "Education is a topic that can easily grab my attention because as a student, I feel like education should be stressed, politically. In today's society, without an education you will go nowhere. Politicians [] aware of this and they need to be reminded of the hardships that some students have to go through to receive a decent education." In a similar fashion, Shay's essay incorporated a discussion of gender and equality, issues about which she felt strongly and would continue to address in reflections and class discussions throughout the length of the study. In the following excerpt from her paper, the intensity of Shay's emotional stance is revealed in both her language choice and her incorporation of an exclamation point to ensure emphasis: "While politicians are arguing who should win the Presidential campaign, their main focus should be in the interest of average Americans. Restoring justice and equality is necessary in the work place!"

The last excerpt, regarding the power of the media, is taken from an essay written by Mischka, who, in a later section, will reveal her own struggle with powerful influences. In her insightful analysis of the works that had been on display she asserts that, "Regardless of the mindset or the intention of the cartoonists, the cartoonists' work can really affect the media and

therefore affect the opinion of American citizens in whichever way he or she choses."

Transformation/Shifting and Changing

While the above cited excerpts (original choice of font and color were left unchanged in order to provide an accurate representation of students' multimodal print choices) demonstrate an active forward movement in thinking beyond the text in terms of conceptualization, analysis, process, and response to messages embedded in each work, they serve as but a glimpse into the identities and the complex totality of the students' engagement with the multimodal process. In order to provide more detailed data and analysis of this particular cojoint foray into the realm of aesthetics and multimodal creation, I will now discuss the projects and responses created by two of the students.

An analysis of these works begins with Mikey's previously referenced experience with multimodality which is discussed in detail below. Because this is Mikey's first attempt at working with the still less-than-familiar concept of multimodality and its use in a writing class, we see that he relies heavily on text, and to a great extent, adheres to the formatting and punctuation associated with traditional academic writing. Yet, his choice of the patriotic colors red and blue as well as his use of varied font styles and sizes demonstrates his shift into a more imaginative realm. His incorporation of an online, rather than photographic image, of the political cartoon that he discusses testifies to his on-line research and technological skills. As Mikey, himself, states in his process analysis reflection written after completing his multimodal project:

When we were at the museum I was wondering how on earth is this going to be possible. Ever since I could remember if I wrote a paper the way I wanted it I would fail...When I arrived home ...I started to mess around with pictures and different fonts...Certain words and names were used as different fonts. For most of the paper there was an old newspaper font. I founded that since we were

talking about political cartoons I use a newspaper since most political cartoons are all in newspapers. I had the ink both the colors blue and red to represent the American flag because it was about politics (fall 2012).

Mikey's procedural methods, as related above, indeed testify to his online skills, but more importantly, they provide evidence of a complex pre-organizational thought process. He begins with inquiry, moves on to exploration, makes external and very astute connections between his subject matter and the modes and medium that are most suitable to the design of his creative venture. Moreover, it would seem that although he was originally perplexed by the agency afforded to him in this assignment, it is ultimately this very same freedom and power that unleashes his creative energies.

Although on the surface, Mikey's writing in his essay seems to fall short of the standards associated with traditional academic discourse, it was most likely written in haste, as I asked the students to turn in their multimodal design two days after the event in order to see what they would create while impressions of the exhibit were still fresh in their minds. A teacher might judge Mikey solely on his writing. However, with the addition of a multimodal element and an accompanying process analysis, we are privy to the reflexive processes and cognitive abilities/reasoning that Mikey has. Mikey is obviously engaged by his creation and it is evident that he has done a great deal of thinking about how to execute the project (more time than he might have spent on just a verbal/written assignment). He is drawing on his own skills/thoughts and the work seems to be more of a challenge than a chore. Notice how the writing improves after he finishes discussing his thought process. It seems as if there is room for debate as to whether this is actually poor writing or is it more authentic writing, as it seems journalistic in nature. Moreover, in the excerpt below, we can actually track Mikey's growing confidence as he writes. Heretofore, through his own admission, he had been a dependent writer, one who wrote his assignments in haste, and almost

WHEN VISITING THE HOFSTRA UNIVERSITY MUSEUM I EXPERIENCED SOMETHING I NEVER HAD BEFORE. BEFORE I WOULD ALWAYS JUST LOOK AT THE POLITICAL CARTOONS AND LAUGH HOW THEY MADE THE PEOPLE LOOK LIKE. AS I WAS LISTENING TO THE SPEAKER SPEAK I STARTED TO UNDERSTAND WHY THEY WOULD MAKE THESE POLITICAL CARTOONS. EACH POLITICAL CARTOON HAD IS OWN MEANING. THERE WERE

MILLIONS OF THEM. THEY HAD ONE FOR EVERY TOPIC THAT WAS POSSIBLE. FROM THE WAR ON IRAQ TO STUDENT DEBT

CRISIS TO HAMAS TO George bush.

ONE PARTICULAR CARTOON THAT STOOD OUT TO ME WAS



"The Graduate"

BY JIMMY MARGULIES. This caught my eye because even though I don't face the same situation, almost all my peers face the

problem with being in HUGE debt when they graduate from our university. They could possibly be owning more then 100 thousand in payments. This is a huge problem because when we all graduate from hofstra university we could possibly face filling out for GOVERNMENT CHECKS because we don't have any work available for us. Then most of us will owe MONEY we cant afford to pay back. It will also cause people to set back on life by not affording to getting married or getting married or getting married and getting scared to have a BABY because they CANT AFFORD IT.

blindly, in an attempt to respond to a set of guidelines and rules set forth by his teacher. While responsiveness to a given assignment is wise, it too frequently is the case with students like Mikey that response—quick response—assumes priority over true engagement with the topic at hand. His own words below offer testimony to his belief that his role in the creation of the essay should be minimal. However, through multimodality, Mikey seems to have experienced an epiphany regarding his role in the overall writing process; an epiphany which has allowed him to begin to own his writing, as he indicates that practice, or

Writing this paper was an interesting process. Although I had a hard time thinking it over and actually starting this paper it was a great experience.... I found this to be one of the most difficult papers I have ever written since starting school. The idea of writing a paper, which had to be by our guild lines, was scaring me because I was use to having the teacher or professor telling me what was to be done. With this one we had to start on our own and basically use our imagination. I believe if given a similar assignment it wouldn't be a walk in the park but it would be easier as I got this one done and the more experience I get the more better I can become at anything. Which is important to a writer because if he or she has the ability to write any style he can write about almost anything he or she wants to (fall 2012).

In terms of identity, this assignment, which was one of the earlier projects of the fall semester, documents a shift not only in the way that Mikey views the writing process but also in the way in which he perceives himself as a writer. In accord with Gee's (2000-2001) theory of identity, Mikey's reference to his previous multiple failures at those times when he "wrote a paper the way I wanted it" are indicative of components of both an I-Identity, one based on "the institutional perspective (p. 102), and a D-Identity, or "discursive perspective identity" (p. 103). Although the I-Identity is typically associated with a diagnosis and label (in this case, pertaining to learning disabilities) affixed through psychological or medical discourse, I was never told that this was the case with Mikey. However, as Gee points out, "people can construct and sustain identities through discourse and dialogue (D-Identities) without the overt sanction and support of

"official" institutions that come, in some sense, to "own" those identities (103). Mikey's narrative seems to indicate that powers greater than his resided in his teachers who, as representatives of the educational institution, deemed his written work, and by association, Mikey himself, as deficient. Thus, by sustaining this D-Identity in the face of ongoing classroom confirmation of its existence, Mikey sees this identity officially sanctioned by the institution when he enters college and is placed within a quasi-segregated program for students whose academic skills have been deemed by the University as "underprepared" for college level work.

Yet, within this same, very revelatory essay, we are witness to the key moment during which Mikey's identity shifts dramatically toward a more positive view of his academic abilities when he declares, "I got this one done and the more experience I get the more better I can become at anything."

In truth, Mikey did get "this one done," and he did it well. A closer look at Mikey's writing within his multimodal text bears the mark of a more confident writer who is familiar with his topic and is able to communicate an effective message that is more fluent and cohesive than the writing evidenced in his process analysis. And, although there still remain traces of Mikey's informal speaking style as well as some minor grammatical omissions, his spelling and sentence structure, for the most part, are greatly improved. Moreover, Mikey cleverly adapts the block style of the cartoon about which he writes and further emphasize his analysis and rebuttal to the cartoon's message through creative and appropriately designed multimodal flourishes. As previously asserted, it is in the element of design that student writers recover, or in some cases, obtain, the pre-organizational and recursive strategies that have been largely lost, yet are foundational components of the writing process. Therefore, as part of the data, Mikey's project provides powerful evidence of the positive effects on writing attained through the multimodal

process. Moreover, as noted above, Mikey retains and builds upon this view of himself throughout the fall semester and into the spring semester when he seems to acknowledge "the multimodality project" as the start of his forward movement.

In the next sample chosen from the multimodality projects, I discuss the data derived from its author's complex creative vision. Kayce's work, below, is a hybrid mix of image and text that makes use of multiple technological affordances such as color, font size, numerals, graphics, imported image, as well as the use of a cartoon image maker application. Kayce takes us through her design process in excerpts from the essay that follows:

In class we were asked to design a paper that included multimodal aspects. We were asked to be creative and disregard all formats that we had previously used to write a paper. Although this paper was fun, there were steps that had to be taken in order to achieve the final project.

In Kayce's opening paragraph, she, much like Mikey, has difficulty in breaking away from the more traditional, MLA formatted paper that is usually assigned in a college composition class. Notice that when she seems to have finally reconciled herself to the imaginative and less strictured process of this assignment, the first thing that she proceeds to do is to construct a series of "steps" that must be taken in order to move forward:

The first step I took to design the paper was to write the paper. I wrote my paper on a specific cartoon and certain features of the museum. I decided to write my paper in regular MLA format to start off. After I got all my ideas out on paper, I then began to think about why it was easier for me to understand my cartoon rather than the others. I figured out that it was because of the visual images. I knew then that I needed to incorporate images and colors into my paper, [and] to put a representation of myself viewing the exhibit in my paper.

So I found a cartoon online and put it at the bottom of the screen looking up. This cartoon was suppose to be reading the passage the way I read it and perceived it. I then decided to put a thought bubble next to the cartoon. Inside the thought bubble was a picture of the cartoon I analyzed. I thought this would add an extra aspect to my paper.

The next step I took was to take the words that I typed and turn them into visuals. This is why I made the word "escalator" look like an actual

escalator. When I hear or see the word escalator I picture one, so I wanted to convey that in my paper. I also changed the colors of certain words. When I recited a word in the passage to myself, the first visual image or color that economy to green because when I hear the word I think of money. I then referred back to the packet that we received in class to make sure that I was one the right track with my multimodal design. After all my ideas and preparation, I finally put the finishing touches on my paper. I put my paper into columns because I thought it would be easier to read and wanted to make it look like a comic strip. I find it easier to read things when they are chopped up or shorter paragraphs. came to mind was how I constructed the word. For example I change the word economy to green because when I hear the word I think of money. I then referred back to the packet that we received in class to make sure that I was one the right track with my multimodal design. After all my ideas and preparation, I finally put the finishing touches on my paper. I put my paper into columns because I thought it would be easier to read and wanted to make it look like a comic strip. I find it easier to read things when they are chopped up or shorter paragraphs.

Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis (2000) provide insight into this essential component of the multimodal process when they state:

...multimodal meaning is also much more than the sum of linguistic, visual, spatial, gestural and audio modes of meaning. It also involves processes of integration and moving the emphasis backwards and forwards between the various modes. At the heart of the processes of integration is the inherent "multiness" of human expression and perception, or synaesthesia. Meanings come to us together: gesture with sight, with language, in audio form, in space. And, we can shift our meaning-making emphasis, through processes of transduction or transcoding...We visualise a thought before the words come. Or we hear a word and a whole lot of visual and audio senses seem to fill our minds. It is revealing how naturally metaphors from one mode of meaning slip over to describe meaning processes in another: "imagery" in written text, or "perspective" in oral argument, or "visualisation" of alternative word-centered

"points of view" (pp. 216- 217).

The aesthetics of pictures or words are really important.

It is what draws a person in and keeps them interested.

At the museum this idea came into play. Most of the pilitival cartoons that I observed at the museum had very little words but said so much. The artists of these picture did a very good job of getting a point across strictly through images. For example in this one cartoon, that particularly stuck out to me, there were four

sand each had a specific word or phrase on it.

The phrases were "jobs", "debt",

"savings", "American Upward

Mobility" and a sign that said "out of order". This picture was trying to showcase how badly the American economy is doing by using

s. There was one

ESCALATOR

that were suppose to be going up, but like the economy, it had an out of order sign in front of it. One picture was able to sum up our American economy. This picture also showed the true power of words because in

multimodality" really helped me understand why

"the arts, new literacies and
multimodality" really helped me understand why

"the difference ducation is really important. It

requires you to think outside of a particular

mode and be more creative with learning. Albers

and Harste were right in saying that and "the difference ducation can help someone become more aware

of difference and facets of work. Whether

you write a paper talking about the economy or

draw a picture, essentially the same thing is

being talked about just in a different mode.



just 4 or 5 words this artist was able to get a

Conscientious in her desire to "make sure that she was on the right track," Kayce, when preparing and writing this essay, appears to have followed all of the traditional suggested steps in the writing process from contemplation and inquiry to brainstorming, pre-writing, editing and revision. While these processes seem already to be a part of Kayce's writing repertoire, she has reported in her own reflection that they have taken on greater relevancy and intensity through the undertaking of her multimodal project. This proclivity toward process is, perhaps, the reason why Kayce, in this essay, reveals a more self-assured identity than many of her classmates. Indeed, her statement in which she acknowledges that she processes reading material more efficiently when "they are chopped up or shorter paragraphs," provides us with the singular learning trait that may, or may not be indicative of a perceived academic weakness. As a student, Kayce seemed to bear the identity traits of high-achiever, as she was always prepared for class, participated often in the discussion, and submitted papers that were always interesting and high quality, all while coordinating her academic role of student with that of student-athlete. If she bore any negative label at all, it would be the one affixed to her through her placement in this program. I do not know the particular reason for Kayce's referral to the program. Perhaps she had a low grade point average (GPA) or had a poor performance day when taking the SATs. However, I firmly believe that numbers, rather than actual skills and cognitive ability, which are so clearly demonstrated in the multimodal assignment above, were the determining factors in Kayce's referral to the program.

I have included the above analysis to not only demonstrate the corresponding link between the processes involved in designing a multimodal text and the consequent improvement in the design and execution of a text based composition but also to provide data that serves to help negate the label of "underprepared" that has been, in so many cases, casually bestowed on the students in this program.

From the Students' Point of View

While the analysis and discussion of the data evidenced in its entirety in individual multimodal creations is of great importance, it is also beneficial to consider the range of data made available through excerpts gleaned from a variety of student reflections on their experiences with multimodal composition. Therefore, in this section, I discuss a few of these reflections that serve to underscore significant revelations pertaining to multimodality, writing, identity, and positionality. A discussion of these works necessitates a reminder that this assignment represents the students' first attempt at utilizing the multimodal process as a means of producing a collegelevel composition. Significantly, my purposeful decision to avoid providing strict guidelines in lieu of creative freedom and agency initially unnerved some of the students. As A.J confides, "I was a little nervous going into this assignment because we were given an assignment with little structure. We had the freedom to choose cartoons and convey their meaning in any way we see fit... It felt different to have freedom to do whatever I wanted." Ultimately, however, A.J. sets aside his nervousness and states: "In making this piece I felt a certain amount of passion in trying to convey this issue." Reba, too, admits that "... it felt strange changing the format for this reaction paper." However, much like A.J. who ultimately found 'passion' in his work, Reba soon realizes that "it gave me a chance to be artistic and have fun by using multimodality... overall I was happy with what I did.... I enjoyed writing this way even though it took more time and thinking about what I wanted to do."

Interestingly, 'fun,' a word that is not typically used by first-year students to describe their composition assignments, became the catchphrase in many of the papers. As Coop tells us, "The paper itself was also a fun assignment because it broke traditional ways of writing essays or a reaction paper. It allowed creativity to flow and got me more evolved with my assignment. If

I had to do an assignment like this again, I would not shy away from it." Ned concurs, and states, "I had fun creating this assignment, not because it was about a political cartoon but because I could use what I have and show it by using software. I like having the freedom to express what I see in my own way, rather than using the basic MLA format." Moreover, Ned comes to a new realization about the writing process and the value of time invested. As he tells us, "I also learned that I worked harder because it was something that I created by myself and nothing that was given to me. I hope that I am able to create more multimodal essays in the future and I am glad I was privileged enough to get the opportunity."

Aside from fun, what is apparent in these various comments is an increasing sense of control on the part of the students along with a willingness to devote more time to the crafting their work. There also seems to be a shared awareness that their position as students has changed from that of mere performer to one of agent of power.

In the two following excerpts this sense of agency becomes even more apparent. Leya conveys this agency when writing about the details of her process: "When I first started the project I was a little excited because it was different from any other essay that I had done. I liked the idea of using different fonts and different colors in my essay... I started to conceive the idea of my multimodal layout then actual words that could be changed or showed multimodality." Leya is seemingly enervated and much more confident in her abilities, factors which are reflected in the final sentences of her essay: "In conclusion, working with on my first multimodality project was a challenge I was looking forward too. It made [] think of all the ideas that I could try to incorporate in my project." The idea of challenge and power are also aptly conveyed by Riley, who declares, "I love when a teacher asks you to be creative and write and design whatever you

want. In my opinion, doing the assignment this way was easier for me cause I got to be creative and design it the way I wanted."

In the last two excerpts we find, perhaps, the most detailed accounting of the ways in which a literacy experience can bring about dramatic shifts in self-awareness and identity that lend themselves to an increased access to higher level thinking and productivity. These shifts are clearly demonstrated in Mischka's detailed accounting of her personal learning experience: "I found the whole process of not simply redrafting but analyzing my own thought process from one draft to the other extremely effective to my learning. I have never come across this approach to writing before and it is something I would definitely consider using when I next need to create a piece of writing unconventional to my habits." Furthermore, in her conclusion, Mischka reinforces her classmates embrace of multimodality when she claims that, "It aloud me to find a way of creating something original based on the classic ways I like so much." Ken, too, who heretofore has not been the strongest of writers, reveals his now clear understanding of the composition/communication process that had previously eluded him: "Before jumping into the actual typing of the paper, I tried to think of some way that would allow me to express myself best. I wanted the best way possible to convey my ideas to the reader and to try making it fluid." Ken's response is significant in that it indicates his assimilation of the design process, and in so doing, he has not only shown awareness of his audience but also bypassed the typical first-year writer pitfall of "jumping into" their writing without fully processing what it is they wish to communicate. He goes on to provide the remaining details of his epiphanic experience: "The first thought that came to mind was the layout. I asked myself, "What would go where? How would the pictures be portrayed? How could my writing best compliment and explain the pictures without moving off topic?" After thinking about all of this, I brainstormed different types of layouts in my head."

As data, the above excerpts appear to be testimonials to the benefits of the incorporation of multimodality into a college composition curriculum. These excerpts document the students' positive attitude toward the use of other modes in creating a communicative text as well as a sense of power, control, creativity, agency, and yes, freedom that accompanied such use. Moreover, we see from the data a high level of student engagement with their writing, and the likelihood that, once engaged, they will continue to strive toward even more cognitively demanding learning performances. Through the use of multiple modes, multiple levels of learning appear to have been achieved by these students. As Jewitt (2008) points out in referencing the work of Gee, 2003; Kress, 2003; and Kress & Bezemer, 2007, "Learning often involves adopting a specialist language, an epistemological shift leaving one world of experiences for another. This can be expressed as both a loss and a gain of new possibilities and new identities" (p. 260).

To borrow from Kress (2003), the question then that arises from new-found learning is exactly what has been lost and what has been gained at this stage of data analyses. We can merely reflect on what appears to be the initial stages of an ongoing transformative process. Therefore, the losses appear to be few, yet very significant, in that we see the initial stripping away of the internalized effects of institutional and/or self-labeling and an isolative sense of otherness. What has been gained, in addition to the qualities and sensations discussed above, is an introduction into the academic community primarily through the initial acquisition of academic discourse which is demonstrated in the students' enhanced command of language forged through the design process. In the selection process that accompanies the design of a multimodal project the students were not only tasked with choosing the appropriate affordance or mode with which to communicate their message but also with choosing the appropriate word and tone that would provide the text-based clarity, conciseness, and inference they wished to convey. As Jewitt (2008), referencing Gee

(2003-2004) observes, "A change in discourse practices potentially marks a change of identity" (p. 260). As with identity and learning, the writing strength of the students is shifting, changing, and growing progressively stronger throughout the course of the two semesters.

The Storm

Despite my intense preparation for this study, I could not foresee the impending, and quite literal, storm on the horizon. The research under discussion was conducted at a University located on Long Island, New York and commenced in the fall 2012 semester. What also had commenced was hurricane season. While the local weather was never a consideration of my study, the events that took place on October 29th, 2012 imposed themselves upon the research. This was day on which Tropical Storm Sandy struck the eastern seaboard with a fury that left in its wake death, homelessness, freezing temperatures, a sense of desperation, and a suspension of classes for more than a week. Many of my students and I were among those hard hit, leaving us in a state of disequilibrium which became manifest in students' writing, in our class discussions, and perhaps, most significantly, our identities.

I discuss this event not only to inform of a substantial interruption during the course of the study but also to exemplify a situation in which flexibility, in terms of the syllabus, absences, and student preoccupation is a necessity, for when regular classes once again commenced, it was very apparent that most of us were still too disoriented to carry on business as usual. In an attempt to provide an environment in which the students could feel safe and begin to regain a sense of normalcy, I set aside the class syllabus and asked the very few students who were able to return to class to do some free-writing about the storm and its effects. Not surprisingly, the predominant theme in nearly all of the papers dealt with change. Yet, what was surprising was that the students demonstrated through their free-writing a very rich and broad perspective on the events that had

transpired which often went beyond the subjective. In previous sections above, the data indicates that interaction with aesthetics and multimodal practices had expanded the students' perspectives in terms of the conceptualizing and design of projects. However, while I had reason to believe through the students' assignments and class discussions that their worldview was expanding, I had not previously been able to document this shift towards a more global view until I was presented with the following brief and unscripted musings: "Just 2 weeks ago, the sun was shining, the leaves were falling and the autumn winds were blowing...Now that is all history. With Hurricane Sandy and the recent snow storm, lives have changed drastically" (Kylee, 11/18/12). Kylee, one of the few students who was spared the first-hand effects of the storm, seems to have secured some peace of mind for herself in an almost photographic image of the calm and serenity of the first few weeks of fall before the storm hit. Yet in the stark contrast that she provides between the calm and the storm, she empathetically conveys her awareness of the bleak reality that survivors must face. In Willy's excerpt which follows, we see that he, too, has been spared the devastation of the storm, "Luckily, my family and I made it through the but not the inevitabilities of life: storm....Eventually, the storm died down and passed away. However, that wasn't all that happened. My great-grandmother had passed away and now I felt like I was the next one to be in danger." While Willy expresses concern for the storm's victims, the culmination of all the past week's losses seems to have left him extremely fearful of further personal loss, and acutely aware, perhaps for the first time in his life, that other storms will come.

A true victim of the storm, Jamie's reflection is powerful and telling in that he not only recounts the material losses and discomforts he has suffered due to the storm: "Last week, was one of the worst weeks NYC has ever encountered...I was one of the many that were affected by this storm...We were w/o power for 6 days. The lack of power cause[d] us to jump back+ forth

between families houses" but also places great, almost greater, emphasis on the chaos that was inflicted on his academic life: "Also, the storm affect[ed] my studies... When the storm [came] + I lost power the cycling between made me lose focus. I ended up writing papers at the last minute w/ no time to revise and craming for the mid-term on the way to class. I just know those grades are going to be horrible" (Jamie 11/18/12). What is most interesting is that this chaos seems to be reflected in Jamie's writing style. As is evidenced above, Jamie has produced a hybrid text that incorporates symbols and a form of textese, a design choice that is clearly multimodal in nature, but a choice, I suspect that he has unconsciously adopted in order to convey the "cycling" that has left him nearly spent:

The range of reactions to the effects of the tropical storm was as varied as the identities displayed by the students in the essays that they wrote. While the three excerpts cited above are quite subjective in nature with a more concentrated focus on the personal or local ramifications of the storm, the excerpts that follow provide evidence of more global views of the situation, as Jamie, who has previously demonstrated his social, political, and historical savvy in our previous trip to the museum, opines, "Recent Events in America have totally drowned out the stress of college, a reelected President, the stock market fell 300 points, and weather has caused thousands of people to loose everything they had" (Jack 11/18/12). Roy also reveals his broader perspective on the current situation, yet distinguishes his changed perspective through the careful caveat that concludes his paper:

Between the presidential election, the category one hurricane, and the snow storm a few days after the hurricane in November, people's lives have been changed...For me, personally I haven't been a victim of the past week and a halfs craziness. The only thing I've had to worry about was making my schedule for next semester, getting my work done for all my classes and studying for midterms. On a normal day all those things might sound like there the worst things ever, but in reality, there not the worst

things ever at all. I think that these storms could be a wake up call to many people, and make everyone realize that you might not have it as bad as you think (Roy, 11/18/12).

Finally, it is the generally soft-spoken Andrew who emerges as the loudest and strongest advocate for global awareness when he writes:

We were told that global warming would occur and would have drastic effects on our environment, but we continue to pollute the air with the burning of fossil fuels, dumping garbage into our ocean and destroying forests...Looking back hurricane Katrina did similar damage to New Orleans as Sandy did to the east coast. Both hurricanes came, killed and destroyed. Many people died, those who survived were left homeless or without power and froze in the dark. We as people have created our own problems. I am not pointing the blame to anyone specifically just us as a whole. Despite these problems I do believe we will temporarily recover for who know when the next storm will come and the destruction that it will bring (Andrew 11/18/12).

In his new-found agency, Andrew has produced his most effective writing of the semester.

Despite the fact that morning classes had been cancelled and very few students were present in the afternoon class these small in-class writing samples are rich with data that help to shed significant light on the ways in which this catastrophic event evoked shifts in students' identities. As Moje and McCarthy (2002) observe: "[I]dentity...shapes or is an aspect of how humans make sense of the world and their experiences in it, including their experiences with texts" (p. 228).

In addition to the above in-class reflections, I received an unsolicited and fully developed reflection on dramatic life and identity changes from a student with near-perfect attendance who had recently missed quite a few classes. Concerned about her well-being, I had sent her an email. Through her email response, I learned that during Tropical Storm Sandy Mischka had been in New York City visiting friends when a recurrent, self-inflicted illness that she had been battling for years had once again presented itself. Interestingly, she did not provide this information in her

email, rather it was hidden in plain sight, so to speak, between the lines of her attached essay which appears below and which I will presently discuss at length:

I Feel Halloween Smelling, Chocolate Flavored Butterflies. Who Is Dead?

It's a mixture of a night in Manhattan with only half its lights on- A walk that starts in candle lit China Town. A mixture of a hospital blur as first hand experience and death of a friend as a distant one. Its mixed with the spirit of devastation everywhere you go, and in everything you hear. It's all around. It is Halloween and Sandy left her ghost behind to make it a memorable one. It's a moment that's somehow was orchestrated to have a sad story on every level.

There is the end of a certain time, an era. There is the end of ones life. There's the end of old habits. And there is the end of a particular fear. The notion of Endings is so thick in the air I can taste it in the Halloween candy I was given in the hospital by the nurse that was taking care of me earlier in the day. My stomach is turning as I am on a Chinese bus driving through powerless New York. There are lines of cars miles long waiting for gas because there is a gas shortage in the form of a symptom of Hurricane Sandy. Cops are everywhere. That's pretty much the only lighting this part of the city has. Not even the traffic lights are working. I'm almost expecting for us to get into a car accident at this point. It feels like fiction, but it's not.

The end of an era takes on all kind of forms. In this context the loss of ones house is the end of a certain era, a type of life built during the course of time memories were made in that home. The end of ones life can come in different forms too. Like for example the change of a certain lifestyle. But in this case it is the end of a short life in the form of death; a real end of a life as a result of unfortunate timing. End of old habits; there are many reasons to end many habits usually and sometimes a bigger reason than the many before comes along. Suddenly you realize it really is time to hand the end to this particular habit of yours. Landing in the emergency room of the hospital makes one terminate the habit of ignoring symptoms. Symptoms of a sickness you know you have but neglect because you don't want to waste golden time on it. Finally, there is the end of a specific fear. The fear I am talking about is a kind of fear that one cannot purposely end because the ending of this fear is not possible to satisfy with anything internal. Its absolutely external. I am talking about the fear of losing comfort. People supply each other comfort and when a disaster like Sandy takes all forms of comfort away and leaves nothing but the people you have in your life you distinguish who you can rely on for comfort. That is the end of the fear that this person might not have your back when you really need it. And so with Sandy comes the great end of this fear that your person might not be there when you most need them. It is trust that is tested and becomes solid.

There is something so extremely off about the dimension this week was placed in given the circumstances. Parts of the big powerful city, New York lost power. The Chinese bus I am on was the only transport option from Manhattan to Boston. I

convinced my doctor to discharge me from the hospital. By the third day of countless needles, tests and check ups. I had to get out of there. I told them that this happened to me before and if I can take the antibiotics in the form of pills and get rest at my sisters' place in Boston, for a week or so, I should get better. So after a couple more tests and blood work they told me I could go. They told me to check my temperature and blood pressure every hour and immediately call them if I start getting worse or if I get a fever.

I can barely keep my eyes open but the current vibe of the city in its current post Sandy state is keeping me awake. Apart from the darkness there is no obvious damage in this area but the Sandy Aftermath spirit is present from a distance. I feel like I am in the film 'The Day After Tomorrow'. I feel like at any point now something outrageous is going to happen. For an unclear reason a sense of suspense is present (Mischka 12/11)

In this brilliant narrative, Mischka documents for us, and possibly, for herself the identity shifts that are taking place during the chaos within chaos that she is experiencing. Despite her stylistic repetition of the word fear, a technique that she uses quite effectively throughout her narrative, Mischka's inner strength is displayed in her willingness to share her most private thoughts and feelings as well as her insecurities and "self-neglect" with her audience. Yet, it is her ability to acknowledge and examine who she has been, to say this is "the end" of that person, good-bye and farewell, I am moving on, that reveals the steely core of this young woman who has virtually raised herself in the boarding schools where she has spent most of her young life since leaving Russia. Within three paragraphs, Mischka's audience witnesses her transition from girl to woman, a transition mirrored in her description of the half-lit city with its sense of loss to her closing comments, "Apart from the darkness there is no obvious damage... [f]or an unclear reason a sense of suspense is present."

Above is a multimodal image of the Millennial, a self-portrait of a girl whose identity and life are transforming with every keystroke of her laptop. It is even possible that she may have typed this on her cell phone during that long journey from death to rebirth on the Chinese bus. This

is instantaneous technological communication facilitating a sort of stream-of-consciousness writing style. Instantaneous, stream-of-consciousness, yes, but the rapidity of the affordances used to create this complex identity narrative belies the undeniably evident process of design that gives it its shape and dimension. The point that I wish to make through this data is that multimodality is more than the physicality of concrete affordances; it is a state of being with affordances that are of the mind. Thanks to the arduous research of scholars in the fields of composition, literacy, and education we are beginning to understand that multimodality has always been a part of our cognitive processing, and most certainly, it has always been a part of the composition process (Shipka, 2005).

Self-Identification/The Reveal

In this section, I discuss the positive effects on meaning making and on identity within a learning environment, such as a college composition class, that encourages the students to claim agency in their writing through active choices. The most revelatory assignments in each semester were those in which students were given the freedom to write in the first person, to direct the scope of the topic, and to choose the format that was most conducive to the telling of their own story. It is through these very particular choices that a text-based essay devoid of any actual images becomes multimodal in nature. Again, it is the element of design that figures predominately in my assertion. As the choices that are made in the design of a traditional multimodal assignment are the most essential and agentive part of the composing process, conversely, through continued active engagement with the multimodal process, the inclination to preliminarily design a written text begins to become a reflexive action for the student writer. A note from my field journal echoes this finding: "I realize how valuable the narrative is in revealing the identities that so many students keep locked away... Why is it that they offer up so

much more on paper than when they are in the classroom community? Not that they should reveal personal information in front of others who are still essentially strangers, but they confide so much to me. Is this a sign of trust already established? I hope so" (field journal 10/8/2013). I really do hope so, and I believe so, yet each of these essays also reaffirmed the notion that many students, particularly Millennials, who are quite used to posting intimate details of their personal lives on very public websites, quite often divulge more in their writing than in oral, face-to-face communication.

In this sense, students are also more forthcoming about exposing their insecurities regarding both academic and non-academic issues. Much truth-telling as well as pain surfaced in the students' papers written in response to the first essay assignment, The Power of Words, the instructions for which are as follows:

This essay is a bit personal in its nature, as I am asking you to examine the way in which words have had a powerful effect on your life. From the beginning of this semester we have been discussing words and examining the ways in which words can be empowering in terms of the knowledge they bring to us and the ways in which they can help us to better articulate our ideas and beliefs in order to achieve our goals in life. We also have considered the ways in which words can be hurtful causing us to feel insecure, ugly, stupid, or "lesser than" others. Most recently, we have come to understand the terrible consequences that occur when we fail to use our words to question and to speak out against injustice and the pressure that is imposed on us to conform to societal beliefs and actions that we know to be wrong.

Therefore, I would like you to write a 3 page narrative essay about a time in your life when "words" had a powerful effect on you. You may consider the above suggestions or you may choose to examine your life in terms of a literacy timeline in which you recall how you came to acquire the power of words through learning to read and write. In fact, the literacy narrative would not only allow you to discuss the power of words but also the times when words or lack of words created a hurtful or harmful situation.

Interestingly, but not surprisingly, considering my efforts toward creating an agentive environment, each of the students seemed to interpret this assignment in his or her own way.

Some wrote more or less traditional accounts, in terms of page layout and format, of how and when they acquired the ability to read and write, or of the ways in which words built them up or knocked them down, while others seized the opportunity to incorporate other modes, so as to visibly imprint their identity on their writing. For example, Roy, an aspiring filmmaker, took advantage of the page set-up option on his computer to transform his essay into a script format, separating each event in which words of encouragement and praise were bestowed upon, him into separate scenes.

On the other hand, quite a few students seemed to use their writing to evoke catharsis as they recounted the times in which they were made to feel different. The following are excerpts from a few of these papers:

Sometimes the words I want to use are not appropriate for the sentence or the words do not carry the sentence well...Ironically, in my life my word choice has been questioned, commented on or considered incorrect. "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." Whoever said this must have been thinking of the physical effect. Words hurt so much that they cause psychological damage that leave scars so deep that they change lives. Even without using them they have affect[ed] my life today" (Leya, "A Big Misunderstanding"10/02/14)

Leya's feelings of insecurity, otherness, and powerlessness are multi-layered and complicated in that they seem to have their origins in childhood taunts about her looks and her race. As Leya tell us, "When I was younger, I use[d] to get picked on every so often for my looks. I had a big forehead and was tall, scrawny and black." Her only defense comes in the form of behavior control as she masks her forehead with her hair, tries desperately to gain weight, becomes attuned to "the lighting in the room so I didn't appear so dark," and grows silent. However, as her resentment and anger grows, Leya gains power over her assailants—and anyone else in her sights—by moving from silence to the delivery of sharp-witted retorts and the inappropriate words that she writes about. Ironically, it is Leya who has used words as sticks

and stones to inflict psychological damage on others, and with this realization, Leya once again feel the need to retreat into silence. Yet, in what appears to be an effort to be heard, Leya seems to be speaking to me directly as she concludes her essay with the following words of confession:

On the first day of college, some of [the] teachers had questions that I could have easily answered but I decided not to because I didn't want to waste my words. I wanted to save them so I wouldn't look like a know it all. I will never be good with word[s], and it's so unfortunate because I have so much to say (Leya's essay, 9/13/12)

This information, in conjunction with the first line of her essay, seem to dispute Leya's overt claim that her problems with words derives from a retaliatory desire to even the score against her detractors. In fact, it seems to be more of a diversionary tactic used by Leya to avoid dealing head-on with her deep-seated feelings of insecurity about her linguistic capabilities. I reflected on this issue after reading her first in-class essay, writing the following notes in my journal: "Ashley—good—see signs of sociocultural background and language; leaves off final "s," "d," and "ed"; sentence structure and ideas good—belie language" (fieldnotes, 9/13/12). Consequently, in an attempt to circumvent years of criticism, I made sure to choose my own words carefully whenever making comments on her written work, an example of which follows: "Leya, you have done a wonderful job of envisioning, creating, and documenting your multimodal project. You are extremely clever and bright, and your writing was detailed and informative."

I believe that the combination of offering Leya an alternative method, multimodality, through which she could tap into her cleverness and imagination, along with continued individualized moral support contributed to the vocal, participatory, and confident student that she had become by the end of the semester.

Kayce, too, speaks of a longstanding internal conflict that had its origins in an early classroom experience that left her with deep-seated feelings of insecurity:

I struggled with math throughout grade school. I spent hours working on homework, studying for test[s] (sic) and memorizing formulas which still resulted in failing grades...Once I was told I had to repeat the class I immediately felt ashamed, insecure, and lesser than my classmates...I was a disappointment to myself... I kept repeating the words "you failed the course, you failed the course"...This word soon prevented me from succeeding in school. I became the word...I was content with where I was all because of one word. This experience helped the word gain its true power" (Kayce, "The Struggle" 10/02/14).

While it is not made clear in her essay if Kayce's label was institutionally or self-affixed, it does seem to be clear that she had somehow come to equate failure with a very personal, social and perhaps, familial sense of extreme stigma. The power of this word and its perceived negative ramifications are succinctly encapsulated in Kayce's damning self-assessment: "I became the word." While Kayce eventually used her shame and deep disappointment as a motivator, "I have overcome the negative connotation that I had attached to failure and turned it into something posistive," not all young people have the strength to do this.

Reba, in an excerpt from her essay entitled, "THAT class," tells us what it feels like to become a label and to remain a label:

Looking back at what classes I was placed in during elementary, middle and high school have brought me to where I am today. Still today I never want to be called on in class to read out loud because I am scared people will judge me if I were to read a word incorrectly. Although the goals of these classes [was] to help me, I ended up becoming insecure with reading out loud. It was designed for me to feel comfortable reading out loud but it did the opposite. I felt labeled being put into these classes, and being shy to begin with did not make it any better for my self-confidence. According to my parents I loved reading when I was a child, but now since I was labeled, reading is something I do not look forward to anymore. This experience did not end well with me, I loved reading as a child, but now it has all changed" (Reba, "THAT Class," 10/04/12).

Reba's revelations came as little surprise to me, as she had approached me on the first day of class to confide that she would prefer that I not call on her in class to either read or respond, as she felt physically incapable of exposing her perceived inadequacy before the class (field notes, 9/4/12). I say 'perceived inadequacy' because, in truth, that is what it was. Reba had attended a private school from pre-kindergarten through grade school in which only Hebrew, a language in which she was proficient, was spoken and read. However, when her parents made the decision to transition Reba into a public school, she was perceived of as "at risk" and placed into pull-out support programs simply because of her slow adjustment to English as her primary academic language. The situation in which Reba found herself is unfortunate testimony to the long-term negative effects on identity that occur when a student is misread by an institution.

Reba, much like Leya, seemed to blossom within a classroom setting that embraced a transformative pedagogy which incorporated the many alternative methods of communication offered through a social-semiotic multimodal approach to learning. Although I never asked, nor did she ever volunteer to read aloud in class, Reba did manage to break with her learned silence and often offered spontaneous responses and comments during class discussion (fieldnotes, 10/25/12). I view these personal developments as instantiations of what Cope & Kalantzis (2000) call transformed practice, or the fourth pedagogic factor which Jewitt (2008) tells us "relates to the ways in which students recreate and recontextualize meaning across contexts" (p. 249). In other words, the data above appears to suggest that not only do the students recreate and recontextualize meaning, but in many cases they, themselves, are recreated and recontextualized.

Picturing Reading

In this section I talk about the ways in which an introduction to and engagement with multimodal practices in the college composition class bring about what I think of as a

'multimodal state of mind'. In the examples discussed above, we have seen how alternative ways of creating texts has led to broader perception and enhanced creative approaches to learning and meaning making that has demonstrably changed the ways in which the students design their communications as well as their identities; they have learned to literally and figuratively *read* their worlds in different ways. Jewitt (2005b) observes that, "Recognising the multimodal character of texts, whether print-based or digital, impacts on conventional understanding of reading... What is ostensibly a monomodal written text offers the reader important visual information which is drawn into the process of reading" (p. 326).

To this end, I discuss a multi-faceted, multimodal assignment that was designed to facilitate the students' reading comprehension of a rather dense translation of Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" in preparation for a viewing of the film *The Matrix* which was meant to be a visual companion piece to "The Allegory". I asked the students to read through "The Allegory" as many times as necessary and then to attempt to convey its meaning in a drawing. This segment of the class, which was focused on visual analysis and would later include a trip to the 50/50 art exhibit on campus, had multiple purposes. I wanted to emphasize the importance of metaphor as symbol, as symbols are intrinsic parts of the multimodal social semiotic communicational landscape, to see if meaning was lost, retained, or possibly enhanced in the transduction of information from one mode to another. In addition, I wanted to seize the opportunity to put into play a pre-writing strategy that I hoped would provide the class with an alternative way in which to process the complexity of Plato's dialogue as well as other academic readings whose inaccessibility often got in the way of a student's ability to write focused, analytical, and articulate papers. However, before I begin the discussion, I wish to make clear that the preceding statement is not a commentary on the cognitive abilities of this particular group of

students, rather, it is an observation of what I believe to be a generational or Millennial propensity for expediency in fulfilling all assignments which often equates reading deeply with simply scanning an assigned text which, in turn, leaves them with little overall understanding of a topic as well as a lack of textual support (field notes, 10/09/12).

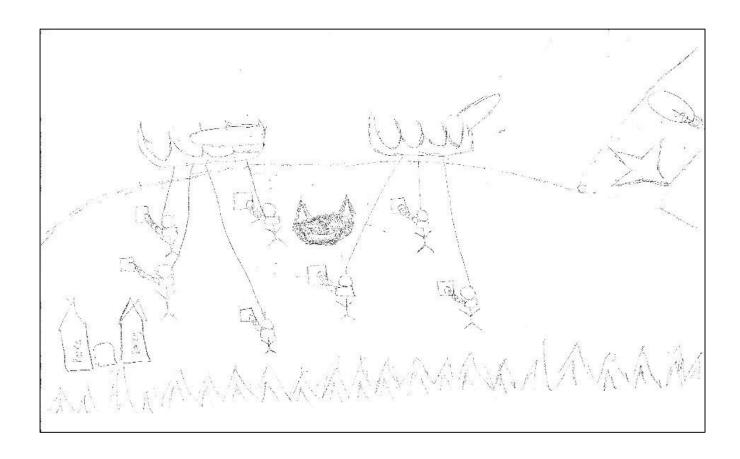
While the students had the freedom to create this drawing technologically, interestingly, all chose to produce a hand-drawn work on notebook or plain white paper. Only one student included color, while the rest chose to draw in either ink or pencil. The significance of these choices has remained difficult for me to assess, due largely to the fact that I rarely requested that such graphic work be done on the computer. Instead, in my desire for authenticity, individuality, and identity I usually left this choice to the students, except on specific occasions in which the assignment necessitated the use of technological affordances. If I were to make any assertions at all about this issue, I would venture to guess that once again, expediency, a key trait of the Millennial, was the impetus behind their choice to represent images through monotone, handdrawn work. While the students' choice of a more basic method of representation may seem contradictory, considering the countless graphic affordances available through technology, I noted that in the majority of assignments that included a graphic component the students repeatedly opted to produce hand-drawn work. In some cases, the students actually voiced their reluctance to involve technology, claiming ignorance or fear of what many considered to be a complex operation (field notes, 10/9/12). However, as the data above indicates, these obstacles were clearly and brilliantly overcome when the use of technology became a requirement of the assignment. Yet, whatever the reasoning behind their choices, the drawings that were produced, as represented by the samples below, indicate that the majority of the students were able to depict the scenario described by Plato as well as the significance of the metaphors, thereby,

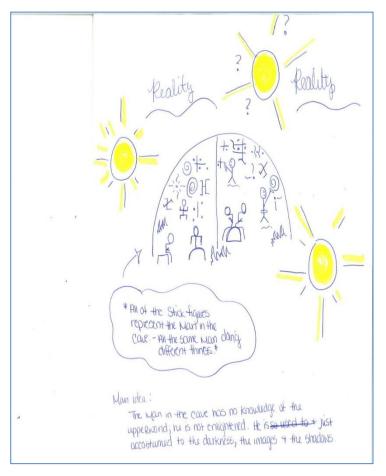
transforming the figurative into the literal. Moreover, these self-produced, interpretive 'maps' lent themselves to an insightful read on the student's meaning making processes in that these processes were made manifest through their design decisions.

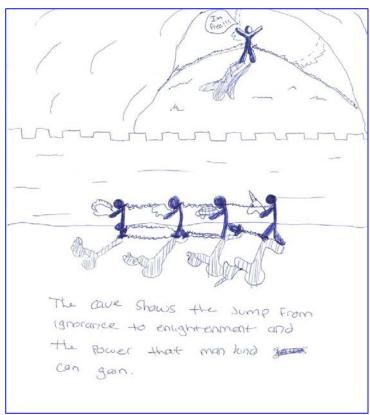
As this was a non-verbal exercise, the data to support this assertion is culled from a list of the symbols chosen as well as the number of times that the symbol was used. Out of the fifteen drawings that were collected from the class the various symbols and the number of times they were chosen are as follows: the cave (15); the prisoners (15); fire (12); shadows (11); the sun (8); shadows of objects (6); the free man (4); nature (2); the philosopher king (2); and the puppeteers (1). Interesting variations, shown below, included an instance in which a depiction of sunlight was chosen in lieu of the sun, one drawing in which hieroglyphic-like symbols seemed to replace shadows and objects, and in a brilliant choice of metaphorical representation and individuality, one student drew a light bulb at the mouth of the cave as a sign of enlightenment. The incorporation of all of the key metaphors in "The Allegory" as well as the number of times they were depicted in the drawings indicates that over two-thirds of the class was successful in their grasp of the symbolic nature of their reading. To ensure the accuracy of this data, a tabulation of the total number of symbols used in each drawing was produced which provides us with the following statistics: seven images were used in 5 drawings, six images were used in 5 drawings, four images were used in 3 drawings, with five images used in 1 drawing, and eight in 1 drawing. These numbers indicate that six or more symbolic representations were used in eleven of the fifteen papers, which accounts for approximately two-thirds of the class. Furthermore, I would argue that even the drawings that contained the least amount of images at four, also demonstrated, through their choice of the cave, the prisoners, fire, and sunlight as the most significant symbols, that the key concepts of the text had been understood and meaning

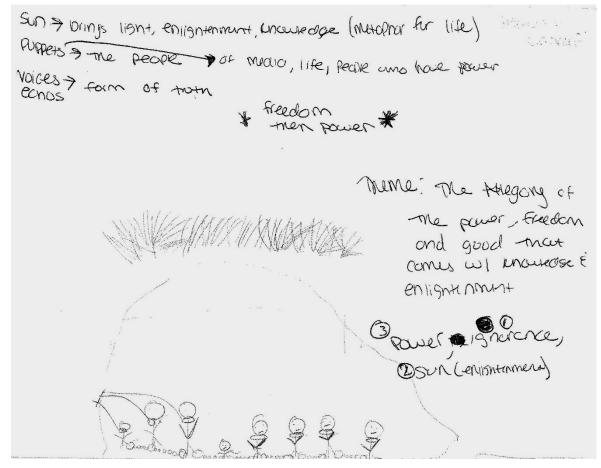
made through the process of transduction. As Jewitt (2005b) attests, "...image can be used to reinforce the meaning of what is said, what is written, and so on. In turn, this relationship serves to produce or indicate coherence" (p. 316).

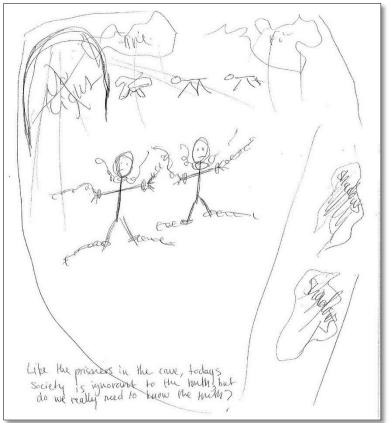
Moreover, while the above data indicates that the majority of the students' were successful in creating drawings that reflected the deeper metaphorical meaning of "The Allegory," they, as well as those students' whose interpretations were not completely realized in their initial drawings, were able to build upon their knowledge through the inclusion of textual additions, or notes, on their drawings (below), as they moved in and out of groups in which their pictorial texts were viewed and ideas exchanged.











As a result of this multimodal enterprise, the majority of the students went on to produce written reflections on "The Allegory" which demonstrated more insightful analysis then had been displayed in previous written reflections based on reading assignments. For example, Zena astutely notes, "Light is a metaphor for education and experience...education [is] an insight [that] is innate in the soul but it must be brought out." She goes on to say that "I think the final important point...is that the men should share the knowledge and put it to good use...which would allow them to be the rulers in their own lives. With knowledge and experience, with light, life gets better" (Zena, 02/24/23). Similarly, Mack tells us, "In "The Allegory of the Cave" the reader is faced with multiple symbols. The most important and paramount symbol[s] is (sic) the sunlight and darkness." Mack, one of the two students who had included a representation of the philosopher king in his drawing, further states that, "[t]he darkness symbolizes deception and injustice while the sun symbolizes the truth and enlightenment...Plato is trying to tell the reader that the person who has been enlightened is the one who shall rule" (Mack, 02/24/13). While these brief excerpts stand as testimony to the successful inclusion of the multimodality in a first-year college composition class, it is Breena, whose single paragraph response demonstrates the illuminating effectiveness of this multi-process, multimodal assignment:

The Allegory of the Cave is a metaphorical reference to knowledge (the light) versus ignorance or blindness (the darkness). The prisoners are held captive in darkness, unable to look anywhere but in front of them, blind to the real world, unable to see the truth. Because of this circumstance, the prisoners have become fearful of that which is unknown to them. Reluctant to embrace the light due to being accustomed to living in the dark for so long, possibly even resentful of the light. The shadows were all the prisoners had known much like a child at birth only knows what's in its immediate surroundings. The prisoners were so used to the darkness that when they saw the light, it hurt their eyes and they ran from it. However, any prisoners who had seen the light and accepted it began to reject the darkness. The enlightened sought to help those in darkness seek knowledge and light but they wanted nothing to do with the light or anyone who had been there. To the prisoners of the cave, the light seemed like Hell but to anyone who had

been brought to the light and experienced the power of knowledge, the cave became Hell (Breena, 03/13).

Consequently, the students' newfound ability to 'read' and transform the world around them as conveyed through different modes added new dimension to their viewing of the film, *The Matrix* as well as the art displayed at the University's 50/50 art exhibit, "Art Reflects the World." Although this tripartite unit on visual analysis, or reading the word and the world, included elements of written composition, greater emphasis was placed on furthering the students' abilities to recognize, translate, and re-contextualize what was being 'read' or viewed. Each of the three assignments was designed to not only immerse the students in a full-on multimodal sensory experience but also to act as a scaffold upon which the next assignment was built. As a case in point, by adding a visual component to their reading of "The Allegory of the Cave" the students first processed and transformed the written text into images that reflected their synaesthetic experience of the metaphors detailed within. This enterprise then prepared them to view the heavily symbolic film *The Matrix*, which is widely believed to be the Wachowski Brothers' filmic vision of Plato's "Allegory." While many of the students had viewed the film before, others claimed to have foregone watching it based on their belief that it was simply another "action" film with little or no cultural significance. In fact, even those who had seen the movie prior to viewing it with the class believed it to be "entertaining," but had not moved beyond its face value into the deeper, philosophical meaning of the film. However, newly enlightened about their own capacity to re-envision meaning brought about through their successful imaging of "The Allegory," the students seemed to have a deeper engagement with the 'text' of the film.

In their collective viewing of the film, the class not only understood the significance of the director's contrapuntal use of darkness and light, but also began to recognize the previously

ignored redemptive theme embodied in the character's names: Neo, the One; Trinity, the inspirational; Morpheus, the Father; as well as the 'savior's' battle to reverse mankind's fall via technological folly (field notes, 2/25/13). Through collaborative thinking and a bit of risk-taking in terms of venturing guesses about embedded symbols such as the womb-like pod from which Neo was expelled during his process of rebirth, the students, much like the film's protagonist, Neo, had finally learned to decipher the deeper meaning embedded within the heretofore unreadable matrix code (field notes, 2/25/23).

Perhaps emboldened by their successful reading of the film, the students seemed eager to further hone their skills during our second semester visit to the art exhibit. Although a visit to an on-campus art exhibit is always included in the curriculum for each class that I teach, this was the first time that I had enacted a progression of multimodal experiences that were particularly designed to heighten the students' aesthetic awareness of the possibilities of the visual. My reasons for creating this experiential assignment were twofold: as a response to students' successful fall semester engagement with multimodality and as a scaffolding introduction to multimodality for those students who had not taken the first sequence of writing with me in the fall and who were largely unfamiliar with the concept and terminology. Serendipitously, these classroom experiences were perfectly synchronized with both the theme of the exhibit, "Art Reflects the World," as well as the activities that had been planned for them by the gallery's Educational Coordinator, Ms. R.

The Medium and the Method Redoux

The venue for this exhibit was smaller, more intimate, and even more aesthetically pleasing than the one that we had visited in the fall. This was a true art gallery whose wooden floor gave off a golden glow as it reflected the mood lighting that seem to embrace the viewer in its warmth

while still serving to highlight the variegated artwork that adorned sleek walls. In contrast to the many glass encased displays at the political cartoon exhibit, the art here displayed was naked and accessible to the viewer. In addition, a circle of folding chairs had been set up in the middle of the room so that each student had a place to sit and reflect upon their aesthetically and imaginatively inspired 'reading.'

We began our visit sitting in this circle as Ms. R. acquainted the students with the type of art that they would be viewing. She explained that all of the paintings, sketches, and photographs on display were abstracts, and as such, "many do not have obvious narratives, while others do.... [Therefore,] we interpret the narrative" (field notes, 3/8/13). Ms. R. went on to say that she had purposely covered up the small cards affixed to the wall next to each painting that contained the title of the work, the artist's name, and a brief explanation of the scenario that had inspired the artist's creation, because "our text today is the work of art" (field notes, 3/8/13). She then divided the class into pairs and handed each student a clipboard attached to which was a handout that she had created on which a large assortment of descriptive words was printed. The pairs were then told to choose a particular work that somehow appealed, intrigued, or spoke to them. Next, they were to examine—or read the work carefully, circle the descriptive words that they felt applied to the work, and then "create a story, a narrative about the work" (field notes, 3/8/13). The fact that the students felt fully prepared and equal to this task was demonstrated by the absence of any signs of hesitation or distress as each pair set off in search of their "text".

Due to different scheduling in the spring semester, class time was limited to 55 minutes which allowed the students a mere fifteen minutes in which to seek out a text, choose their descriptors, and create the story behind the text. Yet when the pairs of students returned to our discussion circle, each had created a rich, imaginative, and descriptive narrative about their chosen

text. And, although each of these narratives demonstrated the extremely successful outcome of the reading/visual analysis component of our class that culminated in this gallery experience, it is on the narrative of one pair of students in particular, Antonio and Mikey, that I focus my discussion.

First, I offer this back-story as it serves to underscore the significance of the narrative created by these two young men during this visit. Antonio and Mikey were two of the students who had enrolled in both my fall and spring classes. Consequently, I came to know a great deal about these two students in terms of their familial, cultural, and social lives which allowed me greater insight into their writing strengths and weaknesses. Mikey, outspoken and always eager to meet with me to discuss his writing, had shown steady improvement in his writing since his previously discussed break-through moment while writing his fall multimodality process analysis. Antonio, however, was reserved and did not meet with me as often as I would have liked. Therefore, changes in his writing patterns were not as quickly realized. Both of the young men evidenced traces of ESL associated patterns in their written sentence structure as well as a tendency, despite efforts at brainstorming, to present their ideas on paper in a somewhat disorganized fashion. While I believed that these two characteristics of their writing were related, I also suspected that there were times when a basic understanding of the topic to be discussed was lacking (field notes, 2/25/13).



However, as the two young men, pictured above, sat in front of their chosen text, a black and white photograph that offered very few clues, they jointly proceeded to relate a fully developed, coherent, articulate, and wonderfully imaginative narrative that belied their previous written efforts. From a bleak, desolate, landscape the two had envisioned the central rising mound to be akin to a "City on the Hill," and the smaller surrounding mounds and crevices to be two divergent populations who had come together in an effort to support, share, and embrace each other in their mutual efforts to survive and prosper (field notes, 3/8/13). The entry in my journal that followed their narrative states: "No cognitive problems here!" (field notes, 3/8/13).

It would appear that not only had these two students found the key to understanding through their newly developed reading skills, but I, too, had obtained better understanding of the ways in which these young men made meaning by reading each one's 'text' in a new light. Moreover, just as Mikey had gained empowerment through his successful multimodal enterprise in the fall, Antonio, in his written reflection of our gallery experience, seemed to have newly reassessed his abilities in light of the day's success. As he tells us:

This morning, my written expression class went to the [] Museum at [] University. At the gallery, we were introduced to very artistic and unique pieces of artwork...and then were given an assignment. Our assignment was to make up a story on a piece of artwork with a partner, which in my case was photography. The assignment turned out to be a success for me and my partner because we [were] able to turn our artwork into a story [in] sic that impressed our professor and Ms. R.

The above paragraph is the first time in nearly two semesters that Antonio has dared to express in writing anything that would reveal his feelings about who he is as a student and as a young man, and in so doing, he has provided me with my first tangible sign of a shift in his identity. There is a more assertive and confident tone to his writing and his use of the personal pronouns, "me" and "I," throughout the essay indicate that Antonio has finally claimed membership in the

academic community and now feels safe enough and worthy enough to give voice to his own insights and opinions, or, as he phrases it, to "reveal one's experience" (Antonio, 3/8/13). In addition, in the excerpt below, Antonio demonstrates the totality of his comprehension in the cohesive quality of his essay. Thoughts and ideas are related and one idea melds into the next:

...To me every piece of artwork had its own story and there could be multiple ones to be told as well. The presence of the artwork throughout the exhibit made me feel like I was in a different environment. To be honest, I ['ve] sic haven't seen artwork that included abstract paintings and such unique photography before except on TV or in a magazine. The visuals were very creative and expressed a lot. Symbols, shapes, color, depth were all used to express emotion and had me at times figure out what it's like to be in the same shoes as the artists. As a result of my trip to the exhibit, not only I was [sic] introduced to unique pieces of artwork, I learned about almost [all] the stories behind every painting or photograph[y]. This class trip was indeed a success and it taught me how multimodality can express feeling and reveal one's experience (Antonio, 3/8/13).

Indeed, Antonio has not only offered an effective and telling synopsis of the day's experience, he also demonstrates that he has comprehended and internalized the full range of information accessed through the visual analysis component of the class. In fact, in his more formal reaction paper Antonio selects a painting whose translated text seems to echo the lessons and language learned from his reading of Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" which is demonstrated in the excerpt below:

In this image, there are trees, a landscape of property and a river flowing towards the opening. I see this river as a path leading me into a new life, a new beginning. This path can also lead us into

heaven in which I can see someone old being told by a voice from the forest to enter. The feeling I get when seeing this picture

anxious and ENLIGHTENED because there is a good chance that the river can lead into peace and prosperity.



As further testimony to the efficacy of the progression of visual analysis projects that lead up to the successful readings and subsequent narratives exhibited by the students on this visit, I offer the following entry from my journal:

Ms. R. told me later that many classes, including the general population writing classes, have come to this gallery and performed this exercise—but poorly—not engaged. That is why she was so delighted with the class today. They had far less time to complete the assignment that she gave them, yet they still came up with brilliant insights. Their analytical and critical thinking skills were far superior to most groups that have attended (field notes, 3/8/13).

It must be noted that Ms. R. interacts with classes from almost every discipline at the University and does a wonderful job of coming up with interesting, engaging, and challenging exercises for the students. Therefore, her words of praise regarding the classes' outstanding performances at the exhibit served to confirm my own positive perceptions and to reassure me that I had not been guilty of bias.

Later in the day, as I reflected on the students' praiseworthy efforts, it occurred to me that today's museum visit and the students' responses renewed my initial belief that multimodality was the key to unleashing the innate intelligence of these students who have been labeled underprepared. Each narrative was deeply analytical and imaginative; critical thinking was displayed in the explanations offered, the stories told, and the choice of language, which was often quite eloquent. Each was delivered confidently in smooth, cohesive, and effectively constructed sentences. Again, as if reflecting the positive energy that was directed toward them, students' identities shifted and changed before my eyes, and each pair of students seemed stronger, prouder, and more confident in their academic abilities.

Multimodal Presentations as Conduits for Identity and Agency

In this section I discuss the multimodal presentation, the culminating project in each semester. It is this project that provides the lens through which I view the aforementioned gains and losses of the effects of my transformative pedagogy and aesthetically infused classroom design on the identities and meaning making processes of the students. The final, non-written class presentation was initially conceived of many years ago as a way to mediate the disparity in grades between the more accomplished writers and those who were struggling. However, what I began to see in class after class was that even those students who were having the most difficulty with their writing were tapping into their individual, innate skills and interests and producing not

only cleverly designed visual concepts but also articulating the meaning behind these concepts in a well-organized, concise, and literate manner. Seeing in this methodology a curriculum- related means by which to counter the deficit notion that had, for the most part, been institutionally affixed to these students as well as a way in which significant and very positive identity shifts were often made quite clearly manifest, it was inevitable that I would further pursue this avenue of inquiry in my research.

I had always tried to provide the students with a sense of agency by encouraging them to work with me in the development of their assignments. However, in the final multimodal presentation, I wanted them to have total control over the conceptualization, design, and delivery of their concept, believing this to be an extremely welcome non-traditional moment in a college composition class. Therefore, in the fall semester class I was taken aback by the many faces contorted in fear and the fusillade of hand-waving that took place as the students read the following hand-out:

This assignment is designed to release your imagination and to allow you to have a little fun while still fulfilling a class requirement. I would like you to draw on your creative powers and skills to create a visual representation of the class themes: The power of words, the power of art/visuals, multimodality, technology, the Millennial, all of these, or any combination of themes. Although this is not meant to be a written assignment, some of you may choose to express yourself through poetry or song/music. For the most part, anything goes. I am not judging your presentation on your artistic ability, but on your creativity,, imagination, effort, and ability to capture, through any artistic medium, the essence of the class.

We will be setting aside three class days for these presentations. Each presentation should be approximately 10-15 minutes in length. Please plan your presentation accordingly. Some presentations may run a bit under ten minutes and some will truly need the full fifteen minutes, but please be mindful of running over the time limit, as you will be stealing time away from the next presenter.

The following is a list of ideas that might help you with the planning of your presentation:

Art/painting/poster/collage

Power Point

Film

Photographs

Music/Adaptation of existing music—or—

Creation and performance of an original piece of music

Poetry

Songs/Sung or Read

Dance

Jewelry

Knitting

Sewing

Tattoos

Graffiti

Environmental Signs and Symbols

Architecture

Video Games

***If you have any questions about this project, please speak with me.

After addressing a few of the students' questions such as: "How long should it be?" "What should I do for my presentation?" "Can you show us an example?" (field notes, 11/20/12), I began to see a pattern emerge. Ironically, when offered the gift of academic freedom in fulfilling this project, the students seemed to be actively seeking structure. While puzzling over this behavior, I could not help but recall the characteristics attributed to the Millennial generation as previously discussed in the literature above. I came to realize that this knee-jerk reaction to the attainment of what I saw as power was apparently the result of the ever-present familial, social, cultural, and political factors that had exerted their own inherent power on the construction of the identities of these students. As DeBard (2004), referencing the acknowledged originators of the Millennial title, Howe and Strauss (2000), observes:

This has resulted in a need for and expectation of structure on the part of

Millennial students. Parents of Millennials have organized their children's lives to give direction; this effort has been supported by day care options, after-school programs, recreational centers, music and dance lessons, and arts programs that have come to occupy an increasing amount of what was formerly free play time for this nation's youth (Howe and Strauss, 2000). The end result is that Millennials have come both to trust authority and to count on authority (pp. 35-36).

In furthering this argument as well as seeming to directly respond to my puzzling, DeBard (2004) once again looks to Howe and Strauss (2000) as his source when he states, "The downside can be that Millennial students expect such actions and projects to be highly structured because they do not like to work without a net" (p. 37).

Although I cite the above information which attributes these characteristics collectively to all so-called Millennials, I am careful to remain cognizant of my socioculturally infused theoretical framework which invokes the individuality of each student and stresses caution against the homogenization and/or labeling of an entire generation. Therefore, I also take into consideration the effect of factors associated with the structure and uniformity of most traditional schooling in which "students seem wholly comfortable as passive recipients of professors' expert knowledge, in the tradition that the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire labeled a banking approach to education" (Cox, 2009, p 90) as well as the individual labels that have played a role in the way that some students react to what they perceive of as possible failure in the absence of strict guidelines.

Thus, leaving myself open to all possible explanations for the students' discomfort, I attempted to allay the students' fears by offering examples of projects from previous classes,

and perhaps most importantly, I addressed the individual interests and creative bent of each student in the class. For example, aware that Mischka loved film-making, I suggested that she create a film that depicted a scenario based on one of the topics that she had so passionately addressed in one of her essays. Others in the class who drew, painted, sang, danced, or played an instrument were told that they could incorporate their talents into their presentations. To those who felt that they lacked artistic talent, I suggested that they could use the technological affordances of their computers or create a hand-made poster composed of pictures and letters cut from magazines. Moreover, I made sure to strongly re-emphasize the fact that my view of multimodality did not mandate the use of technology, and therefore, they could use any medium and mode with which they felt comfortable. I ended the class session by asking the students to begin to come up with ideas that we would discuss during our next class meeting. In addition, I reassured the students that I would be available to meet with them if they needed more clarity or guidance.

Many students took advantage of my invitation, but very few of those that came to meet with me demonstrated any lingering signs of insecurity in their ability to design and execute their multimodal project. On the contrary, they came to me with clever and imaginative proposals for their projects, and if any insecurity was demonstrated at all it was centered on the seeking of affirmation that they were on the right track. The affirmation of my own belief in the students' abilities was concretized by way of their presentations which I now discuss.

The data indicates that seventeen of the students opted to use PowerPoint as their presentation platform, two created original films, one played recordings of "Inspirational" songs and lyrics that he had written, one student wrote and performed an original piece of poetry, and one student created a handmade presentation out of cardboard. However, the raw

data belies the complexity of many of the presentations which were often hybrid in nature, combining elements of the traditional with the more nuanced and creative elements associated with 21st century multimodality. Importantly, through these presentations the students demonstrated continued evidence of the three previously noted emergent themes which were:

(1) identity, existent, and in transition: (2) multimodality as a means of engagement, empowerment, and enhanced writing skills as well as a medium through which identity is revealed, tracked and captured, especially in Millennial students; and (3) evidence of generational, institutional, and/or self-labeling prior to, and/or concurrent with, the onset of the study.

Mack's Mementos. As suggested, the students took their inspiration for their projects from topics discussed in class such as multimodality, the aesthetics of art and image, the power of words, the effects of technology on learning, and the generational label, The Millennials.

Although there was a shared basic understanding of these topics, the particular topic choice made by each individual student served to reveal much about his or her identity, an understanding and embrace of multimodality, and in many cases, a reckoning with labels. While many students fell back on the more traditional PowerPoint as the technological application through which to present their projects, no two were alike. For example, Mack, who focused on the stories behind tattoos, began his presentation with slides that contained succinct and well written key talking points regarding the history of tattoos with facts gleaned primarily through a militaristic view. He then moved into slides which contained links to numerous video clips from the television show "Miami Ink" and focused particularly on a segment in which a young soldier, holding back his tears, memorialized his fallen comrades in a tattoo on his back that read: "Whatever It Takes." It should be noted that Mack often made reference in his writing to the fact that he had

always dreamed of being in the military so that he could "serve and protect," but had to defer his dream as he was his family's sole male survivor. Thus, the militaristic angle through which he pursues the history of tattoos as well as his concentrated focus on video clips that solely feature servicemen resonate deeply with him, and are telling indicators of Mack's sense of the duty, loyalty, and honor that he embraces and which was displayed throughout the semester in his writing as well as through his behavior and in-class discussions. In fact, Mack made no attempt to conceal from his classmates the strength of his character and the depth of his passion as he segued into a deeply moving and very personal discussion of his own tattoo which he bore on his back. The slides that followed were carefully paced to match Mack's narrative. Moreover, as shown below, each was painstakingly and artfully designed to effectively juxtapose photographs of his beloved grandfather, the barber, with hand-drawn sketches of details of the tattoo that Mack had created and dedicated to his loving memory.



Mack told us that his father had left Mack and his family when he was very young.

Consequently, his grandfather, who took Mack with him to his barbershop every day, became his

male role model. With each detail that Mack discussed, more and more of his inner self was revealed, especially when, in referencing his tattoo, he told us that "Every day I carry my grandpa and my family on my back." The figurative and literal import of that particular revelation is a telling indicator of Mack's identity and hints at the history and memories that are interwoven in the story of his tattoo. He explained that the scissors in the tattoo were, in actuality, modeled on his grandfather's barber shears. Pointing to the photograph of his grandfather's work station, Mack tapped his finger on the jar in the photo in which the sheers were placed. He told us to look closely so that we could notice the "bits of dirt and grime" that clung to the sheers. Mack had included this minute detail in his sketch to symbolize his grandfather's eight year battle with Alzheimer's disease, the disease to which he ultimately succumbed. Mack had insisted that the tattoo artist take care to add this nuance when he inked the tattoo, as Mack wanted to be certain that "the little things that matter" were captured. In the action itself as well as in the retelling, Mack exerts power and agency over the "artist" who is inking his tattoo design in order to ensure that his tattoo aptly reflects his intended meaning. As Rowsell et al, (2013) inform us, "Whether they are aesthetic or therapeutic, tattoos record life stories, and their look and placement is an expression of self' (p. 98).

Mack continued on with his explanation by referring to the words written in Italian that were imprinted on the ribbon-like strand that encircled the sheers. First, in a surprising display of his cultural heritage, Mack spoke the words in fluent Italian, and then, in English, he gave us the translation: "The Love for a Family is the Greatest Blessing a Life Can Give." Clearly emotional at this transformational and cathartic moment in his narrative as "[t]attoos actively construct identity, materializing parts of self that signal histories, rites of passage, ideas, and

values privileged by the tattooed" (Rowsell et al, 2013, p. 98), Mack turned to his classmates and fervently urged them to "Cherish your family and your moments with them."

It is in this end of the semester presentation that Mack allows his classmates and me to see the realization of the identity that was only hinted at on the first day of class in his answer to the previously discussed personal interview question, "If identity were a toolkit, what would your toolkit consist of?" In order to facilitate the discussion, I now provide an excerpt from Mack's answer:

My toolkit would hold many different things. My identity is different but the same in many ways. In this case, I can do many jobs with my toolkit. A joke to an artist, an artist to a dolt sometimes. In the end, my identity is filled with curiosity and respect to explore all things that interest me, despite societys views (Mack, personal interview, 9/3 /12).

In my previous assessment of the above statement I observed that," In his response, Mack indicates that he thinks of himself as neither a joke nor a dolt." However, in light of the more personal details of his life that were revealed during Mack's final presentation, it appears that I might have initially over-estimated his sense of self-confidence in his response. The poignancy with which he told his story of paternal abandonment, the motto that speaks to the sacred love of familial ties which Mack has chosen to permanently affix to his broad back and which are alternately, a burden and a blessing, as well as his compelling plea to his classmates to "cherish those few moments with your family" which he, himself was somewhat denied, all served to expose the vulnerable young man hidden beneath the stalwart behavior and the vibrant ink.

As I reread Mack's earlier statement I now detected a sense of ambivalence about his identity in the references to himself as a "joke" and a "dolt." As I never saw evidence of the "joking, doltish side" of Mack's identity, I conjectured that perhaps this was a self-label that

Mack had assumed or been forced to take on at some other time and place in order to fit in or to minimize his perception of himself as the fatherless outsider. In either case, Mack's choice to keep this persona in check throughout the semester and to make the agentive decision to present himself anew in the persona of the passionate and altruistic young man as artist seems to indicate that a shift in identity had begun with his entrance into college and was supported by his placement into a composition class that afforded him opportunities to explore and express this developing identity through alternative text making modes. Thus, the complex, multi-layered project that Mack presented seems to be a fitting metaphor for the shifting and multiple identities that have been both revealed and realized through his multimodal efforts.

Mack's project was an exemplary representation of the final multimodal presentations that that were created in both semesters in the sense that all projects, whether digitally or manually crafted, served as imagistic testimony to the transformative and quite often, agentive shifts in the student's identities. Whether shedding labels through powerful displays of writing proficiency via lyrics or poetry or attaining new levels of academic achievement through self-initiated intensive and comprehensive research, each student's imaginative, creative, and uniquely individualistic multimodal presentation served to reify the cognitive and characteristic transformation of each student.

Discussion

"It is not enough to emancipate individuals or to enable them to disclose their lived worlds for their enlightenment and our own. Lived worlds themselves must be open to reflection and transformation...Once they are open, once they are informed, once they are engaged in speech and action from their many vantage points, they may be able to identify a better state of things—and go

on to transform" (Greene, 2000, p. 59).

Transformation, which is central to my pedagogical approach to college writing, has been the primary focus of this chapter as it is inherent in the nature of multimodal social semiotics and consequent meaning making and is actualized in the identity shifts experienced by the students and manifested in their written and visual texts. Moreover, the concept of transformation itself is indicative of the agency that is achieved by both teacher and students when a change is implemented that moves the curriculum away from the traditional monomodal view of writing and into the broader expanse of learning and meaning making afforded through a multimodal social semiotic approach.

As demonstrated and discussed above, an environment such as my classroom, which fosters a multimodal social semiotic approach to college composition, facilitates sociocultural aspects of the curriculum that are not usually taken into consideration in a traditional university setting. These aspects, when interwoven into the context of learning allow for individuality, a sense of agency and motivated engagement on the part of the student, as well as a shift in the positionality of the teacher-student dynamic from hierarchical to collaborative. In this way, opportunities are provided for the resultant display of identity through the multiplicity of authentic design choices available to the student as designer of the text to be communicated. Jewitt (2005a) attests to this phenomenon when she states: "Interest connects a person's choice of one resource over another with the social context of sign production. The modal resources that are available to the person are a part of that context. In this way the relationship between a signifier and a signified is a trace of the characteristics of the person who made the sign and what he or she wants to represent" (p. 312). Kress (2010) expands on this premise and tells us:

All signs, whether those that I make in my actions, or remake in my inner

transformative and/or transduction (re)actions, are always embodied, for maker and remake alike. In this way the meaning potentials of the mode in which a sign is made become embodied...In this way too, *identity* is embodied and becomes more than a merely mental phenomenon, an 'attitude,' maybe, that I display or perform (p. 77).

Furthermore, through my discussion of the concept of design, which is the essential feature of a multimodal communicative act, we have been witness to the various texts that have literally and figuratively captured and documented the unfolding of identity as extant and in transition as well as the way in which the processes involved in the design of a multimodal text serve to reinforce similar processes associated with the act of writing. It is this mutually beneficial reciprocal transaction between the two text-making processes that lends further support to the inclusion of a multimodal social semiotic element into the college composition class. Moreover, design has the potential to become the great equalizer when it comes to demonstrations of proficiency in communication. As Kress (2010) explains, "Design is prospective. It responds to demands which, in some way, are constantly new. Rather than being a competent implementation of conventionally given practices, design is transformative, hence inevitably innovative" (p. 132). As I have demonstrated throughout this chapter, this aspect of multimodality not only inspires agency but also provides a most egalitarian method for the debunking of socially and self-affixed labels of insufficiency in a marginalized setting.

In sum, the broader dimensions of the students' views obtained through non-traditional alternative modes of reading and writing that have been discussed in this chapter lend validity to the use of multimodality in the college composition class. Moreover, on a related note and of particular relevance for the students in this study, "multimodality also challenges the assumptions

about learning (as a linguistic process) and the traditions embedded in educational assessment" (Jewitt, 2003, p. 84). In other words, while writing skills and written texts will, for the time being, remain the predominant focus of the college composition class, the trend towards integration of a multimodal approach to writing will not only assist the students in producing essays of a more coherent and analytic nature but also present opportunities for students to refute their deficit-related labels through engagement with a range of modal resources that will demonstrate their capacity for complex, higher-order thinking skills.

In this chapter, I have discussed how the inclusion of a multimodal social semiotic approach to college writing impacted upon the identities and textual performances of students housed within a marginalized program and considered by the University to be underprepared for the rigors of a tertiary curriculum. To this end, I discussed how my socioculturally infused transformative pedagogy as well as multiple opportunities for aesthetic engagement with the various arts served to reinforce the transformative and agentive properties associated with a multimodal approach to meaning making. In detailing the assignments that were designed specifically to inspire imaginative and engaged responses, I was able to locate and identify shifts in student's identities that demonstrated positive growth in matters pertaining to cognition and confidence. Most importantly, students' work testified to development of more proficient writing skills through the absorption and replication of the processes associated with the design component of a multimodal social semiotic approach to meaning making. However, although the varied sampling of student's work that has been discussed in this chapter offers great insight into the benefits of such an approach, the case studies discussed in chapters 5 and 6, to follow, provide a more thorough and detailed accounting of this transformational process as it occurred in and through the work of two particular students.

Chapter 5

The Student as Sign, Signifier, Signified

Introduction

In this chapter I narrow my focus to the discussion of Adrienne, a young woman who was a student in the writing classes that I taught in the fall 2012 and spring 2013 semesters. I selected Adrienne as a case primarily because she initially presented as an enigma that piqued my curiosity as both a teacher and a researcher. She had an almost ethereal presence and knowing eyes that seem to take in and assess her classmates, the content of the course, and me. Ultimately, my choice was supported and furthered by Adrienne's approach to multimodality which was always identity-rich, conceptually unique, and painstakingly designed. However, it was her initiation of an on-going email discussion between the two of us that assured me that Adrienne would provide me with a wealth of data that could, hopefully, provide answers to the questions that directed this study.

In Adrienne's case, the search for identity begins in the past. Adrienne's journey to my class began in the small village of Smolensk in Russia where she was born to an alcoholic mother and a father who had earlier abandoned his family. At the age of four she was taken from her mother and her home by the Russian equivalent of Child Protective Services and placed into an orphanage where her hair was cut into a tomboyish bowl shape and dressed in pants and tops that masked her gender. Her first language was Russian, and it was in the orphanage that she was taught the Cyrillic alphabet and learned to read and write. I believe that it was also here that Adrienne learned to stay silent and to sit back and observe others without revealing too much about herself. And, although she never said as much, it is most likely the time during which her fertile imagination, which would later mature and blossom, took root (field notes, 09/26/12).

After spending ten months in the orphanage Adrienne was adopted by an American couple two months short of her fifth birthday which, she claims, was a very good thing. Apparently, after age five, an orphan's chances of adoption were slim to none. Moreover, at age five, children were removed from the orphanage and placed into a state-run facility where most usually stayed until they were emancipated. Although Adrienne offered this information easily and willingly, there were times during the telling of her story in which her eyes became unreadable and the smile on her face seemed somewhat forced. However, she would quickly recover her usual smile and calm demeanor and move on with her story.

Adrienne spoke well of her adoptive parents, although I learned very little about her mother and nothing at all about her adoptive father. In one conversation during which we discussed her early literacy learning process after she had come to the United States, she indicated that neither of her parents read very much and thus had not played a major role in the development of her love for the classic novel. This revelation seemed to indicate another source of isolation for Adrienne, and I wondered if perhaps, this was yet another reason for her affinity for these enduring stories and the characters that inhabited their pages, as they seemed to provide needed realms of fantasy into which she could escape for a while, playing out her own often beleaguered life though theirs in what seemed to be a search for catharsis (interview, 12/18/12). Although I was very curious about the transitional phase in which she moved from speaking Russian to speaking, reading, and writing in English, I was careful to avoid stirring up any memories that might be too painful to recall. I did, however, feel comfortable about inquiring about this transitional phase as it played out in school, since she had made reference to it in her Literacy Narrative which is discussed below (interview, 12/18/12).

Again, though the recollection of this particular time in her life during which her difficulty in understanding and responding to the nuances of English caused her to be ostracized by her school mates and made to feel a sense of deficiency and otherness by her teacher, had to be unpleasant, to say the least, Adrienne seemed unmoved as she spoke to me. I recognized this sort of masked presence as similar to Adrienne's in-class persona, and as she spoke, I began to understand that the masking of emotions that was Adrienne's default mode had long ago been adopted as a protective reflex meant to keep her feelings in check. This movement further into herself is a key marker of Adrienne's identity, yet it also denotes the beginning of a movement outward of her imaginative capabilities. With the hard won attainment of her ability to become proficient in English, Adrienne began to read voraciously. Her favorites as a child were the books from *The Magical Treehouse* series (Adrienne's literacy essay, 10/2/12) which inspired Adrienne to begin writing her own tales of fantasy. This early love of reading and the consequent assertion of literacy-based agency would prove to become a dominant feature of Adrienne's core identity and, ironically as a way in which she could assume a different and seemingly more powerful alternative identity.

Adrienne seemed to proceed through her elementary and high school years as a loner. Still considered the outsider, her fellow students turned their derision from jeers to fears predicated, she claims, on the fact that she was Russian and therefore, different. Although in pain, Adrienne initially adopted the quiet resolve that had seen her through many hurtful situations in the past. Yet, after years of quiet angst, Adrienne's resolve was broken in high school and she was placed in a hospital for two weeks in order to obtain treatment for what she indicates was a mental breakdown.

One assumes that the road back to wellness was difficult, and to be honest, I never pursued this line of questioning. However, it was during this recovery period that Adrienne began posting her blog on an on-line site called deviant Art. At first, I was a bit confused by the name of the site, but Adrienne explained by telling me that "deviantArt is more or less a forum on which artists of every type post their thoughts, stories, poetry, art, and digitized graphics while interacting or holding discussions with other members of the site" (interview, 12/18/12). Her contributions to this site under the pseudonym, The Nobel Queen of Lothaire, had had a powerful transformative effect on Adrienne, as it provided a greater audience for her stories and poems than could be found within the confines of the bedroom in which she wrote her first stories. Moreover, although we would often find ourselves in disagreement regarding this issue, Adrienne's deviantART blog brought her into the agentive world of multimodality, a fact which she often chose to minimize. Our disagreement centered on my belief that multimodality was an imaginative, artistic and empowering way to better writing and therefore, belonged in a college composition class, whereas, Adrienne thought of herself as a traditionalist, and despite her intense technological interaction with the online deviantART site, she felt that technology and imaginative engagements with the arts were merely distractions from the more traditional learning methods associated with a university.

Disagreements aside, throughout the semester Adrienne consistently demonstrated her imaginative, creative, and written proficiency, all no doubt aided by her continued practice on her blog at deviantART. In effect, she was an enthusiastic and high performing student which caused me to wonder how she came to be placed in this program. Therefore, I was surprised to learn that although Adrienne's grades in high school were very good, considering the trauma that she had experienced, she had had difficulty with the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). Consequently, her

scores fell beneath the criteria for admission set by the University. For that reason, and that reason alone, Adrienne, one of my best and brightest students, was considered to be underprepared for college.

La Giaconda

I titled this section on Adrienne "La Giaconda" as I always tend to picture her in each class sitting unreadably silent, yet with a mysterious smile on her face and a gleam in her eye. However, in actuality, I came to know more about Adrienne than I did about any other student with whom I have worked. Perhaps this was due to the fact that, early on in the fall semester, Adrienne elected to send me spontaneously generated email missives which offered me privileged insight into her personal, out-of-class identity and which significantly added to the wealth of data derived from Adrienne's classroom-based imagistic works and written texts. In light of these factors which lead to my choice of Adrienne as a case, I will be analyzing the data derived from the content of her many out of class communiqués written from what, I believed she felt, was a more comfortable distance as well as Adrienne's class based written and imagistic work which were so impressively unique, evocative, and revelatory.

Reading Between the Lines

It was Adrienne's propensity for prolific reflections on the day's class discussions that provided me with insight into her out-of-class identity. In these reflections, which soon became regular events, Adrienne privileged me with her personal and usually very informed take on the day's topic, often startling me with her deep insight and wealth of researched information as well as unexpected glimpses into aspects of her life that had helped to shape her opinions. It took me a while to realize that the silences that I witnessed in class were actually moments in which Adrienne was distancing herself in order to gain perspective on the multiple points of view that

were expressed. In fact, she, herself, made reference to her in-class persona a number of times over the course of our discussions and email exchanges. For example, during an interview session held at the end of the first semester Adrienne responded to my inquiry regarding the seemingly contradictory identities evidenced by the silent Adrienne who sat in my class and the verbose young woman who would not hesitate to initiate a lengthy conversion once outside of the classroom walls by telling me that, "When I zone out in class this (the creation of her email) is where my mind goes all of the time. It's a default action; an example of what I'm thinking in class" (interview, 12/18/12). Though Adrienne sufficiently satisfied my curiosity with this answer, she returns to this topic in an email sent on May 20, 2013, just a short time after we had met for an interview session, in which she tells me:

When I was in high school believe it or not I actually got a lot of supporting roles in plays. I was in drama for 5 years and did both plays and musicals. What's strange is that even though I can easily put on a new face and act on stage, I can't do that in the classroom. I never volunteer because I like to listen to what others have to say more. I also have a hard time coming up with answers on the spot. This week I had an interview at Walmart and all the questions where on the spot and I looked pretty idiotic answering them. I did well in plays because I was able to memorize lines and act it out. If I don't have lines or know what I am going to say then I become very socially awkward and tend to not interact with people. On dA (DeviantART)it is very easy to communicate because you can think before you type (email communication, 5/20/13).

At the point in time at which I received this email, Adrienne exhibited a comfortable and confiding tone in her messages, an observation that is confirmed by the ease with which she offered me this very private view into her sense of self as "very socially awkward." Moreover, through this email, Adrienne seemed to be letting me know that a key identity shift had taken place, one that she wanted to make me aware of, but still could only reveal through the less personal medium of an email message. Curiously, although our conversations and interview sessions had yielded much information of a personal nature in which she spoke freely about her birth in Russia, being

literally taken away from her biological mother at the age of four by Russian Social Services, and her placement into an orphanage until she was adopted by American parents (personal interview, 12/18/12), Adrienne had never really seemed to own a label. In fact, in both her silences and in her conversations, Adrienne seemed to exude a sense of self-confidence; an assuredness about who she was and what she had to say, and if she had to bear any label at all, it probably would have been that of loner. This is not to say that Adrienne was anti-social, for within a few weeks of the start of the semester she quickly became one-third of a trio of friends that also included Mischka and Shay. They sat together, walked to and from class together, and often Shay and Mischka, who coincidentally, was also from Russia and still bore a barely visible trace of an accent, would accompany Adrienne to my office for chats. However, while Mischka and Shay seemed to share a bond of experiences that went beyond the campus, Adrienne seemed always to resist engulfment by the friendship.

While self-confidence was often evidenced in much of Adrienne's writing it was also the primary medium through which she expressed her insecurities. It is this deep affinity for writing and for the more traditional and classical forms of learning and meaning making that make Adrienne so interesting a case study. She confidently makes her interests known on the first day of class when she writes, "I try to read every day. My hobby is writing, so I often read other people's work, but I enjoy reading classics and poetry" (personal interview, 09/04/12). Not surprisingly, Adrienne also indicates her feelings about technology when she responds to another question on the survey regarding the amount of time spent each day on her cell phone by declaring, "I personally do not use my cell phone, I have one, but I find it to be a major waste of time, I only use it to make important calls and text very rarely" (personal interview, 09/04/12). Nor does she miss the opportunity, in the spring semester interview, to reinforce her disdain for the perceived

bastardization of traditional language manifested in Millennial textese by adamantly exclaiming, "I hate text speech" (personal interview, 01/30/13). There is a suggestion in one of our later interviews, that Adrienne's adherence to the traditional may have been a learned behavior that originated in the orphanage into which she was placed after being taken from her mother. Responding to my question regarding her literacy skills before coming to America, Adrienne reveals that she knew how to read and write in Russian, having learned the Cyrillic alphabet through skill and drill repetition. With a half-hearted laugh she tells me that in the orphanage she learned to "Do what you are told and do not do anything else" (personal interview, 12/18/12). Thus, from the beginning of our first semester together and on through to the end of our second semester in the spring, Adrienne continued to make her argument in favor of the traditional as opposed to the technological in education very clear in her written assignments as well as in her email messages. As a case in point, I offer the following email exchange in which Adrienne reflects on a class discussion regarding the impact of technology on the world as we know it, followed by my response:

Hi Professor Buono, I hope everything is well.

After class today I began thinking that if written text is going to become obsolete and replaced by technology than in the end, we will only be receiving information that someone else thinks is important. A prime example of this already happening is Cliffnotes, someone is reading the book and putting together what they think are the most important ideas and quotes from the book. Cliffnotes often excludes many important key points, which potentially make the story what it is. So I'm thinking that if people are using cliffnotes and google to learn about a book, they are really only learning what someone else has learned about that book. (This is why I don't think technology should be used as an educational tool.)

What concerns me most is that if everything is online in the future and there is no handwriting or books/newspapers and the internet and technology could potentially control what we learn about a book, we will be told what a book is about by someone else, rather than what we think. Twenty or thirty years from now, it may be the norm to be told the information, which means that we will

constantly be thinking someone else's thought and have ideas that are not our own.

Do you think eventually we will be to the point where we will be plugged into the internet 100% of the time? Like we won't need to even leave our houses, will we even have houses? or can we live in a closet sized space where we can control our education, work and income from the internet? This was a really random thought.

thank you, Adrienne (personal email, 11/29/12).

Dear Adrienne,

Now, this is the kind of email that I love to receive! You have truly done some thinking about this issue, and you raise some really important—and frightening—questions. I especially like your deep line of thinking regarding the reading of books. From much of the reading in this area, one would think that the scenario that you have laid out below is inevitable. However, there are others, including you and I, who believe this would lead to intellectual stagnation. I, myself, am hopeful that if we are truly undergoing some sort of cognitive evolutionary cycle, that reading will prove to be among the "fittest" and will survive. We still read the Greeks, the Bible, Shakespeare, and so many ageless classics in order to glean knowledge and beauty that is still so relevant today. Therefore, I have to believe that we will continue this practice despite technological progress.

However, it is up to this generation's critical thinkers, like you, to take agency against the predicted changes that threaten the intellectual values that you hold so dear. You are a writer, and a good one. Use technology—your blog—to fight technology. Put your thoughts out there; write articles; be active. Do not let these damning prophecies come true.

Thank you so much for sharing your thoughts with me. I would love to continue to hear from you about any issues that you are pondering deeply.

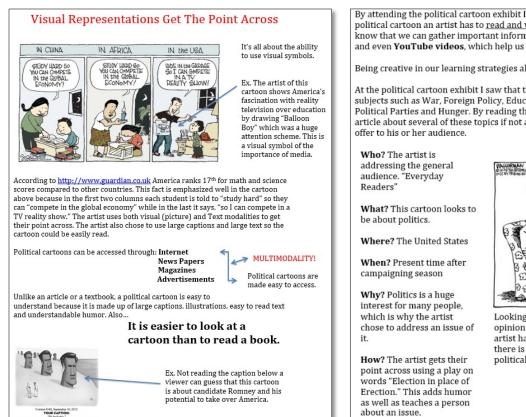
Take care, Prof. B.

In this email, the first of many more to come, Adrienne confirms that, despite her in-class silences, her brain is moving like a locomotive, making connections, asking questions, prognosticating about the future, and clearly letting me know about her intellectual position on my curricular stance regarding the use of technology in the classroom. Yet, rather than interpret her intentions as oppositional, I wondered at the ability of this student to reposition the power construct

that, whether intentionally or unintentionally conveyed by the instructor, usually inhibits the students' voices. Moreover, I saw Adrienne's challenge as a validation of the success of my use of a socioculturally based transformational pedagogy in that this action indicated that her sense of self-confidence and agency had grown dramatically within the span of a mere two months in my class.

The 'Art' of the Story

In any case, despite her misgivings, Adrienne was always the steadfast student. As she tells me in a later email, "I think constantly being on one side or the other creates more conflicts. Although, I think there are things that need to be changed, I am more than happy to listen to both sides of the argument" (personal email, 2/11/14). Thus, we see below, in Adrienne's project created after a trip to the fall Political Cartoon exhibit on campus, how painstakingly she tries to embrace multimodal concepts:



By attending the political cartoon exhibit I was able to learn that in order to create a political cartoon an artist has to read and watch everything! Many people don't know that we can gather important information from commercials, video games and even YouTube videos, which help us make decisions about politics.

Being creative in our learning strategies allows us to understand information better.

At the political cartoon exhibit I saw that the cartoons covered a vast array of subjects such as War, Foreign Policy, Education, Debt, Racism, Women's right, Political Parties and Hunger. By reading the daily newspaper you can easily find an article about several of these topics if not all. A political Cartoonist has so much to



Looking at a cartoon a reader may have his or her opinion about it and what it is trying to say. The artist had his or her opinion as well, which is why there is no wrong answer when looking at a political cartoon.

In fact, Adrienne does an excellent job of incorporating elements of design, especially in her layout strategy, choice of font, and use of directional arrows. However, we also see that, although well-placed, there also is a great deal of traditional text. Adrienne's more traditional and classical bent are demonstrably at odds with her academic aspirations which compel her to adapt a method of communication with which she claims to be uncomfortable. It is only within her comfort zone of the basic essay that Adrienne subtly, yet intentionally, gives voice to her objections, stating:

Although I appreciated getting the chance to work outside the box, I found it harder to put it together because I was worried that I wasn't covering everything or doing the assignment correctly. The only preplanning I did was at the exhibit when I was visualizing how I wanted it to look, but I'm the type of person who creates as they go. I do the same when writing a story, I create the plot and how characters are as I write it. I find if I write down exactly how I want something, it makes the story or assignment not fun and it takes longer for me to do it (Adrienne's process analysis, 10/30/12).

Ironically, despite her objections to the introduction of multimodality into the composition class, I soon became aware that, much in the way that a multimodal composition captures and reflects identity through aspects of design chosen by the designer, so too did Adrienne's style, tone, language, and nuance create a text-based imagistic representation of the many identity phases and shifts that she experienced.

Adrienne, a 'Novel' Young Woman

As evidence of Adrienne's unique ability to figuratively transduct words into images, I offer in full, below, Adrienne's beautifully written, emotionally compelling, and vivid literacy narrative in which she linguistically bares her soul and tells the stories behind the silence:

10/2/12

Written Expression 1

Professor Buono

A Classic Life

Jane Eyre

"I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will." –from <u>Jane Eyre</u> by Charlotte Bronte

I was four years and two months when I was taken from my family and put in an orphanage outside of Smolensk, Russia. I was never told that I would never see my mother again, but I was told that I'd be getting, "New parents." I remember telling the mom who had adopted me that, "I couldn't wait for her to meet my real mom," It was the shocked expression on her face that told me I'd never be going home.

Like the character of Jane Eyre, I felt as if I would never belong with this

new family. I was old enough to understand I wasn't their child, which made it hard to feel like I had a purpose to the family. Although my parents weren't like Mrs. Reed, Jane Eyre's aunt, I still felt as if I were being punished. Is there no punishment worse than being taken away from your family?

Lord of The Flies

"For a moment the boys were a closed circuit of sympathy with piggy on the outside." –William Golding

When I started Kindergarten I
wasn't familiar with the language yet and
often got in trouble because other kids
would tell on me for speaking, "weird
words." I was much like Piggy's character
back then pronouncing nearly all my words

"Assma" instead of Asthma. Needless to say, I spent a lot of day in timeout for those "weird words."

wrong. I guess kids can't get used to

Getting a timeout was not my only dilemma; my mom insisted that I take swimming lessons as a way to get to know other kids. I don't think she saw the problem with learning something when you couldn't understand the language. Like Piggy, I spent my time alone floating around the pool while everyone who understood what they were supposed to do swam in a group.

I can't forget the time in first grade when I was made to take a test more than once. I pretty much knew English by then but I was still not familiar with all the sayings. The teacher made everyone say, "I cross my heart and hope to die," after finishing their test because for some odd reason that meant we didn't cheat.

Apparently cheating in first grade is like

cheating on a SAT. As you can guess, I had never heard of that phrase before and didn't know what I was supposed to say, but until I got it down I had to take each test twice. During that period of my life, I felt as if everything was utter chaos just like in Lord Of The Flies. I was running around trying to learn a new language while the lost boys were running around trying to get off the island.

To Kill A Mockingbird

"You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view.... until you climb into his skin and walk around in It."—Atticus Finch

Between sixth and eighth grade students began to realize that I was from Russia and that I was different from them. I didn't have a problem with that since everyone is different in one-way or another. The problem I did have was that everyone started fearing me like I was going to hurt them. When I would walk up

to fellow students they would flinch or say,
"Don't hurt me," as if I had brought the
Russian army with me. Like Scout in To
Kill A Mockingbird, I just wanted people
to understand me and not treat me
differently. Even though I wasn't laughed
at because my father took on a
controversial case, I felt worse because I
was being laughed at for whom I was.

The fear the students had towards me went on all through high school as well. I would treat it like a joke because how could they know how I was feeling? If I reacted poorly to them fearing me they would only be more afraid of me, even though it hurt inside to let them continue. In the novel, Scout Finch was known for having a temper and showed it well, but for me I didn't show it at all and I was still being treated like I was.

Wuthering Heights

"My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods; time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees.

My love for Heathcliff resembles the
eternal rocks beneath—a source of little
visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I am
Heathcliff?"—Catherine Earnshaw.

In <u>Wuthering Heights</u> by Emily
Bronte, Catherine Earnshaw is written as
the character with no identity. She is often
confused as to who she is and takes her
anger out on the people around her.
Between ninth and tenth grade I felt like I
had been possessed by Catherine
Earnshaw's spirit.

At the start of ninth grade I found that I had lost my way and often took out my anger on my family. It had gotten so bad that I ended up staying in a hospital for two weeks. During my time there I learned that I was having a hard time dealing with my past in Russia. I was getting flashbacks and was angry because I had learned that my biological mom wanted to keep me, yet I was ripped away from her. The

2 -

medication they put me on only seemed to make me angrier and prone to violent behavior. I was only grateful that my classmates could not see me this way, or they would have had a real reason to fear me.

In the novel, Catherine Earnshaw became angry when she was torn from Heatheliff, and I was angry that I had been taken from my real family. Both of us had lost our identity and were taking it out on those around us.

NobleQueenOfLothaire

"If you aren't giving your all then what are you giving?" -

8,382 page views, one hundred and twenty-eight watchers, two hundred and thirty-three stories that have been viewed 21,635 times and an online series with a hundred persons following. All to finally become the NobleQueenOfLothaire.

I began writing in second grade when I wrote my own version of the Magic

Trechouse series. Writing has always been a part of me. There is always a story that need to be told, whether it be through poetry, prose, fiction or non-fiction.

If I couldn't write, I don't think I don't think I would have ever recovered my sense of loss and the anger that came with it. The ability to create a story gives me the power to create another life and to create a character that represents a part of me.

Since I found writing, I can't say I regret anything that's ever happened to me. Being adopted and facing PTSD isn't what defines me, what does define me is my ability to show everyone who I really am through writing. Jane Eyre, Piggy, Scout, and Catherine Earnshaw all relate to me in one way or another, which is why story telling is essential. Finding a character you can relate to makes the experience of the story that much better.

4-

In this assignment, students were given the option to design and execute their essays in a non-traditional manner. While many students, as discussed above, chose to write the narrative in the still expressive but more traditional MLA format, Adrienne instead, opted for the innovative, non-traditional style that had so frustrated her in the previous museum assignment. However, in making this choice, it seems that Adrienne was not so much thinking about conventions, but about her love and identification with the characters that peopled these texts; texts whose traditionally formatted pages are reflected in her own design layout. In reference to these design choices as well as the content therein Rowsell and Pahl (2014) note, "identities are layered, and multidimensional, constructed in dynamic and interrelated ways...and...can be found sedimented within texts" (p. 393). This "sedimentation of identities into the text," as explained further by Rowsell and Pahl, "can be seen as an artifact that reflects, through its materiality, the previous identities of the meaning maker" (p. 388), a stance that seems to supply theoretical support for my assessment of Adrienne's writing style as being essentially multimodal in its ability to convey aesthetically infused linguistic images of the many stages of her identity. It also helps to explain my decision to offer her essay above, in full, for to omit any section would be also to omit a portion of her identity. As Hull and Greeno (2006) state, "[n]arratives of self—telling ourselves and others stories about the people we have been or want to become—can constitute especially significant moment of identity construction" (p. 84).

Therefore, we notice that, in addition to the classic layout of the page, Adrienne chooses to introduce each novel with a succinct and image-invoking quote that serves to signify the mood of the text as well as what Rowsell and Pahl (2014) refer to as the "layer" of her identity that is reflected through the novel's protagonist. Adrienne, adapting the more stylistic language of the Victorian novel, then proceeds to insert snapshot-like memoirs of critical stages in her life in which

family, language, peace of mind and identity are lost, shifted, or forced to be reconstructed and often supplanted by institutionally and socially affixed labels and subsequent loss of self-worth. Finally, it is in the concluding section of each novel-related recreated identity phase that Adrienne, speaking as both child and young woman, brings the reader within the complex, compressed layers of her identities and allows us to bear witness to the self as fragmented and in flux. As she states in the last line of her Catherine Earnshaw incarnation, "Both of us had lost our identity and were taking it out on those around us."

However, we find in the concluding segment of the essay's classical trope a redemptive quality in which the character/identity created and assumed by Adrienne, the <u>Nobel Queen of Lothaire</u>, is stately, regal, and able to forgive, though perhaps not to forget. In the excerpt below, Adrienne asserts that the reclusive child has found agency through writing:

If I couldn't write, I don't think [] I would have ever recovered my sense of loss and the anger that came with it. The ability to create a story gives me the power to create another life and to create a character that represents a part of me. Since I found writing, I can't say I regret anything that's ever happened to me. Being adopted and facing PTSD isn't what defines me, what does define me is my ability to show everyone who I really am through writing" (Adrienne's literacy narrative (10/02/12).

Furthermore, through writing, especially through her online writing, the silent child has found her voice. Through the cathartic properties afforded through writing, Adrienne has faced and addressed old wounds, transformed anger into power, and redefined her sense of self by forging a new identity that is no longer reflective of disempowered literary figures, but which powers her ability to create her own, more agentive characters.

The Power of the Queen

The agency provided by the online persona of the Nobel Queen of Lothaire might also explain why, at the point in time during which we met, Adrienne evidenced no overt signs of

previous labeling. She, herself, indicates that she had acquired enough of her own power through her writing to do battle against the institutional, societal, and familial powers that had, through their labeling process, further marginalized a child who had long felt "as if everything was utter chaos" (Adrienne's literacy narrative, 10/02/12). Furthermore, there are indications throughout Adrienne's literacy narrative that the power that she senses as a young adult may have been fostered even earlier, in childhood, when, as a second grader, she sought to replace chaos with order in creating her own version of *The Magic Treehouse* series. In these magical tales, embodied with classic mythical characters such as Merlin and Morgan Le Fay, two young children, Jack and Annie, are summoned from their ordinary lives and sent on fantastical and heroic journeys throughout time and space in search of adventure and, it seems, agency. Though Adrienne never provided samples of her earlier writing, it is very likely that the free-spirited adventures of these young children held deep resonance for her in her isolative state. Moreover, Adrienne's acknowledgment of her re-envisioning of these particular stories as the commencement of a new stage in her life seem to suggest that writing—and a touch of fantasy—provided her with not only an outlet for her angst but also the control that was absent in her own lifeworld. Though unable to elude the positioned and labeled identity imposed on her within the classroom, Adrienne seems to have been able to positively resituate herself through her out-of-school every day literacy practices. Ivanic (1998) discusses this process stating, "In spite of these powerful shaping social forces, individual writers participate in the construction of their discoursal identities through selection (mainly subconscious) among the subject positions they feel socially mandated, willing, or daring enough, to occupy" (p. 32). Thus, it seems that Adrienne is daring enough, and her ability to acquire agency through the development of what Hull and Greeno (2006) speak of as a "literate identity," or in Adrienne's case, 'identities,' is testimony to the powerful effect of her out-of-school learning practices which are both self-affirming and the foundation upon which her love for the art of writing is built. In many ways Adrienne's tenacious adherence to these practices, to the classics, to all that is traditional, appears to have been a way of retaining the identities that she had created for herself in order to survive the loss of her original social, cultural, and historical identity, as well as her family, her language, and her literacy. Perhaps that also is why she was so resistant to my suggestion that her continued participation on the DeviantART website under the guise of the Nobel Queen of Lothaire, was in direct opposition to her stance on multimodality and technology.

deviantART: The Source of Power

Since it seemed to play such an important role in Adrienne's identity formation, in an interview which took place toward the end of the fall semester I questioned Adrienne about why and when she had become involved with activities on the DeviantART website.

The following is an excerpt from that conversation:

MB: I am curious about your blog. When did you start writing it and why?

A: I started two years ago, and I, my...it's my DeviantART page. I am on there anonymously. Umm...I'm on there not because I (pause).... It's not because I enjoy putting my stories on there. It's (pause)...I most enjoy helping others create, (pause)...kind of help them find their own stories, I guess. I think it's more rewarding to help someone else be creative because creativity is so limited... (personal interview, 12/18/12).

Adrienne's response seemed to explain her perception of her DeviantART online activity as a safe place, yet still just a place, in which she could practice her skills and to craft her art anonymously, without any restrictions or censorship. It was a place where she could assume the

identity that she, herself, had crafted, and through this identity her powers seemed limitless. In addition, Adrienne told me that she valued DeviantART as a space in which she could play an active, almost nurturing, role in helping other anonymous contributors to create both themselves and their stories. In light of her explanation, I began to understand Adrienne's inclination to oppose what she believed to be the technological threat of multimodality, seeing it as an impingement on an artistic enclave. To her, the writing that she did for DeviantART seemed pure, natural, traditional, and classical despite the fact that she was writing on a computer and that DeviantART only existed due to technological innovations, whereas multimodality, in her perception, was somewhat tainted, forced, alien, and definitely non-traditional. Though I tried repeatedly to explain that Deviant Art was, in fact, a multimodal site, and that both were, in effect, focused on the same communicative and artistic principles, I realized that I was treading on sacred ground and that Adrienne ultimately would have to reach this conclusion by herself.

The Rise of the Machines

In fact, I thought this conclusion had been reached when Adrienne stood before the class at the end of the fall semester and announced that she had made a film for her final presentation. Seemingly in the embrace of multimodality, Adrienne had crafted a film based on a script that she had written which had a title and credit page, a soundtrack, and actors recruited from her dorm. However, the quote on the screen that preceded the first scene in the film gave me pause. It read, "The real problem is not whether machines think but whether men do."—B.F. Skinner.

As the plot unfolded, the class and I witnessed a scenario in which first Adrienne's roommates, and then Adrienne herself, were transformed into zombie-like creatures as the result of reading a social networking text on their cell phones. The film then concluded with the following quote:

"Men will become tools of their tools"—Henry David Thoreau.

As I sat there laughing appreciatively at Adrienne's clever knack for utilizing very well designed properties of multimodality to veil her personal commentary, I shifted my eyes from the screen to her face in time to catch the gleam in her eyes and a big, mischievous smile on her face. This was a side of Adrienne's identity that was rarely glimpsed in class, for in that moment of accomplishment and achievement there was no sign of distance at all. It is ironic and almost typical at this point, that in making her point about the evils of technology Adrienne had wrapped it up in a big, beautiful, multimodal package. Thus, once again, multimodality has served as the conduit for the demonstration of increasingly proficient written and cognitive abilities, the medium through which identity, in this case, is literally revealed, tracked, and captured, and also which provides evidence of Adrienne's full-throttle thrust away from debilitating labels.

Epilogue

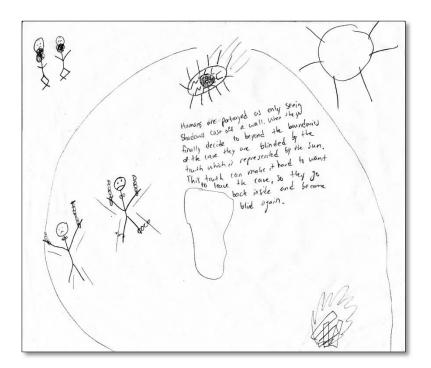
The fall semester proved to be a time of transformation, renewal, and increased agency for Adrienne. Despite her repeated denunciation of the use of multimodality in a college composition class, she excelled in the conceptualization and actualization of multimodal projects. With every academic victory—and there were many—Adrienne's visible identity shifts moved her farther away from her labels and closer to a stronger and extremely agentive identity.

A New Chapter

As we move forward into the spring 2013 semester, we find that although Adrienne's stance on the inclusion of multimodality into the composition class has not overtly changed, her multimodal visual and written reflection on Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" conveys her continued ability to communicate effectively through an increasingly nuanced semiotic system.

In her sketch below, we see many of the same representations of meaning that were presented by the rest of the class, as discussed above. Adrienne, however, demonstrates her deeper

understanding of the power of semiotic signs through her incorporation into the drawing of what appears to be something akin to an all-seeing eye which becomes the focal point of the sketch. Her placement of the eye, whose exterior details seems to emulate those of her sun drawing, holds significance which is underscored by Adrienne's notes on the page in which she omits the more frequently used term knowledge and instead, emphasizes the metaphorical properties of key elements associated with the eye such as sight and blindness, equating each of them respectively with illumination/enlightenment and darkness/ignorance.



Moreover, in her written reflection, the all-seeing eye seems also to signify the more personal "I," as indicated by Adrienne's shift in the narrative from the removed discussion of 'him,' the slave, to the self-inclusive "we," when she writes, "Plato's message is that we are all in a "cave" until we look into ourselves and become enlightened. Until that point we are stuck chained to a wall only looking at shows, which are only false truth[s]" (Adrienne's reflective

essay, 2/25/13). As will be discussed, the personal "I" continues to play a significant role in Adrienne's choices regarding her identity-related shifts and situatedness throughout the semester.

It is significant to note that there also seems to be a greater sense of confidence and freedom in Adrienne herself, as indicated by her answers to the spring personal interview on which she shifts from the lengthier, complete sentence answers of the fall into answers that predominately consist simply of a word or phrase. For example, in the fall Adrienne responds to the question, "If identity were a 'toolkit' what would your toolkit consist of?" by stating: A book to stand for writing and reading/ A Russian Flag to represent where I'm from/ The color Red/A violin, piano and guitar/wisdom. Yet, in the spring, her answers are simply: A pen/paper/A classic Novel/A smile/Innovation. Similarly, her fall 2012 answers to the question, "How would you describe yourself as a student?" are as follows: "I have good work ethic."/"I try to take as many notes as I can."/ "I listen during class to make sure that I understand the material" become radically different in the spring: "Independent"/ "Free-Thinking"/"Innovative"(Adrienne's spring personal interview, 01/30/14). What seems also to be of great significance is that Adrienne no longer lists her address as being located on campus, instead she enters her home address and adds the name of her on-campus residence hall in parenthesis, as if to signify its diminished role.

Collectively, these answers seem to mirror the shift that has taken place in Adrienne's in and out-of-class identities. The change in address would also seem to indicate that Adrienne is less allied with the student identity with which she began her freshman year. Moreover, in the spring semester, there is a noticeable change in the tone and texture of Adrienne's assignments, as evidence of a still respectful, yet somewhat rebellious, or perhaps, free-spirited, aspect of her identity seems to be emerging. As this new identity seems to imprint itself upon the page of

virtually every essay that Adrienne wrote during this semester, in the section that follows I will offer excerpts from these pages accompanied by a discussion of their significance.

The main theme that seems to drive Adrienne's more argumentative side is, once again, the inclusion of technology/multimodality in the college composition class. Although her first essay, "I Learn in Pictures," in which she responds to an article written in favor of the integration of multimodality into the classroom starts off mildly enough with the following sentence, "The use of multimodality for the millennial generation is essential because of how much we incorporate technology into our daily lives," by the end of her one page essay, Adrienne finds the opportunity to insert her own opinion into the discussion when she writes, "Although using multimodality is a way to revolutionize the classroom and make it easier to learn, I think it hinders a students (sic) ability to look at a text and come up with there (sic) own way of being able to understand it" (01/30/13). Since this assignment was technically a reflection paper, Adrienne's insertion of her own opinion is justified. However, what is more to the point is that the essay, overall, is not quite up to her usual standards, as it seems to be written quickly, almost urgently. In the above example, we see that the first clause of the introductory statement is incomplete and that there are basic punctuation and spelling errors. Yet, since we are in a very early stage of the semester, these missteps puzzle me, but are of little consequence, as I know that it sometimes takes a while for students to get their writing rhythm back after a long break.

In the next reaction paper, written in response to Editor Adam Gopnik's (2008) "Introduction" to *The Best American Essays*, Adrienne again begins the essay with her old flair, making astute observations such as the following:

The odd object is the most complex out of the ones Gopnik talks about because it takes a simple object such as a "molar" and turns it into a metaphor for "morality"...This idea is similar to symbolism because it holds the idea that an

object is not just an object it actually stands for something greater. For example Gopnik uses the idea of the "goldfish" dying, which represents or symbolized (sic) death as a whole" (Adrienne's "Molars and Morality" reflection, 02/08/13).

Scarcely missing a beat, Adrienne has successfully grasped, processed, and articulated the complex ideas that Gopnik has discussed in his essay. Adrienne continues this even-handed analysis for nearly two-thirds of her essay before she perceives Gopnik's comment on the decline of the essay as the signal to transition into yet another discussion about the rise of technology and the death of the written word, as we see in the following excerpt:

The author is also making the point that the essay is in decline and that in a time from now it will be rare to come across one. A blog had now become less than 140 words with sites such as Twitter and Tumblr; the idea of capturing the essence of a person is just a short blurb. No one is taking the time to write essays such as "How does it feel to grow old," or "Help a friend with AIDS" because no one has the time to sit down and read anymore. Although life can still be so simple, it has become complex with the emergence of smartphones and laptops; no one seems to have the time or will to read a humorous essay when they can get a laugh from a picture with text. The essay may not totally be done with, but it is harder to find a good essayist who has the desire to write for the purpose of being a "master of our common life" (Adrienne's "Molars and Morality" reflection, 02/08/13).

While Adrienne's authorial stance, or what Ivanic (1998) would refer to as her discoursal voice, is becoming stronger and stronger in each essay, it is still politely cloaked in an almost theoretical type of discussion. Yet, as we move farther along into the semester, we no longer see the restrained and deferential introduction to the essay. Instead, Adrienne begins her reaction to the journal article "The Arts, New Literacy and Multimodality" by Peggy Albers and Jerome Harste, with the powerful declaration, "Multimodality, the arts and new literacies should be kept out of the college composition classroom because these techniques interfere with a student's ability to learn how to actually write." In this significantly entitled essay, "The Life and Death of the Classroom," Adrienne continues to make similar assertions throughout, such as:

"In order for students to be able to strengthen writing skills they have to be able to both read and spell correctly in the classroom. These skills will not be met, if visual text and technology replaces grammar books and classic novels, which students have used for decades to learn how to compose an essay."

"The only tools that can teach a college level student are traditional methods such as reading and writing real text."

"The only way a student will be able to compose a solid paper is by learning how to write with structure through traditional teaching methods."

"The college composition classroom is not a place to be experimenting with new techniques that may or may not help a student learn how to construct their paper."

"New modes, such as the arts and new literacies have no place within the college composition classroom."

In these sentences, extracted from Adrienne's brief, one and half page reflection paper, we are provided with clear representations of the stylistic changes in which she moves from her previous, more temperate suggestive statements to declarative sentences. We also hear the change in authorial tone that drives these sentences, as Adrienne is no longer mincing words, but instead, is adamant about her objection to the incorporation of technology and multimodality—as well as, surprisingly, new modes, the arts, and new literacies—into the college composition class. Yet, in counterpoint to the tone and style manifested in Adrienne's class-related assignments, I continued to receive sporadic emails such as the following one sent after an in-class viewing of the film, *The Matrix*:

I think one of [the] biggest reasons this genre of film has become so popular is because people are so obsessed with death. Death goes into the unknown and people are fascinated with the unknown. This also goes for Science [F]iction movies and shows. New technology is created and I think it interest a lot of viewers because it's not enough to be in the world we are in now, everyone want the latest gadget and people are very curious about what it would be like to have a flying car or live on a space ship or even use a hologram.

To go along with the death fascination, I think people just like watching others suffer or be in pain. The harsh reality is that a lot of people go on

social networking sites to see fights between people, to cyber bully and too see the world's latest tragedy. This genre wasn't as popular in the 90s because social networking was still in production and no one (sic) had it. People didn't sit on their phones or computers for hours watching people fail. It wasn't a common interest yet. The fascination started when it was 1999 and everyone thought the world was going to end in the year 2000, That's when we start[ed] seeing shows like Buffy the Vampire Slyer, Angel and Charmed, it all focused on the supernatural and the dead.

When social networking became popular, we started to see shows like Gossip Girl, Degrassi, One Tree Hill and 90210 which focused on gossiping about other people and drama. This is also why reality shows are so popular, it (sic) portrays "real" people struggling in "real" situations.

Movies, books and shows often reflect the common interest at the time. In 1922 Nosferatu came out which was the first vampire movie, [when people say that.] It became a huge interest and that movie was followed by many vampire and werewolf type movies. In 1968, George A. Romero produced the first Zombie movie, "Night of the [L]iving Dead" which was followed by dozens of zombie films. This movie also came out at the end of the Vietnam war, so people were interested in it based on how the Cold War was impacting everyone's lives. Instead of watching the war on TV they could go out and watch an apocalyptic Film which provided the same impact, but it wasn't real.

In the 21st century we had the H1N1 outbreak and brought on movies like I am Legend, 28 days later, and Contagion which all had to do with sickness.

Resident Evil, Planet of the Apes, Book of eli, The postman, The Road, 28 weeks later, A boy and his dog and many more revolve around apocalyptic scenarios (personal email, 02/06/13).

In this engaging and almost essay-length email, Adrienne has invited me to participate in a continuation of our class discussion, explaining that, "This (email) was just my thoughts I had at the end of class today and I just had to get them out since there wasn't really an opportunity to talk about them in full" (personal email, 02/06/12). The fact that Adrienne wants to continue this conversation with me as opposed to sharing it with the class during our next session is an indication of the convivial nature of our out-of-class relationship. More importantly, it is another text-based artifact of Adrienne's identity which is shifting again toward a repositioning of the perceived

hierarchy of power that traditionally exists between the teacher and the student. In purposely choosing an out-of-class situation in which to express herself I, the teacher, become the recipient of a lecture delivered by Adrienne, the student. Moreover, while Adrienne's tone with me is conversational, it is also never deferential. However, there is never an indication that Adrienne's efforts are arrogant or rude, rather her assertiveness seems to be an attempt to distinguish herself from the other students through a demonstration of her contemplative and philosophical nature, thereby hoping to attain a more egalitarian position in our relationship.

In addition, the rich content of her email reveals further identity-related issues. As Adrienne directs her focus, once again, to the topic of technology, we find that it is no longer technology that is under indictment; rather it is the people who use it. networking sites in particular, Adrienne moves from a discussion of the prevalent sociological fascination with the endless possibilities for excitement and experience afforded in a virtual world to one that seemingly berates a society that has become morbidly fascinated by death, pain, and tragedy. It is a world in which meanness, hate and cyber-bullying have become the favorite pastime for people of all ages. What is of particular interest in this discussion is Adrienne's reference to unwarranted cruelty in the form of cyber-bullying, as it is reminiscent of the pain and sense of otherness inflicted on her by the mean-spirited words and actions of her grade school classmates. While there is no mention of the use of technology in Adrienne's account of her childhood ordeal, this reference seems to suggest that there is a connection between Adrienne's antipathy toward the cruelty exhibited by people in online social networks via technology and the cruelty that she experienced within the social network of her classrooms. And, although Adrienne does not use language that overtly demonstrate her anger and resentment, she does employ a sarcastic tone which is sometimes enhanced through the selective use of quotation marks as indicators of her facetious intent.

The Deviance of her Art

Interestingly, despite her clearly stated feelings, when it came time to participate in what, I consider to be a total immersion in multimodality through our trip to the University gallery to see the "50/50" exhibit, Adrienne seemed totally responsive and engaged. During the museum session which has been discussed at length above, Adrienne partnered with Mischka (below) as they carefully and thoughtfully examined their chosen piece of art. Then, together they processed the information that they had gleaned from their viewing and created their version of the story behind the picture.



Surprisingly, though Adrienne and Mischka had created an interesting story, Adrienne did not choose this painting as the subject of her multimodal creation. Instead, moving in a completely opposite direction, she chose Ms. Richner's hand-out, below, as her inspiration.

50/50 Cel	ebrating Fifty Years of the	Hofstra University M	luseum
,	Spring 201		
	Reading for Details a	nd Meaning	
bserve and Dis	cover a Theme		
With your s word bank	small group, go to your assi in #2.	gned work of art and	discuss it using the
2. Circle 2-3 v	words from the word bank t	pelow that <u>BEST</u> apply	to your work.
	WORD E	BANK	
Chaos	Movement	Tension	Isolation
Solitude	Order	Boundaries	Detachment
		Memory	Energy
Reality	Mystery	wemory	Live, B1
Reality Action	Quiet	wemory	Zite 67
Action	Quiet narrative properties of the v		



This action seems to denote a sense of quasi-rebellion on Adrienne's part as she has cleverly circumvented the terms of the assignment which suggested that one of the works of art in the gallery should be the inspiration for the students' multimodal creations. In so doing, Adrienne technically fulfills the guidelines of the assignment while still managing to accomplish it on her own terms. However, Adrienne's 'rebellion' in this case, seems to be more of an act of agentive daring as Ivanic (1998) might say, rather than an outright challenge to authority, in that she ultimately melds technology and traditional into a cleverly designed re-envisioning of Ms. Richner's black and white hand-out.

Adrienne has chosen to use technology to ascribe certain personalized characteristics to her layout such as the gradient green background that moves from deep saturated tones to a brighter, almost yellow ascendancy. She has also created her own identity-reflective word list which she has typed in basic black and enclosed within parenthesis which figuratively act as a safe enclosure inside which stand her guarded personality traits, yet the words that she has

selected to develop her pictorial story are bright yellow and spread sun-like across the upper circumference of the page. Radiating down from these identity tags are bright yellow lines which direct the viewer's eye to the cut-out images of her symbolic self. These are cleverly pasted onto paper tags which have been folded and glued to the page and which give the cut-out shapes a sense of dimension. Surprisingly, this traditional and very personal touch actually seems to provide more literal and figurative depth to the picture than might be afforded through technology. To the extreme left of the page stands a technologically crafted dream-catcher into which, as the pictorial narrative suggests, Adrienne's hopes, and aspirations will flow.

In analyzing the data provided by Adrienne's multimodal re-envisionment of her museum visit, I believed that I saw within it what appeared to be an embedded clue which seemed to link her identity images with the technological component instantiated by the dream-catcher. Thus, I felt that in order to better understand Adrienne's views it might be helpful to visit her online alter ego, the Nobel Queen of Lothaire. To this end, I sent an email to Adrienne in which I expressed my interest in the DeviantART site, in response to which Adrienne promptly supplied me with a link to her page and an invitation to "feel free to go through anything you'd like" (personal email, 03/21/13). Upon accessing Adrienne's page, I was greeted by literally volumes of her work which included short stories, poems, essays, as well as instructional aides and tips for writing. The breadth of her work was prodigious as was the quality of her writing which seemed to be even better than the writing that she produced for class. The stories and essays were almost devoid of any spelling or grammatical missteps and the analytical and critical thinking that fueled her writing was focused, logical, and organized. Moreover, her discoursal voice was strong, powerful, outspoken, and supremely confident. As I continued to study the content I was

able to confirm my belief that the identity exhibited in Adrienne's recent classwork was an academically modified version of the Noble Queen of Lothaire.

Apparently, unable to completely suppress the stronger persona of the Noble Queen, Adrienne, perhaps unconsciously, had begun to incorporate into her course assignments the agency and freedom offered to her through her anonymous postings at the deviantART site. This transference in identity would also explain Adrienne's gradual repositioning of her perceived compliant situatedness (Chiseri-Strater, 1996) as a student into one that was literally and figuratively shifted into a position of power which was nearly equivalent to mine as the instructor. However, I once again stress that these agentive strides undertaken by Adrienne were never aggressive or disrespectful in any way, nor were they disruptive of my efficacy as a teacher. Rather, I recognized the supportive nature of Adrienne's agency and came to value the insider input that she was able to provide through her now more often responses in class and through her continued email observations and suggestions such as the following:

I'm not sure if this will work or not, but I was thinking about activities that relate to the current agenda. So we're writing a persuasion piece, and I know people were having a hard time coming up [with] reasons as to how their argument could be backed up.

So I was thinking maybe show a short clip that's on a controversial topic, which would spark debate. And as a little exercise, we would have to give arguments for and against this clip. This would give us practice on coming up with reasons that back up the arguments and maybe help understand how to persuade better.

Just a thought, I'm not really sure how it'll exactly work (personal email, 03/11/13).

Bridging the Gap

Although Adrienne's resistance to technology/multimodality as a part of the curriculum began to take on an edgier tone in her written work, as has been demonstrated through our email

exchanges, no tension existed between the two of us at any time regarding this or any other matter, and our in class and out of class relationship remained almost collaborative as we moved into the last few days of the semester and the final multimodal presentations. As Adrienne stood before the class, she told us that she did not want to use technology in her presentation, nor did she want to stand and read either the long poem or short story that she had written (Appendices), as she felt "as if the point I was trying to tell everyone about wouldn't have been clear" (personal email, 05/03/13). Instead, Adrienne had decided to deliver an oral presentation to the class in which she would talk about the central theme of both her poem and short story which focused on the intrinsic beauty and veracity associated with artistic nudity vs. societal and online censorship (though fictional, I would later come to learn that these works were representative of a conflict pertaining to freedom of expression on the Deviant ART website). As her only visual, Adrienne displayed a bridge made of popsicle sticks that she had constructed and explained that the bridge was a metaphor for the connections that we, the audience could make after hearing her story.



After this introduction, Adrienne proceeded to explain to us that the naked man, about whom she writes, stands in the middle of the bridge and that each end of the bridge represents a choice: to be one that opposes, or censors nudity or one that accepts and supports the freedom of

expression represented by nudity. She went on to say that the nudity exhibited by the man was classically asexual in nature and traditionally stood for pride in the beauty of the body as well as in its health and strength. As she further explained to me in an email the following day,

The bridge was a visual representation of the word "Connection." I believe the things we believe about things have a lot to do with the connections we make with them. When looking at an artistic nude you can either make the connection that is sexual based on your morals or religious beliefs, or you can make the connection that it is inspirational, creative and overall a representation of that artist's emotions (personal email, 05/03/13).

In concluding her presentation, Adrienne faced her audience and asked that we take time to deeply reflect on our personal connection to the topic of censorship. As the applause died down I commended Adrienne on a job well done and noted that although she had claimed that she had not "done anything technological," she did, however, use multimodality in her presentation, as demonstrated by her visual component, the handmade bridge.

And, while Adrienne seemed taken aback by this realization, I, too, came to a new realization about Adrienne's perception, or rather, misperception, of the roles played by technology and multimodality in my vision of our classroom curriculum when, a few days later, Adrienne's beliefs are made more clear in the following email:

I know at the beginning I didn't really have a clear answer as to why I decided to join and use deviantART, but I think the overall reason is that I have never really been able to get along with people my own age. I found that the community of dA was a lot more mature in a sense because everyone had a focus. They focused on either their talent of writing, painting or photography. I think when you have a creative outlet, which takes time, you tend to be a lot more mature in a sense because you are in a way disciplining yourself...

I know what you are probably thinking, I am succumbing to the use of Multi modalilty. Well, [i]n a way, I am. But I am also careful not to let myself get close to these people on dA. I only use it to help others with their writing and to write guides and the occasional story. I think in today's world it is very easy for a person to get wrapped up in life on the Internet. People can become obsessed with things on Facebook, Twitter, Tumbler and Youtube.

I actually think a lot of people already have, which is why I am a little cautious when it comes to using anything social media wise.

The main reason I was against using technology in my presentation was because technology gets rid of the creativity. Unless you are a professional editor or musician, it is really hard to do anything but putting pictures together with a random song. I think technology convinces us that it is creative and we lose the real ideas behind it. Someone had to think of the story, they had to put it together on paper, they had to create the dialogue and decide what to do. With technology we lose the people who have worked hard to create their piece. When we see a movie the first thing we comment on is the use of CGI and special effects, we don't think about the story or the months it took to put a script together, or how much thought it took to put everything together.

I do not think that technology should be in the writing classroom. Technology does not have the ability to think for us (yet), which is why it is important to teach and develop creative skills in the student. Not with power points or videos, but with their own mind. The writing class is supposed to teach analytical skills, which the student can use in any class or future job. I know my argument is a little weak because I know a lot of people would debate that a student can be creative with technology.

Even though deviantART is on the internet, most people create their art off the site. I and many other writers always hand write their stories, some people travel to other countries to take pictures and many have studios they use to paint. dA is not really a tool of multi modality, it is more a tool of sharing creativity. We are not using it to help us create our work...but to learn from others. If that makes sense.

I think that is long enough:)

Seizing the opportunity, once again, to clear up Adrienne's misconceptions over the creative and agentive theorizing that espouses multimodality as well as her confused conflation of technology and multimodality, I sent the following response:

It is...interesting that you are budging a bit on your multimodality stand.

However, don't confuse multimodality with social networking, as they really are two very separate concepts. And, I still have to disagree with you about your position that multimodality/technology drains one of their creativity. I feel that it inspire and encourages creativity. I have seen it work time and time again. Students who can't find their "voice" in their writing, seem to locate it and own it within their multimodal projects. The presentations that I see do not always

consist of just a few pictures and a song. I have seen brilliant work, inspired work. Moreover, I don't always ask that technology be used. If the class seems ...to really embrace the concept behind multimodality, they can create in whatever modality suits them (personal email, 06/03/13).

This message is followed by a long period of silence which ends as the fall 2013 semester begins with the receipt of the following email:

Hey!

Hope everything is going well this semester.

Walmart kept me pretty busy all summer, worked 10 pm to 7am, which wasn't bad, but not really ideal either.

Now that I am taking all business classes, I see why it is important to teach technology in the classroom, but I still stand strong on my position that it does not belong in a literature/writing class. I understand that it is how some people learn or express themselves, but sometimes we have to learn how to overcome our weakness. I think if we learn how to manage all sorts of projects within different mediums we will become well rounded. If someone who is strong in public speaking must take public speaking classes, or if someone who is not a strong writer, must continue writing in order to improve. This does not mean that they will never be able to create a powerpoint presentation or a video for class, but it means those things will be on hold until they can grasp the basic concepts, which are things such as reading, writing, grammar, critical thinking and analysis.

While, I do believe people should do what is best for them learning wise, it does not mean they should put off other areas, which seem more difficult to understand or put into practice.

Let me know when you are free and I'll stop by your office. :) Have a good one, Adrienne

I did not make an issue of Adrienne's continued tendency to see multimodality as a purely technological tool although it is difficult for me to accept the notion that she cannot comprehend the concept that I am espousing, as she is far too intelligent and insightful. I begin to consider the idea that it is not so much a case that Adrienne *can*not understand, but that she *will* not understand.

The Student as Signified

What I believe is being evidenced in Adrienne's seeming refusal to see multimodality in a different light, is her fight to preserve the identity that she has been able to create through her writing. As the Noble Queen of Lothaire, Adrienne has flourished; she is giver of life through the technological medium that gave her back her life. As support of this belief, I, again, reference the memorable lines from Adrienne's literacy narrative in which she tells us:

If I couldn't write, I don't think I would have ever recovered my sense of loss and the anger that came with it. The ability to create a story gives me the power to create another life and to create a character that represents a part of me. Since I found writing, I can't say I regret anything that's ever happened to me. Being adopted and facing PTSD isn't what defines me, what does define me is my ability to show everyone who I really am through writing" (Adrienne's literacy narrative (10.02.12).

Also, in reviewing some of Adrienne's most animated objections to multimodality, the arts, the new literacy studies, and technology in the college composition class I came to believe that there was a persistent misunderstanding between Adrienne and me, regarding not only the meaning behind the aforementioned aspects of my curriculum but also about my pedagogical and curricular intentions regarding their use. Although I made numerous efforts to clarify my intentions quite often during the course of two semesters, in truth, I believe that while multimodality was the overarching theme of the class, I offered a balanced blend of traditional as well as non-traditional assignments. However, based on the data, it appears that Adrienne was reacting to what she refers to during our late fall interview as the "dummying down" of subject matter within this particular program (personal interview, 12/18/12). In fact, during this same interview, Adrienne expressed dissatisfaction with the program in general. She told me that she had been under the impression that her classes within the program were going to help to enhance and build upon her already existing skills. Instead, she felt that the majority of her classes were no different from her

high school classes. Essentially, she did not feel challenged. I explained to her that she had perceived the purpose of the program correctly and that for many students our curriculum was challenging and did help them to develop stronger skills which would help them to better navigate their way through the remainder of their college classes and on into their careers. Furthermore, I pointed out that, especially when it came to writing, she had far more skill than the average firstyear student. In addition, she loved writing, whereas many other students considered writing as well as the writing class to be a chore, and therefore, did not embrace writing with the passion that Adrienne demonstrated. While she acknowledged that many of today's Millennial students needed to be "spoon-fed" their lessons because of their lack of interest in many subject manners as well as their tendency to be easily distracted, Adrienne still seemed dissatisfied with her placement in the program. Interestingly, although Adrienne had, in this same interview, indicated that neither she nor any other students in the program with whom she was familiar felt marginalized or labeled by their placement in the program, this abrupt turn in the conversation seemed to indicate otherwise (personal interview, 12/18/12). In fact, in an email sent the day after our interview, an excerpt from which appears below, Adrienne again expresses her dissatisfaction with both the program and with the quality of today's Millennial students:

I think the classroom has gotten to the point where students just come in and expect to be told all the information (I know this is how it was in my core class). When we are told all the information, there is no thinking involved. Without thinking a student won't be able to take the information and turn it into something creative.

I remember when I was in elementary school, class was more fun because the teachers would allow students to respond and really think of ways to express their ideas, either through projects or something simple and getting into groups and trying to come up with the best idea. Now the student comes in to a classroom, sits down and the teacher or prof talks for two hours, the student takes notes and then prepares for either the essay or exam. This mode of education isn't teaching the student to think, it's really limiting them because the student is not

thinking they are just processing information that is constantly spewed at the (personal email, 12/19/12).

Therefore, it seems that some of Adrienne's dissatisfaction with her experience in other classes in the program as well as her growing sense of discomfort with her placement in what she has now begun to perceive of as a marginalized setting, may have surfaced in my class where Adrienne knew that I would afford her the academic freedom to fully express these feelings.

I also believe that Adrienne did not realize that in my view, multimodality is not so much about technology as it is about the ability to offer a variety of ways in which a student can make meaning. Further, I think of multimodality as an alternate way of stressing the traditional methods of composition, as discussed in Chapter 4, such as pre-writing, design, and revision, without enforcing the heavy-handed methodology that usually accompanies the teaching of "traditional" composition. Yet, the biggest misunderstanding between us was centered on the nature of the deviantART site. Adrienne, in her efforts to defend and preserve this sacred spot in which she felt safe and in which her imagination and creativity could flourish, continued to fail to realize that what she most treasured about the deviantART site was the multimodal affordances that it offered to her. Instead, she saw it as a bastion of tradition as, I believe, she tended to project her own standards onto the site, much like a proud mother sees a reflection of herself in the talents of her beloved child. We must remember that this is a place in which, as Adrienne tells us, she feels as if she has "the power to create a new life."

In a somewhat related fashion, once she has successfully transitioned out of the program Adrienne sent me another email in which she informed me that she was "currently studying Russian, and I am waiting to see if I can pick it up quickly since I spoke it until the age of 7/8" (personal email, 09/10/13). In this message I sense Adrienne's announcement of the beginning of

a new identity phase, a "new life," so to speak. This is an interesting and very telling move forward on Adrienne's part, sort of a precursor to what will follow, as it is only when Adrienne steps into my classroom again in the spring of 2014 that she begins to see multimodality and herself, in a new light.

Discussion

"A wise man once said that our judgments do not reflect what we actually see, but instead are constant reminders of the insecurity we have within ourselves" ("The Body is a Bridge," Adrienne's poem, 12/03/13)

In this chapter I have discussed how the inclusion of a multimodal social semiotic approach into a college composition curriculum has served as the conduit through which a key participant in this study, Adrienne, was able to undergo significant and positive identity shifts, find and assert her authorial/discoursal voice, gain agency against the imposition of existing power constructs and subsequent labels denoting deficiency, and demonstrate increased mastery of her writing skills.

In this very unusual case study, I have discussed the ways in which, ironically, Adrienne's continued oppositional stance to the inclusion of multimodality in the writing class became the medium of her agentive transformation. Because a multimodal social semiotic approach to composition studies recognizes and values the individualistic proclivities of the writer, Adrienne utilized this academic freedom to enact many identities as she also sought to obtain more agency against the social, familial, historical, and institutional powers that had previously marginalized both her academic and personal performances. Discussion in this area demonstrated that Adrienne had been forced to yield her academic agency to the very tradition-oriented, institutional power exerted over her in the Russian orphanage where she was abruptly

placed as a child. Having relinquished her voice to an early oppressor and faring no better in the American schools where her ESL related learning issues were disparagingly dismissed as cognitive deficiency, Adrienne sought to regain power and sense of self through her out-of-school writing.

Further discussion revealed that this earlier academic experience had forged disparate/dichotic identities that remained part of Adrienne's collegiate persona and were exhibited in both her classroom and written performances. On one hand, it was the distanced, silent, and inscrutable Adrienne who occupied the classroom, and on the other hand, a very present, vocal, and opinionated Adrienne who inhabited the pages of her written work. The common thread between these two personas/performances was the focus on excellence. Thus, while Adrienne was provided an environment in which she could freely, yet consistently, express her opposition to my curricular inclusion of multimodality, due, precisely to my embrace of a multimodal approach to college composition, the discussion indicates that she produced not only exemplary multimodal projects but also found voice and agency through these projects. Moreover, the adaption on my part of a multimodal method of analysis encouraged a nontraditional reading of her text-based written work into which Adrienne had embedded multiple identity-related linguistic images that revealed aspects of Adrienne's former and current identities. Consequently, this process allowed both of us to view her academic skills through a more enlightened and appreciative perspective.

The discussion also indicates that occupancy within this multimodal and socioculturally infused environment provided Adrienne with the power to resituate herself within a marginalized setting through her initiation of an ongoing email conversation between the two of us. In addition, as the discussion shows, the agency obtained through these actions also provided

Adrienne with the ability to shift not only her identity status but also her position from one as solely a receiver of information to one of co-provider. Moreover, ultimately, detailed discussion of Adrienne's online alter-ego, the Noble Queen of Lothaire, which was maintained at the deviantART website, further reinforced the transference of written skills, practiced and developed in a multimodal technologically infused online site, to the everyday literacy practices of the participant.

Therefore, we see, through the discussion above, that despite Adrienne's many efforts to decry the value of the infusion of multimodality into the college composition class, it is, in fact, multimodality that has provided her with the agency, power, and enhanced verbal and written skills to refute her marginalized status and to assume a less fragmented and more whole identity. As she has so insightfully written:

"...And the wise man repeats, we burn our bridges in anger, /but build new ones to connect..." ("The Body is a Bridge," Adrienne's poem, 12/03/13).

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Chapter 6

Identities in Play

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss Sean, a first-year college student and student athlete who, as such, enters this marginalized program already relegated to the academic periphery by institutional labels and accompanying negative perceptions. Traditionally, institutional and faculty perceptions of the academic abilities of student-athletes are predicated on the stereotypical image of the student who, even in the best case scenario, will barely make it through the semester with the lowest possible passing grade. As McHugh, et al (1995), citing Seller, (1992) notes, "It is assumed, particularly at large institutions, that an athlete is socially inept and does not do well in the classroom" p. 217. Moreover, as noted by Simons, et al (2007), "Overall, studies of student and faculty perceptions of athletes found negative attitudes towards intercollegiate athletes concerning their academic ability and motivation consistent with the dumb jock stereotype" (p. 3). Therefore, the student athlete seems destined to enter the University with a perceptually based and discursively sustained pre-assigned "I-identity" reflective of what Gee (2000-2001) calls, the "institutional perspective" (p. 102). To make matters worse, if that student should come to be placed by the University into an academic support program, whether it is for falling short of the pre-determined criteria for entry based on SAT or GPA scores, such as is the case with Sean, or simply to reinforce skills that generally develop over time and experience through maturation, that student falls victim to a second institutionally affixed and discursively sustained label and accompanying I-identity which suggests that the student is somehow cognitively deficient and, therefore, academically underprepared for college level work (Gee, 2000-2001).

Sean, brings with him to the University two additional labels of learning disabled (LD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) that he has carried, respectively, since first grade and junior high school, and which suggest cognitive and behavioral disorders. Gee (2000-2001) identifies the manifestation of these labels as an N-Identity which is commonly perceived of and treated as "a matter of "nature" (e.g., due to genes or neurological "defects") or of the "nature of the child" (e.g., the child's mind/brain as it has been modified by the child's earlier physical or social environment)" (p. 101). Gee is also careful to note that "N-Identities must always gain their force as identities through the work of institutions, discourse and dialogue, or affinity groups, that is, the very forces that constitute our other perspectives on identity" (p. 102).

So we see that, although Sean has not yet set foot into any university classroom, he has, already been negatively assessed, labeled, stereotyped, and marginalized. It is at this crossroads of identities imposed and ascribed that we turn to a discussion of Sean as he seeks to renegotiate his identity and sense of self within this new environment.

Sean's Story: For Love of the Game

Sean was a young man who sat in my classes during the fall 2012 and spring 2013 semesters, and whose charming grin belied the challenges that he faced on his way to the University. The son of a marine, Sean was born during his father's tour of duty in the First Gulf War. After finishing his tour, Sean's father became a policeman and he and his family settled on Long Island. Sean proudly told me that his father has since become "New York's top homicide cop" (personal interview, 12/18/12). Interestingly, Sean spoke mainly about his father and only mentioned his mother to discuss his birth. Sean's father seemed to have a great deal of influence on Sean's character formation. For example, Sean was always respectful and polite, adhering to the rules of etiquette associated with an officer and a gentleman both in person and in all of his

correspondence. Yet, as I grew to know Sean I realized that beneath the refinement of the officer and gentleman lay a rebellious and somewhat wild child. The origin of these conflicting identities was never identified by Sean, but he mentioned that his father had travelled a similar road and had ultimately become an alcoholic while he was still in college. Although he said that his father had "sobered up a few years ago," Sean noted that when he was younger and would get into trouble at school or at home his father would "smack [him] over the head" and that early on, he had learned that "not discipline, but fear—fear will make you act a certain way" (personal interview, 12/18/12). The pride with which Sean spoke of his father's status as a "cop" seemed to indicate that Sean no longer feared his father. However, it became clear that fear was still a motivating factor behind the lapses that Sean experienced in the classroom and on the playing field.

Sean had come to the University at the invitation of the Lacrosse team coach who had recruited him and, in effect, provided him with the opportunity to attend college. Sean's educational road to college was a rocky one. Thought to have a reading disability, Sean was placed in pull-out reading classes from first through third grade. As a result, Sean's resentment toward his early outsider status fueled an innate sense of rebellion that grew stronger as he moved through each grade. In junior high he was diagnosed with ADHD which may or may not have attributed to his generally poor performance in school. Sean admits that throughout his freshman and sophomore years in high school he had "no goal set" (personal interview, 12/18/12). He ran wild, hung out with the wrong crowd, drank, got into trouble and ignored his school work. At this stage in his life Sean didn't worry about succeeding academically, as he always "figured I would go into the Marines" (personal interview, 12/18/12). The only thing that kept Sean anchored to school was athletics. Always an athlete, Sean was a member of the

school's wrestling and football teams. Of his athletic performance Sean said, "I was mean, strong. I was a nut. I hit hard" (personal interview, 12/18/12). Early in his junior year of high school Sean was approached by his coach who wanted him to play Lacrosse, however, Sean said that he "thought it was a sissy sport" (personal interview, 12/18/12).

Ultimately Sean's coach convinced him to try out for the team and Sean soon found out that there was nothing "sissy" about the sport at all. He spoke of his experience and said. "I had the 'jitters' as I went onto the field. I had no hand to eye coordination. You need IO for Lacrosse, not for football. I just couldn't get it. The kids (other players) made fun of me. I hated it—hated it" (personal interview, 12/18/12). Experiencing a new sort of otherness initially triggered old feelings of resentment, and Sean immediately thought, "I'll show you" (personal interview, 12/18/12). Moreover, his perceived need of "I.Q." for Lacrosse and the belief that he somehow lacked it seemed to sting his pride, for although Sean never pushed himself to the limit in terms of school work, he firmly believed that he had the capability (field notes, 12/18/12) Yet, rather than fall back on his usual self-defeating behavior, in this situation Sean chose to be agentive rather than rebellious. He told me that he trained all of that summer and the only thought on his mind was to succeed. When he came back to school Sean was so good that he made the Junior Varsity (JV) team. From there on, Sean embraced his new identity as an achiever, earning As in his classes and garnering notice from college and university lacrosse scouts. Lacrosse scholarship offers began to pour in and, as Sean stated, "Brown, Harvard, Yale, and Georgetown were knocking my door. I had my congressman's approval to get into the Naval Academy. I was dead set on going to Annapolis. I wanted to become a Marine Lieutenant, and then I could get a job anywhere in the world" (personal interview, 12/18/12). However, when the time came to submit his transcripts to these schools he faltered, as he

explained, "I was too embarrassed. I took the SAT (Scholastic Achievement Test) four or five times but I couldn't get it" (personal interview, 12/18/12).

Eventually all of the schools withdrew their offers. This was a great loss for Sean, and the disappointment in himself and the entire situation sent him spiraling off course again, until Hofstra expressed interest in him. With a note of pride and gratitude in his voice Sean told me that "[the University] wanted me. Coach T. kept calling my home and saying "We want you, son. We look for a leader—a strongman" (personal interview, 12/18/12). Knowing that he was once again valued as an athlete, Sean went on to explain that his grades improved. Consequently, as soon as he committed to play Lacrosse for the University he received his invitation into the program which led him to my classroom.

Thus, Sean entered the program and my class with a long history of shifting identities between being the outsider and the insider. In fact, Sean's identity was still in transition as the semester began, wanting to wipe the academic and athletic slates clean by succeeding both in the class and on the field, but torn between the pressures and responsibilities of each one, he seemed unable to achieve a balance.

Sean's Game Face

On the first day of classes in the fall Sean entered the classroom late, but apologetic, and thereby established a pattern that would continue throughout the rest of our academic time together. Dressed in Lacrosse team sweats, Sean wore his new University identity proudly and with a bit of swagger, yet his response when his name was called during attendance was earnest and polite, and thus, another behavioral pattern was set (field notes, 09/02/12).

Throughout the three semesters in which we worked together, I was continually frustrated by Sean's late arrivals, absences, and assignments turned in far past the due date, all of which were usually attributed by Sean to his obligations as a student-athlete which included work-outs, practices, and games. Yet, admittedly, my displeasure with Sean's seeming disregard for deadlines and responsible behavior was almost always mollified by the intelligent and earnest way in which he would plead his case. In those moments when he knew that his academic success was in jeopardy, the braggadocio of the jock identity that he had assumed would disappear and instead, I would be facing the more academically aligned Sean who eloquently expressed his sincere apologies and swore that he would change his ways if only given another chance. And, of course, I would give him another chance because I knew that despite his erratic ways Sean had the intelligence to succeed. Thus, this cycle of shifting identities between the jock and the scholar continued. In fact, the only aspect of Sean that was constant was the continual vacillation of his identities between two extremes, the reluctant student/athlete and the aspiring intellectual/lacrosse star.

In my first real peek into Sean's academic identity, provided by the answers on his personal interview sheet, I was only able to see the outline of the persona he wished to project at the start of the semester. He revealed that his intended major was secondary education/History or business and that he would describe himself as a student with the words: "Apprehensive," "auditory learner," "love to free write." In terms of his reading skills, he claimed that they were "Good, I like historical literature as well as military history," that he read, "Maybe 1 or 2 books a month," and that "I read military books most often" (Sean's personal interview sheet, 09/03/12). Regarding his writing skills, he claimed to be "Very detailed," "Somewhat organized," and "Not very good spelling or grammar, however when I am able to focus an idea or form a opinion

through my writing, I can really write quite well" (personal interview sheet, 09/03/12). Interestingly, Sean's athletic identity was only mentioned once, and even then it was less significantly entered on his list of hobbies which also included, "Fishing, hunting, Golf" (Sean's personal interview sheet, 09/03/12). It is within these answers, which serve as my first true introduction to Sean, that he has chosen to provide me with a glimpse into the young man who seemed to set his athletic identity aside in order to emphasize his deeper investment in the more academically aligned self who was proud of his reading and writing skills. Interestingly, he had also chosen to make me aware of his academic insecurities through his acknowledgement of his difficulties with spelling and grammar.

While traces of Sean's different identities are detected in the answers above, it is Sean's response to the question, "If identity were a 'toolkit' what would your toolkit consist of?" that seem to provide the key components of Sean's latent core identity. In his answer, previously referred to above, Sean tells me that his toolkit would consist of the following items: "Hammer; Tape messure; Screw driver; Nails." He then goes on to state, "All tangible items that can be used for building. However looked at as intangable, they build a strong character" (Sean's personal interview sheet, 09/03/12). Sean's choice in naming actual tools along with the use of the verbs "build" and "building," seem to indicate that he considers himself to be a work- inprogress. Somehow, this unfinished sense of self seems even more significant when considered in conjunction with Sean's previous statement in which he candidly admits that as a student, he is "Aprehensive". As Sean will later reveal to me in an interview session, the apprehension he feels began in his early school years when institutional and familial agents had perceived of his reluctance to engage in academic reading lessons as evidence of a learning disability (interview session, 12/18/12). As a consequence of these perceptions, Sean received

his first institutional label and was made to attend pull-out reading classes from first grade through third grade. At the time of the interview, I asked Sean if anyone had ever tried to encourage him to read or had sensed his real abilities and told him, "Hey, you are really good at this." There was hesitation and a note of resentment in his voice when he responded by saying, "No, not one teacher. Some thought I was smart, but they didn't care; they felt I was too lazy." Sean goes on to tell me that he remembers thinking, "I'm not gonna show you what I can do," yet at the same time acknowledging his fears by telling himself, "I think that you don't want to come face to face with the fact that you are smart." (interview session, 12/18/12).

Sean seems to reference this event in his essay on the power of words entitled, "The Words That Move Me," when he writes:

It is almost ironic to think how words can absolutely destroy you, break you apart brick by brick and at the same time you are built back up stronger and wiser than ever before...Many times I find myself thinking how the power of words may have a different effect on different people. How can one determine how much power a word has? Considering all people perceive things differently does this mean one word has more power than another? Or are all words equally as powerful and their effect is directly related to a persons emotions. One could argue that the powers of words are intertwined with a person's perception of those specific words. Maybe the power of words does not manifest itself in the words themselves, rather in human perception and how words relate to that persons life. If so then words do still carry power and meaning with them, but we can control how much power they have over us as individuals (Sean's essay, 10/03/12).

While on the surface this essay may appear to be a rambling, stream of consciousness reiteration of the same idea, a closer read reveals the story of how a young boy's confidence, indeed, his very sense of self, has been destroyed and torn apart, "brick by brick". He further identifies the powerful role played by perception; perhaps the cool perception of a teacher who sees apprehension as laziness or deficiency, and the perception on the part of the boy who

understands the derision embodied in stinging words that directly "relate" to his own life. We also see the first moment in this boy's life when he decides that he will control both the power of words spoken and those that will remain unspoken.

Sean's attempt to obtain control over exactly when and how he will perform for his teachers signals a pivotal moment in the history of Sean's interactions with the educational institution. Merchant's observations (2005), drawing on work done by Holland, et al, (1996) highlights the significance of Sean's decision. As he writes,

...identity formation is defined in terms of "authoring the self" in dialogic interactions with "figured worlds". These figured worlds are cultural realms in which social and discursive practices are performed and developed. The individual has both "positionality" (a power relationship) and agency in a figured world, according to Holland and her colleagues. So, as individuals participate in a figured world they are positioned in it, but also have the potential to shape or reconstruct it (p. 304).

Aware that Sean has, more often than not, taken up a positionality of resistance in previous "figured worlds" of the classroom and that he is currently struggling with his opposing identities in an effort to embrace a narrative that will allow him to "come face to face with the fact that [he] is smart" (interview, 12/18/12), I began to examine his work in a new light, looking past the misspelling and faulty or omitted grammar and straight into the heart of his discourse. I realized that the spelling and grammatical errors in Sean's written work were not indications of a lack of skills; rather, they appeared to be remnants of a past learned behavior adapted by Sean as a failsafe against academic success. For example, in the essay above, Sean writes the word 'person's' three times. Granted, in two out of three instances the possessive apostrophe is not

used. However, it is correctly used on one occasion which indicates that Sean does have the knowledge. It also indicates that in his haste to get his words on the page, he has overlooked, neglected, or chosen to let these errors stand. Although I will make note of these lapses when I am commenting on his paper, I also offer words of praise and support in an effort to encourage what, I believe to be, Sean's attempt to shift his positionality from one of resistance to one of engaged participant.

Sean's Multimodal Playbook

Despite any apprehensions or labels. Sean was one of the few students who grasped the concept of multimodality almost immediately. In fact, during our interview session I had asked Sean what he felt about multimodality. He responded immediately, enthusiastically, and with a touch of pride by saying, "I love it! Remember, I explained it when we were in the library (at the Political Cartoon exhibit). After class, five other kids came up to me and wanted me to explain the assignment to them. I knew that you wanted us to express (our interpretations) in images and some words—but pictures." Sean's ability to assimilate abstract concepts and then to picture and frame them in his mind, proved to be a valuable asset, especially while working with multimodal concepts. Sean's multimodal projects always demonstrated a carefully balanced mix of text and technological affordances by way of color, font, and symbols, as demonstrated below in his multimodal response to our visit to the Political Cartoon exhibit entitled "War Drums". Here, we see that Sean has decided that he will not simply replicate the cartoon that he has viewed; instead he selects images that are synonymous with "Uncle Sam," who is a familiar symbolic representation of America. In addition, Sean's design choices are interesting in that the use of carefully placed text rather than actual drums provides a metaphorical representation of the menacing approach of the enemy. Furthermore, the intended break between the words,

"War" and "Drums" serves to simulate the image of the broken drums that the cartoonist has placed in the background of the original cartoon.



Although Sean chose to use a more traditional, print-based approach in completing his assignment in a seeming effort to align himself with the format of academic discourse, he had elected to use the patriotic colors of red and blue to highlight the typed font against a white background. Moreover, the patriotic and militaristic themes of the cartoon selected by Sean were somewhat reflective of his interests and identity in that they hearken back not only to the type of reading that he loved but also to answers on his personal interview sheet which indicated that his favorite move was *The Patriot* and his favorite hero(s) were, "Every one of our US Marines" (Sean's personal interview, 09/03/12). Because these are topics about which Sean is informed he easily grasped the cartoonist's underlying message as well as the multimodal purpose behind his

design concept. This is a chance for Sean to demonstrate evidence of his knowledge base, and so he proudly proceeded to write the following:

The political cartoon exhibit was not only informative but it gave a different perspective on politics and how they can be related to us. The exhibit I viewed was titled War Drums. It had many different aspects that not only caught my attention, but also captured my interest. It seemed to hold my interest with not only humor and art but political satire as well. The way the author designed the cartoon is what really the page. He used visual symbols that were made it jump off easy to recognize such as the Republican elephant and broken drums to represent the drums of war beating away. To coincide with the symbols he used excellent use of label's to show how each drum represented a different country of conflict. Large exaggerated images make the cartoon come alive to the viewer. The author used these bold larger than life images to highlight certain important aspect in the piece that he wants your attention drawn to.

The author also used aspects meant to play on human emotion and their views on society. For example the stereotype of the Republican party of being quick to go to war is one of the main points in this piece. It also pokes fun at the Republicans for not being able to learn from their mistakes in previous wars.

The blurb above the Republican elephants head implies much more than just the phrase itself. That phrase being "Maybe this time it will work." The visual aspect of the broken drums in the back round clearly labeled Iraq and Afghanistan make it easy for the viewer to grasp the message. However when looked into the technical aspect of something so simple is a brilliant technique by the author. The piece is politically complex yet easy to understand, while using humor and political satire almost as a buffer to not overwhelm the viewer with political views. It simply turned into a piece of art that can be enjoyed no matter who views it. I took away much more than a political message. I took from it an idea that was expressed adequately through art and cartooning. The powers of this piece of political satire dose not only come from the message alone. It comes from how the author designed the piece to relate to the viewer. No matter what your political party or view is, the cartoon can still be a work of art and comical at the same time. If you can enjoy those aspects of the cartoon the message can even be picked up with out

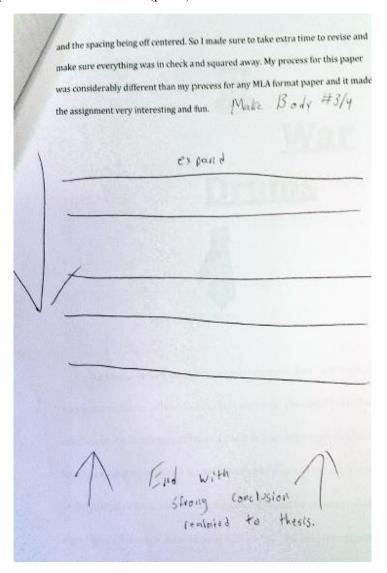
even looking for it (Sean's multimodal essay, 10/03/12).

Yet, his most interesting application of multimodality was, appropriately, in his writing process. For example, in Sean's process analysis essay in which he discussed the way in which his museum project was designed, he talks about his use of a T chart, stating:

This assignment allowed us to break from a traditional writing format and expand our creative writing process. However, the traditional process differs extensively from the creative process because I had to implicate when writing my paper. I tried to focus on many key points in the political cartoon, however I wanted to also capture the techniques used to highlight the points to the viewer. For this I used something similar to a T chart. For each different political pun or point of humor I wrote the technique used to highlight it directly across from it on my chart. I tried to conceptualize how the author perused his process to come up with the cartoon. By doing this I was able to not only better understand the cartoon but I could also illustrate both message and technique in my writing. After I had a T chart set in place it was easy for me to then move forward with my writing and differentiate the humor and political satire from the actual art of cartooning and the techniques used (Sean's process analysis, 10/25/12).

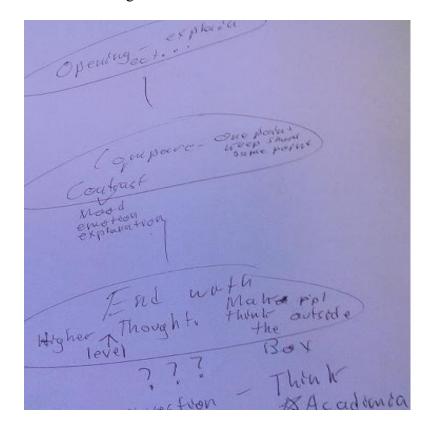
In addition to using a T-chart as a visual method of pre-writing organization, we find that on the last page of the rough draft of Sean's essay, which had been edited by me and peer-reviewed by a classmate, Sean had created a post-writing visual aid with textual addendum which helped him to expand upon his previous work. As the image below indicates, Sean had hand-drawn a series of parallel horizontal lines which represent the text based note that he had written above indicating the need for a third and fourth body paragraph (Make Body #3/4). Moreover, the large arrow pointing downward at the right of the lines is a transmediated, and very emphatic, representation of his handwritten note, "expand," which is placed above the lines. Further, at the bottom of the page, Sean drew two smaller arrows pointing upward, in between which is the handwritten note, "End with strong conclusion related to thesis" (Sean's process analysis draft, 10/25/12). Sean's embrace of transmediation as a stage in his writing process would seem to indicate that, despite the often hastily written final drafts that he had submitted, a

great deal of thought had gone into their creation. In addition, Leland and Harste (1994) believe that, "[t]ransmediation encourages reflection and supports learners in making new connections" (p. 340), and Felton (2008) observes that, "Proponents of visual literacy contend that if the *physical* act of seeing involves active construction, then the *intellectual* act of interpreting what is seen must require a critical viewer" (p. 61).



Further evidence of Sean's tendency to graphically visualize his thought process as a preparation for writing appears on the inside cover of the blue book in which his sample essay

was written. As the picture below reveals, instead of a T-chart Sean opted to use elongated ovals, or bubbles, to order his thinking.



Note that this organizational pre-writing process is utilized by Sean for an essay which was written on the second day of class. This would indicate that this is not a strategy that he has learned in my class; rather it is either a previously learned school-based organizational technique, or it is evidence of the way in which Sean's mind works. Although he has claimed in his personal interview that he is an "Auditory learner," it appears that Sean also has many of the methodological habits associated with a visual learner. While it has been suggested in the literature that today's Millennial students are, inherently, more visually attuned because of the ubiquity and use of technology in their school and out-of-school lives (Felten, (2008); Oblinger

and Oblinger, (2005)), I cannot say with certainty that this is the case with Sean, although, in his essay titled, "Multimodality is not the model, but the Issue" Sean makes the statement, "Where can one draw the line for technology being helpful and able to expand a creative process or just another distraction for our millennial generation?" (Sean's essay, 02/04/13). In fact, he states in his personal interview that generally, he is only on his computer "No more than three hours" (per day), and "only to check face book" (Sean's personal interview sheet, 09/03/12). Therefore, it seems that Sean's tendency toward visual representation as a learning style is an innate trait. To clarify, while I recognize the fact that the term visual literacy is usually meant to suggest the ability to read and process images that are digitally produced, in Sean's case, I suggest that his visual attunement is more of a visual logic application. In other words, he thinks in visual terms and uses visual devices to help him to deconstruct and then reconstruct meaning. As Jewitt (2008) claims, "how knowledge is represented, as well as the mode and media chosen, is a crucial aspect of knowledge construction, making the form of representation integral to meaning and learning more generally" (p. 241).

Sean's use of visual learning tools such as T-charts as well as linear and bubbled brainstorming techniques is an extension of multimodality in that the meaning conveyed in one medium is transmediated or transducted (Kress, (1998) into another medium and is indicative of the semiotic way in which Sean constructs meaning. As Jewitt, (2008), referencing her book, *Technology, literacy and learning: A multimodal approach* (2006), argues,

Design, diversity, and multiplicity emphasize the meaning-making practices and interpretive work of students. From this perspective, the multimodal texts and artifacts that students make can be viewed as one kind of sign of learning, a material trace of semiosis. These texts can be understood as material

instantiations of students' interests, their perception of audience, and their use of modal resources mediated by overlapping social contexts (pp.258-9).

I place emphasis on Sean's affinity for the visual as it is indicative of a cognitive capacity for learning that has been largely ignored throughout Sean's educational career. Thus, it would appear that it was within an environment that was predicated on a transformative pedagogy which prioritized the individual personal, social, and historical backgrounds of each student and which incorporated a multimodal social semiotic approach to learning, that Sean's formerly unacknowledged literacy was finally recognized and valued. Consequently, Sean came to see himself in a more positive light, and with this sense of positivity—of agency—he began the process of recreating himself in the model of an academically oriented student. In this way, his identity began to shift toward that of a more assertive and engaged student. As Jewitt (2008), in referencing both Gee (2004) and Cope & Kalantzis (2000), states, "...success at multimodal learning can be coupled with the ability to be autonomous and self-directed designers of learning experiences, to possess problem-solving skills with multiple strategies for tackling a task, and to have a flexible solutions orientation to knowledge (p. 260).

The Sidelines

However, in spite of his growing sense of accomplishment, Sean continued to arrive for class late, leave early, or not show up at all. And, although his academic performance in the fall semester was, for the most part, geared toward success, his self-proclaimed fear of coming face to face with his own intelligence seemed to repeatedly threaten to undermine his efforts. In the following email messages Sean's own words document this identity struggle between the driven would-be scholar and the lax jock.

In the first email of the fall semester, dated September 20, Sean wrote to me regarding the submission of an assignment that had been due on Septermber 13. In it he states,

> "I apologize for the lateness, I found out what i was supposed to do regarding my email with my [University] portal here is my original paper. In the future I will make sure to have it on a attachment" (email, 09/20/12).

This email is quickly followed by Sean's response to my acceptance of his paper which says,

"No problem at all and trust me my revised copy with be much better thanks again!" (email, 09/20/12)

Because it was early in the semester and I knew that new first-year students usually require a period of adjustment to their academic responsibilities I was not too concerned about this firsttime late submission; rather, I was somewhat impressed by Sean's courteous note, despite the lack of punctuation. However, on October 10, I received another email from Sean that referenced the revised copy mentioned in his second 09/20/12 email, about which he writes,

Professor Buono,

Attached is my final copy of my paper. I hope my revision process was up to par. I'm sorry for missing class and not being able to submit the rough draft. Hopefully my extra credit paper was interesting and I look forward to class tomorrow. Sincerely,

Sean S. (email, 10/10/12)

This particular email is noteworthy because it provides a glimpse into Sean's conflicted identity and behavior. While he has turned in a current paper on time and taken the initiative to earn extra credit by attending and then writing up a reflection of an out-of-class event in honor of the cartoonists whose work we would later view, Sean has missed class yet again. At this still early stage in the semester, Sean has already been absent multiple times.

On 10/25 Sean sent a brief email with an attachment containing the essay that was due that day which stated,

Professor Buono,

Attached is my paper with full color print... Sincerely, Sean S.

I was happy with Sean as this paper was submitted on time, yet at the same time I was disappointed because he had, once again, not been in class to hand it to me in person. As we headed into the last weeks of the semester the number of absences continued to mount as did Sean's vacillating identities. The following email communications are indicative of the sort of stops and starts in academic progress exhibited by Sean during that period of time:

12/04/12

Dear, Professor Buono

I am sorry for my absence today in class. The change in temperature along with many other things has caused me to be feeling very sick. Im going to see a doctor today. I woke up with a temperature other wise i would have made it to class. Im sorry again and i will be sure to make class thursday. If there is any work i missed or any extra work you would be willing to give me i would be more than happy to get it done. Sincerely, Sean S.

12/13/12

Professor Buono,

Im sorry I did not stop in today to deliver my rough draft and partner revision sheet. I had to write two other papers and but together a presentation. Im not using this as a excuse i was just very overwhelmed and was unable to come by. I hope you will let me bring the two sheets on tuesday or thursday. I know i have to stop by to participate in your study as well and i look forward to doing so. I know you collected my final paper today and i hope the two other sheets will not cause any points off considering i feel I'm making progress in your class as far as my grades are concerned. Thank you very much for your time. Have a good weekend and i will see you tuesday or thursday.

The content of these email messages gave me cause for concern about Sean's behavior and state of mind. The vague "many other things" to which he attributes his illness and his feeling of being "very overwhelmed" are undoubtedly signs that Sean is not on his game, so to speak, either in the class or on the field.

Fast-Break

Yet, in spite of feeling "overwhelmed," Sean managed to submit his final research paper. However, as the email messages above indicate, it was submitted late and barely stretched to 3 pages in length. The assignment had called for an essay of 5-7 pages in length regarding the students' opinions either for or against the incorporation of multidmodality into a college composition class. The students were to use handouts that I had given to them in class as well as readings from their textbook as sources of support for their arguments. We had had quite a few discussions in class regarding this issue, however, Sean had missed many of those classes and he had not come to me to discuss the writing of his essay. Yet, despite his absences and the brevity of his essay's content, Sean managed to construct an informed, logical, and effective argument which he titled, "Multimodality is not the Model, but the Issue." In this essay, Sean acknowledges the benefits of the use of multimodality in the classroom, yet he chooses to separate it from his discussion of technology, seeming to consider them as two different issues. The decision to do so seems reminiscent of Sean's multimodal creations and transduction of meaning making methods which are minimally dependent on the affordances of technology. In many ways Sean is an anomaly in a generation of techno-dependent Millennials in that he views the world around him not through screens but through face-to-face interactions in which oldfashioned etiquette and depth of thought are his primary social tools. Therefore, he approached his topic by taking a strong stance against the use of technology, or rather, what he believes to be the misuse of technology by today's Millennial students, by posing the rhetorical question, "Where can one draw the line for technology being helpful and able to expand a creative process or just another distraction for our millennial generation?" (Sean's final fall essay, 12/13/13).

In an interesting use of a quote that is indicative of Sean's own relative non-engagement with technology in general, and social media specifically, he argues that "Students must be agents of text rather than victims of text" (Albert's), a sentiment which he follows up by declaring, "This statement pertains directly to my own theory on the subject" (Sean's final fall essay, 12/13/12). There is a new note of authority in Sean's tone, indicating that he feels informed enough and experienced enough to render judgment on this topic. In fact, a look back at Sean's personal interview sheet on which he responded to a question regarding whether or not the use of technological devices like the computer and cell phone have had an effect on the way that he reads, spells, and writes by saying, "Yes a negative effect at that" (Sean's personal interview sheet, 09/02/12), clearly indicates that he is writing about a topic with which he is very familiar and about which he has thought long and hard. In the excerpt that follows, Sean further reveals his personal investment in this discussion when he writes,

If a student is just exposed to the literacy through social media or any type of technology such as videos or wireless devises they are just simply reading off a screen. Not actually fully understanding text and dissecting it, or thinking critically. It also promotes skim reading and having the ability to scroll down a page takes away form a student's ability to carefully process a word or quote" (Sean's final fall essay, 12/13/12).

Ironically, for a young man who was considered to be a struggling reader, Sean has made a cogent argument in support of the critical and analytical skills so necessary to effective reading. He has also demonstrated his own critical and analytical reading skills through his incorporation of the subject matter covered in the many readings assigned to the class as preliminary preparation for the writing of this essay. In fact, Sean's entire argument seemed to countermand

any notion of labeled deficiency in reading as it captured the intensity of the process with which Sean engaged in his own reading.

Moreover, in another section of his essay, Sean gave testimony to his deep understanding of the arguments on the relationship between art and imagination put forth by the esteemed educational philosopher, Maxine Greene. Impressively, he had managed to successfully reinforce his own arguments by using Greene's core philosophy, as expressed below:

Art has to be engaging to the viewer. It has to provoke cense of perception, sensation and imagination. It correlates between one's own experiences and how it relates to us as individuals. How is a student supposed to gather all this information if it is being presented through a screen video or wireless devise? Yes audio and visuals can be stimulating and may cause one have a certain feel about a piece, however over time if it is only presented in this way a student will not be able to differentiate art from entertainment. Some argue that art is in fact entertainment. However according to green it is used to locate and look at ones self and experiences and to determine a deeper meaning and think critically. If we are only being stimulated by audio and visuals then wont we just stop at that? (Sean's final fall essay, 12/13/12).

In the above excerpt, Sean returns to a discussion of multimodality in which he exhibits not only his own visceral and cognitive engagement with the arts and multimodality but also his embrace of the imaginative and creative process that is engendered by them. In his words there is an echo of the Sean who entered the University museum earlier in the semester and found a whole new world filled with aesthetic stimulation, a world that seemed to resonate deeply with Sean's own more aesthetic and multimodally-oriented ways of making meaning.

Split Dodge

I would suspect, as was the case with his earlier process analysis essay, Sean had chosen a topic for this essay about which he was informed and had strong feelings. Therefore, he was more confident about his knowledge base and, consequently, his writing reflects this confidence.

Yet, if one were to read the email messages above that correspond with the time period in which Sean wrote this essay, it would be apparent that there is a certain duality in the identities presented. Evidence of this duality is also evident in Sean's email messages in which he alternately shifts from the more self-assured use of the upper case letter "I" to the diminished lower case letter "i" as a means of self-representation. Rowsell and Pahl (2007), in their discussion of the relationship between texts and identities acknowledge Kress' influence and state, "Texts can be associated with the expansion of identities in that the making of the text can itself be accompanied by a transformation in the identities of the text maker" (p. 393). With this statement in mind, I posit the argument that when Sean is engaged in the production of assignments for this class, whether they are all text-based or multimodal in nature, he adapts the identity of the aspiring student-scholar. Although he doesn't seem to be able to break the pattern of producing his texts quickly, almost as if he must transfer his thoughts to the page before they are gone, his intensity and engagement in the topic at hand seems to indicate that a great deal of thought and research had preceded the moment of actual creation. Conversely, when Sean drifts away from his class work and shifts back into the more time consuming and focal aspect of his life on the lacrosse field, his student-athlete identity seems to become more dominant. Simons, et al (2007) posit an interesting observation regarding the dualistic identities embodied by the student athlete noting, "... at the same time they disidentify with academics, they increase athletic identification" (p. 254). Thus, along with Sean's occasional pattern of self-defeating behavior, it seems as if Sean's identities were continually in conflict, each fighting for the upper-hand and ultimately resulting, as is the case with many student-athletes, in a "dualistic or dichotomized frame of reference toward work, academics, and relationships" (Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001, p. 38).

Further evidence of Sean's dueling identities was obtained in our end of the semester interview in which Sean disclosed to me his appraisal of his "true" academic skills when he told me, "I always knew I could excel—but in a college classroom. I know how to speak, do the papers, critical thinking. I think outside of the box because I know that not one answer is right" (interview session, 12/18/12). However, later, during the same interview, Sean became more reflective as the fear that he continually struggled to suppress arose once again and he admitted to thinking, "If I write that one perfect paper, then I'm kind of afraid that I have to keep writing that paper. Can I deliver every time?" (interview session, 12/18/12).

In making this admission Sean provided me with not only a key piece of information but also appeared to finally have the courage to acknowledge his own self-defeating behavior; behavior that had literally and figuratively crippled his attempts to succeed both on and off the University playing field. Yet, despite his awakening, Sean did not make any concrete attempt to modify his behavior. Thus, as we headed into the last week of the semester, the strain of this internal battle seemed to evidence itself in Sean in the form of a lingering malaise. As the email messages above attest, Sean's presence in class was sporadic toward the end, but when I did see him he looked glassy-eyed and fatigued. However, in spite of these difficulties, Sean showed up on the appointed day to present his final multimodal project.

Goal!!

On the day of his final presentation, Sean arrived at class on time and looked better than he had in the days preceding. When his turn came he stood up calmly and confidently and headed for the lectern where he commenced to connect his laptop to the main computer system. I certainly was more anxious than he appeared to be, and hoped that Sean's current pattern of behavior had not had an impact on the quality of his presentation. However, as Sean began to

speak, I knew that he had, once again, somehow managed to summon forth that side of him that gloried in the act of performance and in the demonstration of his academic prowess. As a matter of fact, Sean spoke to me in an interview about his academic self-assessment saying, "I was always the intelligent kid. I have a lot to say and when I get on a roll you can feel it. You know I know what I'm talking about" (interview session, 12/18/12).

Sean's quite unique and very interesting presentation on the semiotics of architecture spoke to his fascination with anything historical. As Sean displayed images of famous edifices such as the Parthenon and the Capitol Building, he provided an in-depth discussion of the ways in which architectural features such as columns, domes, arches, and pillars were, what he called, "accents of power" (Sean's final fall presentation, 12/03/12). He proceeded to move through centuries of architectural history, interpreting for the class the ways in which the structures were extant testimony of the social, political, and economic aspects of the cultures that had erected them.

As Sean concluded his presentation, he seemed gratified and uplifted by the compliments proffered by both his classmates and me. I told him that I thought his presentation was brilliant, and I must admit that I was both impressed and amazed at the direction in which he had taken his knowledge of multimodality. Although I had alluded to a world-wide use of symbols that spoke to the long-standing presence of multimodality, I had not pursued this discussion in depth. Yet here before me stood a first-year student, one thought to be underprepared for college-level work, who had made the connection on his own. He had transformed our more localized discussion of multimodality into one of more global proportions. Extremely curious, I asked Sean during a later meeting how he had come up with his idea. He responded by saying, "I had one general idea for the presentation—architecture. I knew no one else would do that. I saw a

show on the History Channel about buildings and how arches and pillars were accents of power, and I said "Boom!" that's your first idea. What else do you need—a piece of paper, a pen, a keyboard, and a story. I knew I could talk about it for ten minutes" (interview session, 12/18/12).

The ability to take a basic premise and to knowledgably expand on it extemporaneously was Sean's gift. As his earlier testimony reveals, Sean was extremely comfortable with his oral skills, at one point confiding, "I'm a really good bullshit artist" (interview session, 12/18/12). In light of this knowledge, it became clear as to why Sean preferred to use only a modicum of technology in his multimodal projects, as he felt his main strength lie in his ability to clearly and eloquently express knowledge orally. Not surprisingly, these were times in which Sean seemed to wholly embrace his academic identity.

Halftime

Although Sean ended the semester on a high note academically, he had not resolved the sense of duality brought about by his conflicting identities. Plagued by insecurities and fears associated with both his personal and academic lives and inwardly unable to rid himself of his labeled identity, Sean's innate brilliance seemed always to be undermined by a self-defeating tendency which continually left him just short of reaching the full potential that he yearned to embody as both a student and an athlete. Although there seemed to be break-through moments in which his interaction with multimodality accentuated the best of his intellectual skills and seemed to put academic success within his grasp, he would somehow manage to fall just short of his goal. I did not know at the time, but the behavioral issues exhibited by Sean in his academics throughout the semester were also being played out on the lacrosse field. Sean would later tell me that he had not been doing well in lacrosse because he kept getting the "jitters". His coaches

had pointed out that fear was holding him back, and they urged him to try to relax and focus. However, it seemed that the more he tried, the more he failed, and with every failure there came frustration and a sense of resentment toward his coaches who would not let him play until he was able to overcome his anxiety. Apparently, it seemed as if Sean had spent the entire semester on an identity-fueled see-saw. If the aspiring student/scholar was about to close in on success then the assumed persona of the lax jock would emerge to block the shot, so to speak, and vice-versa. What became an even bigger crisis for Sean were the times in which both identities threatened to shut down. Cox (2009) identifies this type of crisis in her research and notes, "Clearly, quitting is the ultimate fear management strategy, because it offers a means of eliminating the source of anxiety" (p. 32).

Timeout

During the January break Sean suffered a major setback that bode ill for both his academic and athletic identities. Apparently, after having his head shaved and undergoing all of the other ritualistic initiations associated with collegiate team membership, Sean's leg was badly injured during a team practice and he was benched for the season. Also benched were Sean's first-year dreams of playing a sport that he loved for a University whose recruitment of him had won his loyalty. The devastation at having his dream deferred sent Sean spiraling down into deep depression that would play havoc with both his in-class and out-of-class identities in the spring 2013 semester.

The Second Half

In the spring semester, Sean's depression got the better of him; his behavior worsened, and it was only through a great deal of effort and outreach that he was able to pass the class. It was only later, after the semester concluded that Sean would discuss this situation with me

during an interview session. When we met, Sean explained to me that the injury to his leg that had rendered him unable to play Lacrosse for the season had left him "a mess" (interview session, 05/13/13). In pain, and unable to work out or practice with the team, Sean felt like an outsider with too much time on his hands. Thus, during the winter break Sean found himself to be neither a performing student-athlete nor an academically engaged student. As Sean revealed to me during the end of the semester interview, "I was hurt; didn't play for the first five games, so I was out of shape and drinking a lot. I was like, "Oh, it's 5:00; I'm hurt, I don't have practice, I'm gonna go to the bar for happy hour." And I would keep drinking till 9:00 at night and pass out" (interview session, 05/13/13). He further confided that, "The end of the winter break was like a really rough patch of school for me. I told myself to "Get your shit together." I felt like a lazy blob. In the winter, I dug myself into such a deep hole that I only really now got out of it, and the end of the semester I wasn't sleeping, I was (staying up) doing my work (school work). I dropped a class and have an Incomplete in another. I'm still eligible (to play Lacrosse) for next year because I have 24 credits—if I pass your class" (interview session, 05/13/13).

It was also during this interview that Sean revealed for the first time that he had ADHD. When I expressed surprise and asked him why he didn't disclose this information earlier, he told me that he thought he had given me a sheet from student support services indicating his "learning disability." Sean then went on to explain that while he was drinking heavily he had stopped taking his medication for ADHD, as the two didn't mix. Moreover, when he once again resumed his medication regime, it took time for the medicine to begin to work, a factor which also contributed to his poor performance in the spring semester (interview session, 05/13/13). To clarify, when I speak of Sean's poor performance during the spring semester, it is not necessarily the quality of his work to which I am referring; rather, it is to his behavioral performance. As

problematic as Sean's behavior was in the first semester it seemed minimal in comparison to the late arrivals, early departures, absences, late work submissions, and missed assignments that characterized the spring semester.

In fact, we were only three weeks into the semester when I received the following email from Sean sent at 12:15 pm:

Professor Buono,

I am sorry for my absence today. I was not feeling well and had not completed the assignment for today up to par. I was completing it this morning and by the time i realized what time it was it was much later than expected. I will send you another email with my attached assignment. I am sorry for my attendance and will not miss another class this semester (Sean's email, 02/08/13).

At this point, I felt that I was compelled to send him the following email response:

Sean,

You do know what you are doing to yourself, don't you? You are setting yourself up for failure. When we spoke at the end of the last semester, you told me that you knew that you undermine yourself. Stop it!! You are really quite smart and you should be earning an A in every class. And—if you screw up academically, you will get booted off the team. Is that what you are trying to do? Who are you trying to spite? You will only hurt yourself. Please get your act together. I will be very disappointed if you let everything you can be fall through your fingers.

Very sincerely, Professor Buono

I had hoped that by sending a very personal and very emotional plea I could get Sean to take an accounting of himself and get back on track before the whole semester was lost. I also felt that we had established the sort of relationship in which he would want to rectify any sense of disappointment that I had in him. I knew that if he were performing poorly in my class he must be doing even worse in his other classes, and if so, then he was on a fast track to losing all

of his dreams. I had sent the message at 12:42 that afternoon, and by 1:06 I received Sean's quick response in which he stated,

"I understand completely! No more excuses I will earn the grade I know i can. Attached is my assignment.

Thank you,

Sean

I am sure that in the moment that Sean wrote that email his intentions were good.

However, the paper that I received gave little indication that Sean had reconciled his internal conflicts. The paper, which was a reaction to an assigned reading, was barely over one page in length and, although signs of his characteristic insight into certain topics about which he felt more confident were visible, they were few and far between. For example, Sean produced a lovely introduction, in which he stated:

The piece entitled Introduction conveys many different ideologies about essay writing and the essayist behind the writing. It goes into detail about the different kinds of writing as well as essay intentions and formats. Many of the author's points in this piece are looking at a deeper perspective than just writing as a whole. Different quotes suggest a theme of self-indulgence in writing as well as forced opinions...(Sean's reaction essay, 02/08/13).

However, elsewhere in the essay Sean's insight seemed to be occluded by his distraction and haste, as the following excerpt attests:

When a writer gets a reader to relate the message becomes even more captivating. Another example is when he refers to materialist minded people and that style of writing. Showing how it can be appropriate for different styles and genres... (Sean's reaction essay, 02/08/13).

While Sean's stylistic overtures remain intact, his focus does not. Sean omits the name of the author and expresses himself in vagaries, leaving the reader to struggle to understand his intended meaning.

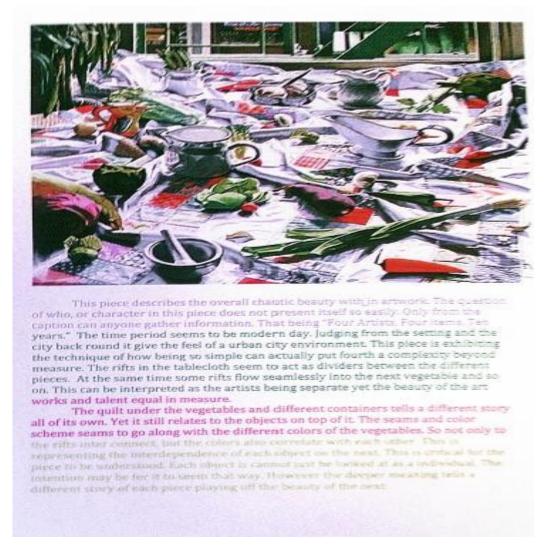
As I have observed above, despite essays that are usually riddled with grammatical and spelling lapses, Sean had always managed to produce essays that testified to his academically aligned identity through their insightful and logical development of the topic. However, this essay, as well as the email that accompanied it, seemed to indicate that the struggle for ascendant identity between scholar and athlete might end in a draw. At the time, I had no knowledge of the difficulties Sean was facing, but his erratic behavior and the reduced quality of his writing alerted me to the fact that something was definitely wrong.

The Scrimmage

One of the major assignments that Sean did manage to turn in during this semester was his multimodal reaction to an exhibit at the art gallery located on campus. The students had attended the exhibit as a class; however, Sean, once again divided by the commitments of his student-athlete status, was travelling with the Lacrosse team and could not attend with us. Therefore, as is usual with student-athletes in my classes, I had offered him the opportunity to visit the exhibit on his own in order to make up the assignment. I had expected Sean to view the exhibit and to turn in his multimodal reflection within a week of his return to campus. However, it was only after two reminders and an interval of a month, that Sean finally gave me his paper.

Although Sean's paper technically fulfilled the requirements of the assignment, it did not exhibit the enthusiastic creative flair of the multimodal reflection that he had created in the fall. Rather than render his own interpretation of the work that he had chosen as his subject, Sean incorporated a picture of the painting which was accompanied by his commentary. While Sean forgot to include the title of the painting as well as the name of the artist, he did choose a large, vibrant work whose simple subject of a tablecloth dappled with vegetables and cooking utensils disguised the complexity of the work. Yet Sean, seemingly drawn by this vibrant collection of

colors and motifs, was able to see beneath the surface of this visual carnival and noted in his reflection, "This piece is exhibiting the technique of how being so simple can actually put fourth [sic] a complexity beyond measure" (Sean's multimodal reflection, 04/08/13). And, although an analysis of the work was not required, Sean continued on in his paper to provide an insightful and quite synaesthetic discussion of the painting, as the following excerpt demonstrates:



The quilt under the vegetables and different containers tells a different story all of its own. Yet it still relates to the objects on top of it. The seams and color schemes seams to go along with the different colors of the vegetables. So not only do the rifts inter connect, but the colors also correlate with each other. This is representing the interdependence of each object on the next. This is critical for the piece to be understood. Each object is cannot just be looked at as a individual. The intention may be for it to seem that way. However the deeper meaning tells a different story of each piece playing off the beauty of the next.

When all these different ingredients of artwork are blended together it will create a feast for the eyes. However they remain separate for now. Still though you can tell that the "Mole" in the bottom left corner will eventually bring them together. It is a kitchen instrument used to blend spices and chopped foods. This will be the final step in blending all these different talents, fo all this painting is about more than food groups (Sean's multimodal presentation, 04/08/13).

In his analysis, Sean's nimble mind cleverly focuses on the variegated hues of the painting, which he mirrors in colored font and which provides the thematic thread that brings a sense of unity to the work of art and to his reflection. The ability to grasp this concept is yet another example of Sean's multimodal way of making meaning. While another first-year student might look at this painting and see only the big picture, Sean's cognitive semiotic adeptness has helped him to hone in on the smaller, more nuanced aspects that might usually go unnoticed by a less finely attuned mind, which he then synthesizes into a collective whole. Moreover, he is able to reproduce the results of this synaesthetic semiotic function in his written essay. Fortune (2005), in referencing the work of Kress (1998), discusses this transductive process and states,

...transduction among semiotic modes occurs constantly in the brain...work[ing] with multimodal texts is not a matter of creating a capacity that does not already exist, but instead it requires a continuing cultivation of the individual's ability to work with semiotic modes separately and interactively. In a multimodal text, subtracting graphic elements or writing elements allows individuals to develop an awareness of how the elements interact in the entire text or of how the individual simultaneously relies on both elements to process the entire text...Such an exercise just begins to tap the possibilities for individuals to develop an understanding of and to exercise consciously the transducive activities

fundamental to responding to a multimodal text (p. 53).

Sean's seemingly effortless ability to respond and to process multimodal texts seems to suggest that his process of "synaesthetic semiosis" (Kress, 1998), has been cultivated through the "biological and cognitive processes involved in meaning making through the textual signs [h]e encounter[s] everyday" (Fortune, (2005), p. 54). In this manner, Sean, on his own, seemed to have worked through and internalized the usually dichotic process of articulating the visual in a written text, thereby reifying his own synaesthetic semiotic way of meaning making as well as Fortune's assertion that "In place of the sequential text-explains-image or image-illustrates-text, in the concept of synaesthesia we have a simultaneity where writing and image converge and operate coextensively" (p. 53).

Player Etiquette

In his final paper of the spring semester, "What Has Social Media Has Done To Our Social Skills?" Sean once again pursued his previously voiced concern over the effects of technology on the Millennial student by stating,

Social Media such as Twitter and Facebook have caused our generations youth to digress in regards to their social skill's and interaction with others. It has become a means to hide one's self from actual contact due to some new concept of quicker and easier communication. However the most important parts of a person-to-person interaction is being lost with in this web of social networking. Things such as formality's, character, and an overall tone cannot be shown through a screen (Sean's essay, 12/13/12).

In this paragraph, Sean addresses issues that are quite consistent with the nature of his own identity. In all of my interactions with Sean, no matter which identity was in the ascendance, he exhibited an inherent sense of formality in the language with which he addressed me in person and through his email correspondence. Furthermore, in spite of the usual oversights that generally peppered his written work, the language and tone that Sean adapted in his essays was

also formal, almost scholarly, and were, I believe, meant to be purposeful representations of Sean's character. Whether these traits can be attributed to Sean's general upbringing or to a son's attempt to emulate the militaristic etiquette and character traits embodied by his sometimes distant soldier/detective father would be difficult to determine, yet the similarities cannot be denied. For that matter, neither can the striking similarities in the father-son behavioral patterns which Sean has revealed to me in an earlier interview (field notes, 12/18/12).

Sean's deep engagement with this topic also seems to have heightened his awareness regarding usage and spelling, for as he moves deeper into his discussion his writing becomes cleaner, more fluid, as demonstrated in the essay's concluding paragraph which follows:

Social Networking has gone as far as to limit our socialization as people. Our relationships in general are being affected. It is breeding a generation built on laziness and instant gratification. There is little to no standard of formality as long as the message carries its point. Character traits, expressions, tone, and much more are being caught in a digital web of synapses that seem to quickly relay a dry message without personal substance. The relationships of our generation are being characterized through online statuses and pictures to relay memories and past experiences to others, instead of just verbally telling someone of a life event. If our generation choses to base their relationships around social networking what will the future hold for us as a society? And further more what does that say about us as a society in general? If we place our relationships in a uniform context of only online communication then how long will it be before many of our social skills are lost entirely? All these questions posed can only be answered through time much like most future inquiries. However if we make a conscientious effort to limit our Social Networking and work more on our social skills we have a fighting change of maintaining our integrity and coexisting with technology rather than being consumed by it (Sean's essay, 12/13/12).

In this essay Sean seems determined to carry out the assertion made in his final paper of the previous semester and to prove once and for all that he is an agent of text, and will, in no way become its victim. Sean's strength of character, an attribute to which he frequently refers and which he highly regards, is demonstrated through his unwavering stance against being assimilated into a group generalization; a way of saying, "I will not accept this label." It is also,

it seems, a signal that Sean has begun to shed the duality of identity that has hampered his forward movement on the playing field and in the classroom.

Sudden Victory

Further evidence of this forward-moving identity shift is seen in Sean's final multimodal project. Building on his research paper topic concerning the negative effects of engagement with social media on the social skills of the Millennial, Sean produced a wonderfully designed, orchestrated and imagistically powerful slideshow that was supremely multimodal in nature. The images, which Sean told us had been very carefully selected from the Google images site (field notes, 12/06/12), were accompanied by a melodic reggae instrumental that synchronized perfectly with the images as each one slid smoothly and gracefully into the other. Impressively, although this was Sean's first attempt at making a video, the overall impression was not of individual frames but of a larger, cohesive unit of display. He explained that it had taken a "good amount of time" to put the video together because he wanted the images to "correlate to each other" (field notes, 12/06/12). He went on to say that he did not settle for the first images that he found, rather, he "dug deeper" and "critically looked at the pictures and saw how they relate and meet the objective of the video" (field notes, 12/06/12). Sean's articulate and seamless delivery of his information as well as the well-organized, coherent, emphatic, and informative presentation which demonstrated not only his mastery of his subject matter but also keen awareness of his audience stood as testimony to his ability to create proficient compositions using the academic discourse and style that so often eluded him in his written texts. Once again, Sean had pulled off a last minute play that proved victorious for his academic identity.

Interestingly, at the time of his presentation Sean told me that he had tried to upload his video to Youtube, but was unsuccessful. As this was not a requirement of the project, I told him

not to worry about it. However, shortly after the end of the spring semester, I noticed that Sean's project was, in fact, available on Youtube.

Post-Game Wrap-Up

By the end of our two semesters together Sean had come a long way in terms of the identities he had assumed and the identity/ies that he wanted to acquire. Having literally replayed the same academic and athletic game that had been so unsuccessful in his elementary and high school years, Sean had nearly bottomed out in his first year of college. The main difference was that in-between the failures he had experienced moments of academic success through the work that he had done in his fall and spring composition classes which had restored his belief in his innate intelligence.

Additionally, as noted above, Sean's writing had begun to become stronger and cleaner in its presentation, and I had begun to understand the quirks associated with his written texts. It appeared that Sean's propensity toward visual logic worked well in conjunction with Sean's ability to more effectively deliver his thoughts orally rather than in the written mode, and although his writing always reflected the clarity of his thoughts, his auditory processing bent has trained him to write in sound-alike spelling. I would also venture to guess that his frequent inability to sustain a grammatically correct format in his writing is directly related to his ADHD and consequent dependency on medication to control the racing of his brain as he wrote. In light of this knowledge, I was able to assess Sean's written work in a non-traditional manner, focusing more on the logic and coherence of the argument rather than on grammatical and textual oversights. In this way Sean came to realize an increased value in his academic self-worth.

These small victories were achieved within a classroom environment whose curriculum was predicated on the belief that a multimodal approach to college composition afforded new

opportunities for the production of communicative expression that lead to the "emergence of literate identities" and the consequent re-identification of students and their literate practices as successful (Vasudevan et al., 2014, p. 448). Thus, Sean's alternative methods of expression were valued and assessed in a different, more positive light than in previous academic settings. In light of this revaluing, Sean's more academically aligned identity, although still in the process of transformation and shifting, ultimately overshadowed the athletic identity that had constantly waged war for Sean's allegiance.

Discussion

In this chapter I have discussed the ways in which the affordances of multimodality as well as the pedagogical and curricular ideologies associated with a multimodal approach to composition studies created an environment in which Sean, a student struggling to redefine himself in terms of the negative socially constructed labels he bore and consequent identity-related internal conflicts, managed to utilize his non-traditional methods of meaning making as a way to gain agency over labels denoting deficiency, to assert his authorial voice, to achieve new feelings of self-worth as well as forward movement toward positive identity reconciliation and achievement, and to begin to write more cleanly and effectively.

In this case study, I have demonstrated through Sean's written and multimodal projects the ways in which his non-traditional methods of meaning making were acknowledged and valued as viable alternative means of expressing academic communication through the wide array of opportunities available through multimodality. Although Sean initially identified as an auditory learner, his work soon indicated that he had an uncanny knack for the visual as well. Both methods had cultivated a synaesthetic ability in Sean which enabled him to process and synthesize abstract ideas, images, and design components, and were imaginative and creative

skills that were exceedingly complimentary to a multimodal social semiotic approach to academic writing. Sean continually demonstrated the ability to transduct his inner vision into multimodal visuals and well-articulated text-based documents that testified to a growing sense of empowerment and agency as expressed through his authorial stance in these works.

The discussion also indicates that Sean's split identity status as both an academically aligned student and distracted student-athlete caused frequent disruptions in Sean's in-class behaviors which tended to negatively impact on his academic aspirations. However, the multimodal environment in which his academics took place as well as the accompanying sociocultural approach to teaching embraced by me as his teacher managed to successfully offset Sean's absorption by the more self-defeating aspect of his identities.

The recognition of Sean's latent learned fears and consequent self-defeating behavioral tendencies which were revealed through individualized student-teacher conferences, interviews, and magnified attention on relevant content in his written and oral work enabled both Sean and me to clearly see that the so-called labeled deficiencies attributed to him were manifestations of personality/identity conflicts and not of cognition. This awareness ultimately brought about a significant identity shift at the conclusion of the academic year which enabled Sean to finish the semester in good academic standing and with a renewed agenda for success.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

Introduction

In this chapter, I synthesize the findings collected from my research about the ways in which the inclusion of a multimodal social semiotic approach into the college composition class provided the means through which identities, extant and in transition, were revealed, tracked, and transformed; composition skills improved; and power and agency were acquired. I begin with conclusions that describe how the application of transformative pedagogical and curricular methods within the classroom created an aesthetically infused community space in which the effects of institutional and self-generated labels on students' identities were revealed, challenged, and transformed through their written and visual texts. Next, I discuss conclusions regarding the effects of this acquired agency on meaning making strategies and the composition skills of the students. Finally, I explore the limitations of my study, implications of these research findings for educators, and offer recommendations for further research.

Labelled Identities

In this study, I have, through the analysis of multimodal and text based coursework, discussed the identities of students who, upon entrance to the University, acquired the marginalized status of academically underprepared as a result of their placement into an academic support program that is, itself, marginalized within this academic community. Although some may have entered with previously affixed labels denoting a sense of academic otherness, many others experienced the stigma of intellectual branding for the first time. The appellation, "academically underprepared," is often equated with the label "at risk," which is, according to Mulvey (2008), "a label that implies a precarious position in the higher education

community" (p. 77). The "precarious position" to which Mulvey alludes is clarified by Lawrence (2002):

...students who do not succeed or who have difficulties in accessing and mastering the mainstream academic discourses are labeled, perhaps 'blamed,' as being underprepared or 'intellectually deficient,' revealing a 'sink or swim' approach to the issue of diversity. It is accepted that it is the students' responsibility if they fail, with academics perceiving that they have little role in, as well as little responsibility for, the retention and ultimate success of students (p.5).

So well entrenched within academia is this discourse of deficit (Lawrence 2002) that it has become the topic of much counteractive literature produced by an extensive body of researchers (Heath, 1984; Rose, 1985, 1988, 1989; Bartholomae, 1986; Hull and Rose, 1989, 1990; Hull, 1991; Gee, 1991, 2008; Street, 1992; McDermott and Varenne, 1995; Shaw, 1997; Larose, et al., 1998; Castro, 2012) who have long decried the negative impact on the identities, self-esteem, and academic work of students who have been the victims of institutional and sociocultural labels.

The data collected from my study indicates that students' perceptions of self and of potential for academic success within the University were influenced by prior institutional labels and were exacerbated by feelings of marginalization brought on by placement into a University support program. Consequently, many students opted for positions of secrecy about their status in order to avoid further societal and peer stigma. In order to counter the sense of deficiency that usually accompanies such labeling practices, a transformative pedagogical approach designed to invoke change was practiced with the aim to create a learning environment which countered the

rigidity of an autonomous view of literacy and instead, embraced a view of literacy that was sociocultural and ideological in nature. To this end, curricular choices were made in an effort to offer students alternative, non-traditional methods of demonstrating their individualized ways of meaning making. The data indicated that a multimodal infused pedagogy and interactions with multimodality served to reveal, track, capture, and document the ways in which identities shifted and changed. The data further demonstrated an increased sense of academic achievement and agency in students as identity transformation took place. In addition, significant instances of students' acquisition of agency through self-generated writing and consequent successful repositioning were documented.

Sites of Transformation

The classroom environment as well as the varied coursework gathered throughout the length of the study provided data about the transformative identity shifts experienced by the students and realized the validity of Ivanic's (1998) assertion that "...identity is not socially determined but socially constructed" (p. 12). Similarly, through the design and construction of their multimodal projects, students became architects of selfhood and agency. The data indicated that students' interactions with aesthetically infused environments, such as University art galleries and exhibits, provided opportunities for students to release their imaginations (Greene, 2002), and to gain new perceptions of themselves and the world around them. Shifts in identity were made visible at the exhibit site through communicative body language and the assumption of new leadership roles which served to substantiate Ivanic's (1998) assertion that "the possibilities for the self are not fixed, but open to contestation and change" (p. 12).

Additional data reaffirming these identity shifts was provided through the students' multimodal designs and accompanying process analysis essays which became artifacts of

students' sedimented identities (Rowsell and Pahl, 2007). This data allowed for significant moments of transformation in the learning and self-actualization process to be tracked and identified. The data also captured evidence of students' synaesthetic engagement with visual and written texts. As noted by Rowsell and Pahl, "[t]he conflation and intersection of Discourses become modalities in texts, which alongside practices, provide a formative picture of the meaning makers—not only their pathway into literacy but also how they make meaning in certain contexts and engage in practice" (p. 392).

Regarding the identities with which the students began the study, a preliminary, informal interview handed out at the onset of each semester provided data that attested to the each student's sense of themselves as readers, writers, critical and analytical thinkers, and users of technology. This data led to the finding that many students disclose more about themselves in their writing than through the spoken word, as was demonstrated specifically, in their literacy narratives and in self-generated email messages. This finding continued to be evidenced in the students' written work throughout both semesters and seemed to be contiguous with so-called Millennial behavior, insofar as the shared propensity to easily and willingly reveal much of one's personal activities and thoughts in online spaces through technological devices (Anderson & Rainie, 2010).

In terms of curriculum, much like the assertion proffered by Jewitt, (2008) that "no one mode stands alone in the process of meaning making" (p. 247), assignments were designed to take into account that there is 'no one method' of making meaning. As non-traditional modes such as art, music, and film were introduced into the classroom, the data showed that students whose methods of learning were also non-traditional were better able to employ their strengths through these various modes when accessing, redesigning, and communicating the messages that

they wished to convey through their work. Significantly, data gleaned from students' work indicated that both the traditional and non-traditional learners in this class evidenced increased proficiency in analytical and critical thinking as a result of what I came to call, a multimodal state of mind. The assignments in which this multi-mindedness was best realized were those in which students were able to express themselves through use of the first person, "I," to direct the scope of the topic, and to choose the format most conducive to the messages they wished to communicate through their work. The data further demonstrated that a significant shift had occurred in the way that the students began to conceptualize and actualize their work by invoking the process of design as both a preliminary organizational and recursive/revisory application.

Interestingly, an even broader realization associated with the design process was students' increased proficiency in reading comprehension. The data collected from visual maps designed and drawn in response to an assigned text-based reading demonstrated students' ability to successfully deconstruct and identify component parts of the reading as well as decode and transduct its metaphorical properties. This data also supported the use of visual design as an effective post-reading strategy that served to enhance overall understanding of content and which lent itself to the successful 'reading' of a filmic depiction of the same material. These findings, therefore, reinforce the assertion that these students, through the attainment of a type of 'multi-mindedness' that has afforded them new and agentive concepts of self as well as multiple new perspectives with which to literally and figuratively *read* their worlds in different ways.

Life Writing

In an unanticipated showing of agentive empowerment, additional data regarding their out-of-school identities was provided through the receipt of students' numerous self-generated

email correspondences. As perhaps, the most authentic source of data, these unsolicited emails offered what was at times, an unfiltered forum in which the students, particularly Adrienne, Mischka, and Sean chose to reveal multiple aspects of their identities, to demonstrate agency through their repositioned authorial voices, and to trust this researcher enough to expose vulnerabilities. This data also helped to give lie to the claim that today's students no longer write, as these students provide evidence that writing, thought to be a dying endeavor, is still being used as the powerful communicative tool that it was always meant to be.

Summary

The summary of the above discussed findings provides insight into the ways in which the incorporation of a multimodal social semiotic approach into the college composition classroom became the conduit through which multiple agentive identity and academic performance transformations took place: (a) the recognition and refutation of institutional labels through significant agentive identity shifts was realized through non-traditional pedagogical and curricular aspects of the college composition class environment; (b) a multimodal approach to learning provided imaginative and liberatory classroom practices through which students who were marginalized by their supposed under-preparedness for college level work forged new identities of acquired empowerment which led to increased proficiency in their critical and analytical approaches to college reading and writing. Thus, the cumulative effect of these combined practices served to elicit data that underscored the positive identity and academically inspired transformations achieved within a marginalized tertiary learning environment in which a multimodal social semiotic approach to learning was employed.

Limitations of the Research

In many ways this study has proven its strength through the wealth of data gleaned from students' successful interactions with a multimodally infused classroom environment. And, though there are limitations, they speak not to a deficiency in the data, but to areas of research less extensively examined, as well as situational and time-related constraints.

Admittedly, the robustness of the data is limited by the small number of participants involved, all of whom were selected from my own classes. Furthermore, this study was conducted within a single, private University. Therefore, there will undoubtedly be a need for further similar research to be conducted with a greater number of participants and in a broader range of college environments. Another limitation of this study arose from instances of attrition in which initial, key participants either dropped out during the fall semester due to financial issues, or left the University after the first semester had concluded. The loss of these key participants had a major impact on the attempts to gather a more diverse population of participants in terms of gender, race, socio-economic, cultural, historical, and educational aspects. Additionally, cases in which key participants did not turn in major assignments related to the study created gaps in the data, although their failure to do so contributed much to the analysis of identity in situ.

Furthermore, while discussions that focused on the effectiveness of multimodality as a method of libratory practice and positive identity transformation for both labeled traditional and non-traditional learners were quite extensive in their scope, areas such as Millennial learning styles and the connection to what is referred to in the literature as digital literacy, received less investigation. A more rigorous examination of claims surrounding supposed 'Millennial' characteristics might have proven beneficial when attempting to further the notion that said negative attributes have been potentially conflated with the prevailing stereotypical depiction of

students labeled as underprepared. Additionally, the inclusion of a method of online, digital discussion amongst the students, either in the form of a blog or an internal University forum, such as Blackboard, would have provided additional, relevant information about identity formation and writing skills.

Other, less significant limitations of the study were realized at the point of data analysis. After the formal conclusion of the study and during the extensive review of data, unexpected or new findings arose that warranted further questioning of one or more of the participants. In some, but not all situations, this data was able to be obtained through communication with the participant.

Although the above noted instances are herein identified as limitations of the study, they also serve to contribute to areas of research which have the potential to yield additional rich data to this line of inquiry.

Implications for Future Research

The findings obtained through this study have opened the door to further research on the so-called underprepared student and the use of a multimodal approach to the teaching of college writing. Necessarily, more work needs to be done in the area of investigating the stigmatizing deficit discourse associated with students who are thus labeled. As the data in this study demonstrates, many, if not most of these students, are very prepared in many ways, and are merely diverse in their ways of making meaning. Additional research is needed to first: explore the nature of these meaning making capacities, and second: delve further into the ways in which a multimodal approach to learning taps into these diverse methods. While much research exists in these areas pertaining to the child as learner, few studies have explored the potential for break-

through information regarding the post-secondary student, specifically, the labeled post-secondary student.

The potential for new studies into identity and identity transformation as occurs in the social context (Gee, 1996) of a marginalized tertiary classroom setting is also demonstrated by this study. On a related note, identity studies can be substantially enriched by further research into the sedimentation (Rowsell and Pahl, (2007) or documentation of identities within multimodal and text based work.

Finally, there is much more to be discovered by research into composition studies, as the process of writing is ever-changing in relation to new technologies and consequent innovative strides in the production of communicative texts. Composition research could also be furthered by studies predicated on the re-envisioning of the traditional academic discourse by which college writing is measured so that it keeps pace with the rapidly evolving social and global discourse of the 21st Century and beyond.

Implications for Theory

The theoretical implications of this study are intrinsically linked to theory and ideology associated with the New Literacy Studies (Street, 1992; Gee 1991; Heath, 1984), the New London Group (1996), and Academic Literacies (Lea and Street, 1998, 1999) in its shared view of literacy as socially and culturally based (Street, 1995), and which challenges the prevailing discourses of power (Gee, 1996), through its transformational nature (Street, 2005). Moreover, it embraces a multimodal social semiotic approach to learning with its multiple possibilities for communication that take into account the cultural and linguistic diversity of a technologically globalized world, and, importantly, with regard to this research, "challenges the dominant *deficit model*" (Lea & Street, 2006, p. 368).

This study has responded to Brian Street's (2005) call for research of an ethnographic type that furthers the educational investment in the practice of an ideological model by demonstrating its effectiveness in providing students with agentive learning methods through which they are able to challenge the existing power construct that has labeled and marginalized them. Importantly, this study has also provided data that serves to challenge the dominant deficit model and which extends the conversation regarding the issue of underpreparedness and the question of what constitutes literacy (Street, 2005) into the heretofore autonomous enclave of the college writing class by providing "models of literacy and of pedagogy that capture the richness and complexity of actual literacy practices" (p. 420). Finally, by providing in-depth analysis of the processes involved in these literacy practices through qualitative case study methods, this study has provided a framework for further research into these areas.

Implications for Personal Practice

Conducting a research study on identity involving one's own students is a risky business. Although we endeavor to remain objective in our pursuit of data collection, it is precisely this endeavor itself that brings us closer and closer to the subjective and very personal realm. That is to say, that in order to really come to understand and identify traits and patterns that will inform our study we, as well as our students, must release our natural proclivity to protect that who we are, our "core identity" as Gee (2000-2001, p.99) calls it. We lay bare our histories, our secrets, our undisclosed and sometimes unconscious beliefs to one another—and to ourselves. Often, indeed, the researcher learns as much about themselves as they do about their students.

Therefore, there is an inherent value for teachers in conducting research about and among the particular population with whom we work, as it affords insights into our practice that might otherwise go unnoticed. Actually, practice is a good word for what teachers do, as in every semester and with every new group of students, we try to do our jobs better than before, to keep practicing and fine-tuning our pedagogical and curricular applications in the search for perfection by way of our students' successes. In that way, research helps us to look deeper into the environments for learning that we construct as well as the effectiveness and limitations of the methods that we employ in our classrooms.

On a personal level, conducting research enhanced what I consider to be my already fine-tuned connection to my students in that I was actively seeking out the clues, connections, moments of self-doubt or wonder rather than waiting for them to surface as they always do over the course of time, and as a result, I bonded with my students and gained insights into their identities much sooner than ever before. Consequently, I have since adapted this research-related heightened awareness as a now embedded part of my teaching technique, finding that it allows me to attend to the individualize needs of the student more expediently.

Similarly, my commitment to research provided a more well-defined view of my curricular practice in the sense that it produced hard data which indicated which assignments and activities engendered the most engagement and inspiration in the students, and thus provided me with a more informed sense of the shape of my future classes.

Finally, in addition to the above discussed invaluable benefits of conducting research, it was perhaps, the enhanced connectivity between teacher and student that proved to be the single, most valuable benefit of my research, as the class in which this study was conducted became a community of trust in which the teacher-student dynamic was transformed from the traditional hierarchy of instructor power to one that was more egalitarian and reciprocal in nature, and stands as the model to which I will continue to aspire.

Implications for Classroom Practice

"Surely, education today must be conceived as a mode of opening the world to critical judgments by the young and to their imaginative projections and, in time, to their transformative actions" (Greene, 2000, p. 56)

Certainly, there is more academic freedom to be found within a University classroom in general, and specifically within a composition class, than in most other teaching situations and, as has been demonstrated in this study, the opportunities for the reimagining of these spaces are virtually unlimited. Though still bound to traditional academic discourse in the sense of the final written product, the process to attaining this goal can be altered from one in which otherness is objectified into one in which otherness is valued and cultivated. The methods, through which data for this study was obtained, such as the inclusion of a multimodal social semiotic approach to writing as well as an aesthetically rich environment, serve to neutralize the rigors of tradition through considerate valuing of the social, cultural, historical, political, and economic histories of the individual student. Research has demonstrated that these methods have been found to of great value in furthering the academic potential in younger students and therefore, should be embraced at the college level as well.

Conclusion

In its attempt to diminish, if not negate, the many misperceptions about students who have been labeled underprepared which have been created and perpetuated through the discourse of medical deficit, this study has addressed the issue of labels and their impact on student identity, non-traditional as well as traditional ways of meaning making, the Millennial, the role of aesthetics, technology, and reading and writing, all of which are intertwined with the discussion of the benefits of a multimodal social semiotic approach to learning. By taking a non-traditional approach to college writing, this study has demonstrated the beneficial and

transformative power of a sociocultural approach to teaching on students' identities, learning styles, and writing abilities.

Thus, I offer the data and findings herein, to other seekers of academic equality in the hope that they lead to further research that will help to tear down the boundaries that for so long have served to constrain those who would dare to learn differently.

Addendum to Case Studies

My original research design was limited to the span of two consecutive semesters ranging from the fall 2012 semester through the spring 2013 semester, during which time I tracked and documented the effects of a transformational pedagogy and multimodal composition curriculum on the identities and writing styles of two specific student cases, Sean and Adrienne. However, while in the process of analyzing and processing my data during the following fall 2013 semester, I was informed that in the spring 2014 semester I would be teaching Writing Studies and Composition 2 (WSC2), the general population writing course into which students from the support program transition upon successful completion of their programmatic Writing I and II classes. While most of the students who had participated in my study had already taken this class in the fall 2013 semester, Sean and Adrienne had not, and although I had maintained a strong relationship with both, I was genuinely surprised and pleased to learn that both had registered to take this course with me. I saw in this serendipitous occasion the opportunity to expand upon my study of these two students by observing them in a non-marginalized class setting. Moreover, in the time that had elapsed between our classes together, I was curious about the ways in which all of our identities may have changed.

Although I did not conduct full-scale research in the WSC 2 classroom where Sean and Adrienne joined me in the spring 2014 semester, I did continue to record observations and reflective thoughts in my journal. In addition, I saved their work and made time to discuss it with them. Specifically, I spoke to Sean and Adrienne about their overall thoughts regarding the effects of multimodality on their learning experiences. Since I offer this section as an addendum to my previous research, I have condensed my discussion and will focus on specific moments

and assignments that seemed to be inextricably linked with my prior research on these two students.

Non-marginalized Environments

When Sean and Adrienne walked into my WSC 2 class in the spring 2015 semester, they did so of their own volition as members of the general student population and without the stigma of University assigned labels. This scenario, so different from the one in which we first met seemed to set the stage on which new identities, forged by the experience and subsequent maturation acquired since we had first worked together, would play out new roles.

Perhaps the most significant identity shift actualized in both Sean and Adrienne was the ease with which each one presented themselves as students within the class. They were comfortable, self-assured, and each was eager to demonstrate their knowledge. Interestingly, it was now Sean, more often than Adrienne, who jumped into class discussions, offering insightful and well-articulated development of the topic at hand. It was also surprising to see that while he was still one of the Lacrosse crew, he also was outside of it, exhibiting more individuality than he had in the past. Although Adrienne continued to be an intellectual presence in the class, she seemed more reflective and inquiring than she had in the past. As the semester progressed, these nuanced identity shifts became reflected in the thinking, designing, and actualization of Sean and Adrienne's written and visual works.

Sean's Shift

Sean's independence from the athletic identity that had posed physical and emotional conflicts during his freshman year as well as his consequent movement toward the embodiment of the academic that he had always aspired to be was manifest most dramatically in his written work. As the essay below indicates, Sean's writing is cleaner, stronger, and more focused. And,

while some technical issues are present, it is to be noted that this rough draft contains fewer misspellings and grammatical missteps than many of the final drafts submitted by Sean in his first year writing classes.

"Necessity Of Modes In The Classroom"

The issue of the acceptance of arts and new literacy's as well as multimodality is one of growing interest in our educational system. Universities across the country are faced with a decision to make. They can stick to the standard methods of writing that have been taught for years, or expand upon them using multimodal techniques. Many old school educators are apposed to the idea of using technology in the classroom. They feel that our society has already been consumed enough by it and there is no space for it in a composition classroom. Other modes for aiding writing also tend to intimidate fundamental writing educators, such as the arts or film. While they may be on the right track as far as thinking technology has consumed society and our generation to a degree; they are mistaken in closing their minds to the idea of using it to enhance their teaching.

While many educators today employ traditional MLA formats for their writing assignments and a strict guideline on how they would like things written this approach does not appeal to all students. Methods such as rough drafts, block pre writing, and bullet point sub-topics are very concrete in nature and often creates writers block. This is due to the structured format that limits student's creativity and often causes rushed topics that are not critically thought out. They are simply used to fill space within their writing or in a draft to satisfy a professor.

With the introduction of new technology's and their correlation with today's media and society many educators feel that our generation is losing literacy. We are able to get bits and pieces of news and information at a near instantaneous pace. Fundamental educators feel that because of this many students are skim reading information and disregarding traditional grammar and spelling. Yet again most educators seem to have the right intentions by disagreeing with new literacy's in the classroom due to these seductively negative opinions about our generation. However they are looking at a glass is half empty rather than one that is half full.

The basis of multimodality provides different modes for understanding different topics even those that go far beyond writing. It allows students to be informed by social semiotics. These are things that they are introduced to on an every day basis. Such as technology, arts, and media. Students are already comfortable with these concepts and because of this when they are coupled together with education an used in a manor that cater to that particular student

it allows for he or she to be successful in better understanding any concept. The different aspects of design within multimodality are what set's it apart from a tradition educational format and almost takes on academic ideology sort to speak. As Albers and Harste state it is the design aspect of multimodality that not only allows students to better understand concepts but also encourage imagination and critical thinking. This surpasses standard writing expectations and provides for less "fluff" in a students writing. This is because every thought on a topic is now relevant to the student in some way and can be supported by critical and rational thought.

While fundamentalists of education claim that Multimodality and New literacy's are just a seductive idea's for our society to rationalize having technology in the classroom, it is supported by fact. Not only is it supported by fact but also the idea that it is just to satisfy our generation's lust for technology is presumptuous at best. New literacy's and Multimodality go far beyond technology. It has different modes and technology is just one of many that can be utilized to convey a message or conceptualize a topic. In the New Literacies Studies done by Lankshear and Knoble there is a clear and present positive impact on students learning ability due to new literacy's. Post typographical and emergent literacies are new to be recognized as literacy's however students have shown a quicker and more intellectual response to visual and artistic tools; things such as power points, blogs, and wikis.

Multimodality and New Literacies have found there way into our classrooms and are here to stay. They are needed in our educational system today with out question. With new advances in technology and our culture it is only natural to develop our generation with the tools relevant to them as individual thinkers. It is not only natural but a necessity as well. With out it we would be limiting our generation to a system that does not cater to the needs of students.

Impressively, but not surprisingly, Sean has articulated a strong argument in favor of the integration of multimodality into the composition class. As previously discussed, Sean's own learning style seemed to be in perfect synchronization with a multimodal approach to learning. Reaping the benefits of this innovative compositional technique seemed to have inspired Sean to become an advocate of such methods. In fact, it appeared that he had grown to be quite the expert on multimodality as his following multimodal presentation, written in response to our spring 2013 class visit to the David Jacobs exhibit on campus, indicates:

Multimodality seems to be the bridge to let as escape from a conformed educational system that has been ingrained with in us over the course of our lives. As you can see

from this image many seem to not want to cross over. It is a similar analogy to "The cave" it takes an enlightened thinker to truly understand a concept, furthermore to teach others that same concept. There are different ways of learning as well as teaching. Human perception gives many different answers to a question. If the answer is correct for that particular individual and allows for him or her to better conceptualize a task then is that not the premise behind multimodality as a whole?



Like the exhibit we visited multimodality is viewed through the "Eye of the Beholder" I thought this image was very fitting for the point I am trying to convey. Multimodality is not one uniform format for doing things. There is no "MLA" multimodal format for writing. If there were I am positive it would be your new favorite writing template for us professor. Our digital eyes have now become intertwined with our physical eyes. In a society engorged with social media and advanced technology we sometimes have a better understanding for the technological aspects of things rather than any visual reality. This treads on a very fine line between becoming a problem with our society and more importantly educational system. However when used to complement our writing and make things more relatable to our audience it is an invaluable tool to have. Just like Jacobs work the most memorable pieces for us are the ones that we can relate to.



Ration= W+I+E+E2(ILA.AMCcont)>Relay



"Each piece seemed to derive from one solid object that had been deconstructed and played with to toy with your perception. Even the solid materials used clashed with the chaotic nature of the pieces creating a sort of irony that a material like metal which is so strong can be made to look contorted and abstract."

You can apply and relate multimodality to just about anything. For example it can relate to architecture. Now this may seem hard to follow; however I am using this building as a metaphor for our educational structure. Like I stated above the pieces that interested me the most were the ones to seem to derive from a uniform shape. However when deconstructed and re-positioned it changed your perception and understanding of the piece immediately. Now how does this concept relate to our educational system? Well say this building was originally a square. Four sides equal through out and recognizable to all.

Much like a square, our educational system seems to be very cut and dry about different approaches to aspects of learning. Sure many can say that the system is not failing us and critical thinking is catered to and nurtured. I am not disagreeing with that at all, however if you have to teach critical thinking then something is wrong. There is no method or lesson plan for it. It varies from student to student and their individual interpretation of it can help with their academic success. It is hard to have an individual perception of a square though. Walk around it as much as you want and it stays the same at all angles. Now imagine our educational system was modeled after the building above, verses the square. It provides different cuts and angles. It lends itself to interpretation and begs to be questioned at each new glance. This is the kind of deconstruction rather than "construction" that will entice multimodal thinking and allow students to have a better understanding of their topics in the classroom. Give a

student something relatable rather than let them distance themselves from the topic and they will thrive. Even if the topic does not relate to them at all, multimodality allows for the "approach" to understanding the topic to be relatable. I could be through technology, art, and architecture, whatever it may be.

In this single piece of written expression, Sean brilliantly exhibits a detailed knowledge of the theoretical concepts which frame multimodality. Moreover, his clever analogy between architectural design and the educational system provides a powerful visual that lends further clarity to Sean's informed and articulate elucidation of the benefits of a multimodal approach to learning.

Adrienne as Advocate

As has been previously discussed, Adrienne had been adamant about her belief that multimodality had no place in the college composition class. However, by the time that we met again in the WSC 2 classroom, Adrienne's perspectives had broadened. I was surprised and delighted when I received the following email attachment from Adrienne in which she announced her new position on the subject:

Preface to the essay

You may be a little shocked to discover my new position on the topic of multimodality. Although, I will always value traditional methods over the integration of multimodal devices, I have come to understand that plain traditional methods are not for everyone. I have always believed that the best way to learn something is by going to the source, i.e. the book or article. I think it is hard for students who have grown up surrounded by technology to focus during long lectures that only use textbooks. I think many students would benefit more in a classroom is they were able to choose their own method of learning.

I was going to stand by my position until a few days ago when I came across a quote. Astronomer, Neil deGrasse Tyson said "When students cheat on exams it's because out of school systems value grades more than students value learning." I think in many ways, the plain traditional methods focus on memorization and the final grades, while multimodality is more about creating individual understandings. I changed my point of view because I was thinking on the lines of what helps me, not on the lines of what would benefit our generation.

In conclusion, I will always have a hard time choosing a comic over a book, but I think that students should be able to choose the mode they want in order to learn information.

In the essay that follows, Adrienne assumes the role of informed champion of the integration of multimodality into the college composition class. Ironically, her statements of support for this argument are in direct opposition to her previous stance on this issue, yet that is the precisely the point. Her own exposure to a classroom in which her voice was heard and valued and in which independent thinking was prized has fostered the more expansive thinking that Adrienne now demonstrates.

A Wave of Change

The arts, new literacies and multimodality are necessary components of the 21st century college composition class. Since, many students spend their free time online, it is important to integrate technology into the classroom. Although, some would argue against this integration, it is clear that many students would benefit from being able to use different modes in order to show case what they learned. In the article, *The Arts, New Literacies, and Multimodality,* Peggy Albers and Jerome C. Harste state, "language is only partial, and that many modes are involved in meaning-making." (11) Instead of resorting to writing a plain essay, students who are interested in modes, such as video, PowerPoint, and art have a chance to express their ideas in a new and creative way. Students who are given the chance to work with different modes are able to interact more in the classroom as well as learn how to construct an essay using ideas from their multimodal projects. In the age of technology, students need a way for what they are using outside of the classroom to be connected to what they are learning on the inside of a classroom.

Albers and Harste state, "New Technologies are supporting literate social practices while altering as well as making less necessary or valuable older literate social practices (like spelling correctly, reading books, and writing personal letters to distant family members and friends)." (7) With multimodality, students no longer have to depend on thick textbooks and long lectures in order to learn more about literacy. Although, students may not be aware, they are learning about literacy through modes such as YouTube videos, comic books, and even video games. The their article, Albers and Harste state, "Children today are learning more about literacy outside of school than they are in, especially through electronic and digital devices and software." (qtd. in What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy 2004) Students can bring what they learned in video games and clips to the college composition classroom, and use their external knowledge in order to develop an argument they can use in their essay. Using multimodality in the classroom will also give students a chance to interact more.

Furthermore, many college classes have become professor-dominated lectures, and do not give students the ability to participate. Students will get more

out of a class if they are able to collaborate and create multimodal projects. In the article, Using Multiple Technologies to Teach Writing, author Kathleen Blake Yancey, discusses technologies role in teaching students writing skills. She states, "Surveys revealed that 90 percent of the students liked working together on the presentations and believed that they learned more than they would have if they had not presented to their peers" (40). By working with PowerPoints, students are able to brainstorm and share their ideas with their classmates before writing the essay. Collaboration will also solve the problem for students who have grown up using technology and have a hard time focusing during eighty-minute lectures. In the article, Why Long Lectures are Ineffective, Writer Salman Kahn who is the founder of Kahn Academy, states, "We should replace passivity with interactivity." (2012) Students would learn more if they were able to choose how they learned. For example, students who have a hard time following a math lecture can log onto KahnAcademy.com and watch short video clips on the problems they had a hard time understanding. The same concept can be applied to the college composition classroom. Students who are allowed to use other methods in order learn about literacy, can choose a mode they feel comfortable with to help them absorb information that was taught the traditional way. Multimodality will not replace traditional methods of teaching, but it will aid students who learn in different ways.

Lastly, students would benefit in the college composition classroom more if their ideas were respected over grades. Since elementary school, many students have been taught that grades matter more than learning the actual material. As a result, students have had to put their creativity on the sidelines in order to focus on passing a test. The only questions is, if students are learning the material or just memorizing it for an exam. The introduction of multimodality into the college composition classroom would allow students to learn the material in a creative way, which would also help them on an essay or test. For example, a student who creates a visual representation of the essay topic may have an advantage of a student who only reads the plain text and has no visual image. In the article, Using Multiple Technologies to Teach Writing, Blake-Yancey states, "Collegeage students, like all writers, often find themselves 'blocked' on at least one writing assignment. Sometimes these writers can't compose because they can't imagine an audience that they might successfully address." (40) Students who are not able to visualize their essay may have a harder time producing the desired work. If students are able to speak their ideas, they will be able to find the underlying cause of argument they want to address. One could argue that students, who are not able to create a visual representation of their essay, are doing twice the amount of work when it comes to actually writing the paper.

In conclusion, the introduction of multimodality into the college composition classroom is a necessity. No two students learn in the same way, and multimodality allows each students to use a mode they feel comfortable with in order to learn the material. Although, traditional methods are still valued and will not disappear anytime soon, they no longer have as great an impact on students who were raised using technology. If professors want students to grasp the material, they should allow them to use all the modes at their disposal. Students

who create videos, music, and PowerPoints representations of their essay topic are able to visualize their paper and have an easier time writing it. Technology is only becoming more advanced, so it makes sense to integrate it into the college composition classroom as well (Adrienne's essay 3/21/14).

I offer the above works as testimony to the power of valuing student's individual learning styles, to the importance of offering them a classroom environment in which they are encouraged to imagine, and to providing them with the tools, such as multimodality, through which they can, as demonstrated by Sean and Adrienne, so effectively express themselves.

Valuing the teacher

Finally, I wish to share with my readers the sentiments and words that make my work so meaningful:

Hey!

I hope your dissertation is coming along well. I have to also say that you have helped me grow as a person as well. Before taking your classes or having one of our many conversations, I always thought that learning through different mediums was pointless in college, but as you know, I have changed my thinking and understand that not everyone learns the same way. This is something that I will take with me to other classes.

Let me know your office hours and I will be sure to stop by! (Adrienne's email, 9/6/14)

Professor Buono,

I just wanted to send one final email to you before I have to change my email from Hofstra. You have no idea the impact you have made on me as a student. The skills and overall impact you have made on my critical thinking and ability to write will carry with me through out my academic and proffesional life. You pushed me and believed in me when a lot of times I didn't believe in myself. I constantly strived to make you proud this year! I know i did not make the corrections on that final research paper but do not worry I will be sending you a bunch of my work from LIU post, and those proffesors will be wondering who taught me how to write and think so well. Have a great summer and I will be back to visit you next year!!!

All the best,

Sean (Sean's email, 5/27/1)

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Appendices

APPENDIX A

Field Study Student Information Sheet

Hofstra University
School of Education and Allied Human Services
Department of Literacy Studies

October 2012

Dear (Name of Student)

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study that I am conducting. Although you know me as your freshman writing instructor, I am also a doctoral candidate in the Literacies Studies Department at Hofstra University. As such, I have begun work on my dissertation that will include the information gathered through this research study.

In order for you to make an informed decision, it is important for you to understand the purpose of my research and the expectations regarding your participation in the study. In my dual roles as Writing Coordinator and writing instructor for the School for University Studies, I am always very interested in finding ways in which to make the process of writing become more authentic and, therefore, more accessible to my students. Moreover, I believe that our writing classrooms should be sites of imaginative engagement in which teachers and students come together as a community of co-learners who are jointly invested in the attainment of mutual respect, trust, interaction, and exchange of ideas. To this end, it is important that I have the opportunity to work more closely with a select cross-section of the students with whom I work, in the hope that I am able to gain insight into the students' perceptions and expectations regarding their teachers, the program, and their writing classes as well as the writing process practiced within those classes.

If you decide to accept my invitation and become part of my study I would ask to meet with you, at a mutually agreed upon time, for an hour or so twice during each semester. During these meetings you may be asked to partake in an interview that will help me to better understand your feelings about writing, the program, and your writing class. Also, we will sit and talk about your how you feel about writing in general and, more particularly, about your current writing instruction and assignments as well as your sense of self as a writer in this class. In addition, I will be collecting your written assignments completed both in and out of class.

Your decision to participate in my study is entirely voluntary. Since I am your writing instructor, I want to assure you that whether or not you choose to participate in the study or even if you begin the study and wish to withdraw at any point, your decision will not have any impact on your grade in my class. I do not foresee any disadvantages to you if you choose to take part in the study. However, I do believe that your participation will prove to be beneficial to both of us by way of providing enlightenment about the student-teacher relationship and ways in which the

writing process can become even more effective for you and for future students. If you decide to opt out of this research study, you will simply tell me that you decline. If, however, you wish to participate, you simply have to read this document thoroughly, ask me any questions that you may have so that you completely understand the entire process and your role in it, and then sign the consent form that I have attached to this letter.

This study and the subsequent findings will provide the data for my dissertation, and, in the future, may be used as the context and content for an article written for publication in a scholarly journal or as the topic of a presentation at a scholarly conference. Your identity will be kept strictly confidential and a pseudonym will be used in place of your name. You will have the opportunity to read and comment upon the final document before it is submitted.

If you have any questions or are in need of further information you may contact my dissertation advisor, Dr. Theresa McGinnis, at Hofstra University's Literacy Studies Department by calling 516-463-5769 or by emailing her at: Theresa.A.McGinnis@Hofstra.edu

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. Your time and effort are greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Marilyn Buono Hofstra University School for University Studies 516-463-5059 engmfb@hofstra.edu

Appendix B

SUS 030/Fall 2012 Professor Buono Personal Interview

Name:
Address:
Phone (home and cell):
Hofstra e-mail:
What is your career goal (intended major)?
If identity were a "toolkit" what would your toolkit consist of?
How would you describe yourself as a student?
How would you describe your reading skills?
How often do you "read" and what is it that you read most often?
Do you feel that you always understand everything that you read?
If you do not understand a word, phrase, or passage in a text what do you do?
How would you describe your writing skills? Please be specific.
What is your process for writing an essay?
Estimate the amount of time during the course of a day spent using one or more of the functions of your cell phone. Which function(s) do you use most often? Why?
Do you spend a lot of time on the computer? How much time in an average day? What activities are you performing on the computer?
Do you consider yourself to be technologically savvy? That is, other than creating text-driven

Do you believe that technological devices like the computer and cell phone have had an effect on the way that you read, spell and write? Please explain.

documents, do you know how to design and create imaginative products such as artwork, posters,

Do you have any hobbies? What are they?

films etc.? Give examples.

Please commit to giving a single answer to the following
questions: Favorite television show:
Favorite movie:
Favorite type of
music: Favorite
book:
Favorite group or
singer: Favorite
celebrity or hero:
Favorite type of
music: Favorite
book:
Favorite group or
singer: Favorite
celebrity or hero:

APPENDIX C

Sample Assignments

FALL 2012 ASSIGNMENTS

Sample Essay:

Below, you will find quotes that reveal two very different perceptions of the "power" of the word. You have the option to choose only ONE of these quotes as your essay prompt—OR—you may choose to compare and/or contrast both quotes.

Please take your time when writing this essay. Although it will not be graded, it will help to provide me with an insight into your writing skills as well as the way you process information and formulate opinions. I suggest that you make sure that you read the prompt(s) carefully, take time to reflect on what each one says, brainstorm a few ideas, and then organize those ideas before you begin to write.

PROMPTS:

"I know nothing in the world that has as much power as a word. Sometimes I write one, and I look at it, until it begins to shine."

— Emily Dickinson

"of all the weapons of destruction that man could invent, the most terrible-and the most powerful-was the word. Daggers and spears left traces of blood; arrows could be seen at a distance. Poisons were detected in the end and avoided. But the word managed to destroy without leaving clues."

— Paulo Coelho

Faculty Research Day:

Assignment: Every student must attend Faculty Research Day. However, before you go, select one (1) topic from the list below, brainstorm the topic so that when you attend FRD you are prepared to seek out the information that you will need. Type up a 1-2 page response to your chosen topic. Due: 9/11

List of Possible Topics for Reaction Paper:

- *Write a one page reaction paper in which you discuss the overall event as well as the variety of works that are displayed.
- *Interview a presenter about the decisions that had to be made when designing their poster such as use of image, text, color choices, font choices, the final composition of the poster.
- *How do the posters represent the skills of composition, editing and organizing an argument economically, i.e. in the confines of a limited space?
- *How do visuals change the dynamic of an argument?
- * Which poster were you most attracted to? Why did it attract your attention? Be specific.

Museum Exhibit/Reaction Paper (Fall 2012 & Spring 2013):

Generally, I ask you to simply "react" to a piece of writing or to an event that I have assigned. Of course, while I always expect you to make a cogent statement reflecting your analysis about the topic under consideration, in this reaction paper I would like to see you step up your game a bit.

You will be viewing visual texts: encoded messages placed within the artwork by the artist. Although we cannot say for certain what the artist truly had in mind, we can try to use our frames of reference as clues to decoding the meaning of the art that we will be viewing. Moreover, we have been talking and reading about various forms of communication represented through multiple modalities that should help to expand and inform your perspective of the work that you will see displayed in this exhibit.

Therefore, I would like to see a bit of puzzling—inquiry—taking place within your reaction papers. Look at the obvious and then begin to ask yourself questions that will broaden the scope of your reaction paper. Use the investigative reporter's trusty guide: Who? What? Where? When? Why?

Have fun with this assignment, as you begin to see art—and the world—through different lenses. In fact, in order to emphasize the "fun" aspect, I would like you to "design" your reaction paper. For example, I have asked for permission to photograph the works on display. If we are granted permission, I would like you to use your cell phone camera to take a picture or pictures of a particular work or of the entire exhibit. Be creative in the way that you take the picture—it does not have to be the standard "photo" that tries to capture a perfect representation of the work. You can cut borders, take the picture upside down—do what you want—now you are the artist. Next, I want you to ignore MLA format—just for this particular assignment. Choose any type of font, or font size. You can alternate font types and sizes. You can add color or include your photo or one chosen from the internet that suits your discussion. Perhaps you want to create a certain layout of words that gives your text added dimension. Be creative, yet still convey a legitimate point.

HAVE FUN!!

Write approximately 1-2 pages due: Thursday, October 25. ***This paper is important and will be graded, so please give it your best effort.

Addendum to Library Exhibit Assignment:

During our visit to the Political Cartoon exhibit this morning in Axinn Library, I realized that many of you were having difficulty conceptualizing the assignment. Although I took the time to discuss with you in more detail, I wanted to put the words to paper not only to provide more clarity for you but also for the second class who will be visiting the exhibit this afternoon.

This "reaction" paper is building on our class discussions about the power of words as actualized by the media and also the reading by Albers and Harste. We are attempting to incorporate the aesthetics of art—the political cartoon exhibit—and its ability to unleash the imagination—our creative responses—with a multimodal approach to writing—the ability to design the way in

which our words will be presented. You may take pictures and upload them to your computer, download images from the internet, change the shape and style of your font as well as add color. You may also choose to reconceptualize the way the font is laid out on your paper. I truly do want you to have fun and to be engaged in this project.

I also would like you to understand that the response that I am looking for is not one based merely on opinion. I do not want the "I like it because" or the "I don't like it because" type of response. I want you to respond to the aesthetic environment, to consider the way that the design of these cartoons have the power to convey so much through a medium which appears to have so little on the page. You may respond to one cartoon, to a themed section of cartoons, or to the entire exhibit. However, you must remember that your reaction is to the art/multimodal aspects represented through the political cartoon.

If you still have questions, please drop by or send an email.

Process Analysis:

Today, I would like you to do some in-class writing about the process you followed when creating your reaction/design essay based on our trip to the Axinn Library to view the Political Cartoon exhibit. As you know, this project was designed to further acquaint you with the power of words as wielded by the media, to introduce you to the aesthetic experience that comes from encounters with the arts, and to allow your imaginations to be released and expressed in a non-traditional, multimodal response format.

As you know, we have been developing our writing skills by learning, understanding, and practicing certain important and very necessary steps that make up what we refer to as the 'traditional' writing process: reading for understanding, annotating, selecting key points, brainstorming, drafting, editing, and revision. I am interested, and I think that you might be too, in learning about the processes that are used when creating a multimodal 'text.' Therefore, today, I would like you to reflect on the steps that you took as you went about conceptualizing and creating your multimodal responses to the exhibit.

Please take this request seriously. Spend some time envisioning your recent creative adventure and do your best to document, as specifically and as clearly as possible, your thoughts and actions as you moved through this process from beginning to end.

The Power of Words:

This essay is a bit personal in its nature, as I am asking you to examine the way in which words have had a powerful effect on your life. From the beginning of this semester we have been discussing words and examining the ways in which words can be empowering in terms of the knowledge they bring to us and the ways in which they can help us to better articulate our ideas and beliefs in order to achieve our goals in life. We have also considered the ways in which words can be hurtful, causing us to feel insecure, ugly, stupid, or "lesser than" others. Most recently, we have come to understand the terrible consequences that occur when we fail to use our words to question and to speak out against injustice and the pressure that is imposed on us to conform to societal beliefs and actions that we know to be wrong.

Therefore, I would like you to write a 3 page narrative essay about a time in your life when "words" had a powerful effect on you. You may consider the above suggestions or you may choose to examine your life in terms of a **literacy timeline** in which you recall how you came to acquire the power of reads through learning to read and write. In fact, the literacy narrative would not only allow you to discuss the power of words but also the times when words or lack of words created a hurtful or harmful situation.

This essay should be **3 pages in length**, typed, designed in MLA format and stapled. Even more importantly, it should be thoroughly thought out, organized, well-developed, and written in a logical and coherent way. Use a dictionary to make sure that the words that you choose are correct in the context. Also, make use of your textbooks for this class to ensure that you have used the correct syntax and grammar. Please remember to provide an ORIGINAL TITLE!

Argument Essay:

In this last essay of the semester we will be using the mode of argument to take a position on the many aspects of composition discussed throughout the semester. We have investigated the power of words, both spoken and unspoken; we have experimented with multimodality and the power of the image as a communication style; and now we are exploring the technological terrain afforded to you, the Millennial generation.

Therefore, in this essay, I would like you to consider just where you stand in the midst of this discussion. Are you a true Millennial? That is, do you believe that you exhibit the traits detailed in the essays that you have read? Do you think that technology, i.e. digital literacy, is an integral part of your everyday life and literacy or do you think, as Carr states, that Google (technology) is making you stupid? Lastly, I would like you to state your position on the integration of multimodality into the college composition classroom. Do you think that the affordances of technology should be incorporated into the college writing class or do you think that adherence to the traditional academic format and content should be preserved?

I know that I have asked two questions, but they are inter-related and both questions need to be answered before you take you choose your final position. We will discuss this topic in class and I will answer any questions that you may have. The final paper should be approximately 5 pages in length and should include quotes from the reading to back up your assertions. As usual, the paper should be written in MLA format and the final draft as well as prior rough drafts should be stapled together. I will want a hard copy of all drafts and an email copy of the final draft. The essay is due on Tuesday, December 11.

Presentation Assignment (Fall 2012 & Spring 2013):

This assignment is designed to release your imagination and to allow you to have a little fun while still fulfilling a class requirement. We would like you to draw on your creative powers and skills to create a visual representation of the class themes: The power of words, the power of art/visuals, multimodality, technology, the Millennial, all of these, or any combination of themes. Although this is not meant to be a written assignment, some of you may choose to express yourself through poetry or song/music. For the most part, anything goes. We are not judging your presentation on your artistic ability, per se, but on your effort and ability to capture, through any artistic medium, the essence of the class.

We will be setting aside three class days for these presentations. Each presentation should be approximately 10-15 minutes in length. Please plan your presentation accordingly. Some presentations may run a bit under ten minutes and some will truly need the full fifteen minutes, but please be mindful of running over the time limit, as you will be stealing time away from the next presenter.

The following is a list of possible mediums that might help you with the planning of your presentation:

Presentation Mediums:

Art/painting/poster/collage

Power Point

Film

Photographs

Music/Adaptation of existing music or creation of and performance of an original piece

Poetry

Songs/Sung or Read

Dance

Jewelry

Knitting

Sewing

Additional Inspirational Mediums:

Tattoos

Graffiti

Environmental Signs and Symbols

Architecture

Video Games

SPRING 2013 ASSIGNMENTS

Sample Essay:

Choose ONE of the prompts below, take time to think about it, and try to view it through as many different lenses as possible. Brainstorm and organize your thoughts and THEN begin to write. You have 50 minutes to complete the essay, so try to balance your response—do not write too much or too little. However, do the best work possible, as I am interested in assessing not only your writing skills but also your analytical and critical thinking skills as well.

Sample Essay Prompts:

"Everything you can imagine is real." –Pablo Picasso

^{**}If you have any questions about this project, please come to speak to me.

"There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle." –Albert Einstein

"Soon silence will have passed into legend. Man has turned his back on silence. Day after day he invents machines and devices that increase noise and distract humanity from the essence of life, contemplation, meditation." –Jean Arp

"Those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything."

— George Bernard Shaw

The Rant/Meta Writing:

As you read the title, you are probably asking yourself, "What is a rant?" You are probably even more confused by the term "metawriting." As the textbook, *Quest* explains, "In written form, [the rant] is an emotionally charged 'freewrite.' It is an exploratory piece of writing used as a discovery tool during the writing process. A rant expresses and explores your thoughts, feelings, and opinions on a subject (this is the metawriting part of the rant), yet it does not require that you support any of your ideas with evidence" (p. 63).

Today, in class, we are going to do a little "ranting" in order to prepare for the first essay assignment. I have asked you to jot down a list of your pet peeves (I hope that you came to class prepared). We will consider this to be your preliminary list—your "just getting warmed up" list. I want you to choose one of your peeves and write about it, NONSTOP, for ten minutes. Don't waste time pondering, brainstorming, or worrying too much about grammar, spelling, and sentence structure. JUST WRITE!

Now that you have finished your rant, read it back to yourself. Now, spend another ten minutes writing down a description/analysis of both the experience and the rant itself.

Finally, we will spend the rest of class discussing characteristics/qualities of the rant.

The Rant/Part Two:

For the second part of this assignment, I would like you to revise and smooth out your rant or choose another one of your pet peeves and rant about it for thirty minutes, read it, think about it, and revise it. Remember, now you are moving into a more formalized part of the assignment in which your "small" object becomes bigger and more global. So, if your original rant topic was not the one that made your heart sing, choose another.

The Opinion Essay:

The Opinion essay is the first of your formal, graded essays this semester. We have discussed the properties of an "argument" essay which primarily necessitates choosing a debatable issue—there must be two sides to be considered. Your stance should be clearly conveyed without reverting to name calling or bias. The essay should include balanced portions of ethos, logos,

and pathos which will be conveyed through your choice of words and the tone of your words. You will be arguing your point of view about a topic selected from your pet peeve list and developed through your "Rant" and subsequent drafts. The substance of your essay will be, as stated in the handout entitled "Criteria for a Successful Opinion Essay," "based on information that you have acquired from personal experience or from academic or observational knowledge. You may use anecdotes from personal experience or observation, or you may discuss and explain information you have picked up either from the media or through academic research. For this assignment, information does not have to be documented. However, you must honestly discuss how little or how much you believe you know at this point in your studies." PLEASE REFER TO THIS HANDOUT FOR FURTHER GUIDANCE.

The essay should be 2-3 pages in length, typed according to MLA format, and stapled. As with all essays, you should begin your revised, final draft as soon as possible so as to allow time to edit and to check for errors of all types—spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, organization, transitions, and development, to name just a few—before you turn it in.

The Persuasion Essay:

In this essay you will be using the art of persuasion to convince your audience that they should agree with the argument that you are making. This type of essay differs from the "Opinion Essay" in that you are to avoid using "I" and you cannot simply use your own experiences and beliefs to make your point. You will need some support from authoritative sources which will be cited in the body of the paper and listed on a Works Cited page. The essay itself need only be 2-3 pages in length, but because it incorporates properties of the formal research paper, it will help to prepare you to write the longer, more deeply researched essay that will be assigned next.

I am giving you a copy of "The Arts, New Literacies, and Multimodality" written by Peggy Albers and Jerome Harste as the article from which you can draw your supporting statements. The question—or, the debatable issue to be discussed is: **Should, as Albers and Harste point out, "the arts," "multimodality," and "new literacies" become incorporated into the curriculum of the college composition class?** You may argue "For" or "Against" this idea. However, whichever side you choose, be sure to back up your argument with quotes from this article (or from other sources that you have obtained). Your own recent experience with the use of multimodality should help you to form an opinion and to choose a side. However, remember that you are not basing your argument on personal experience; rather your persuasive ammunition should be drawn from other, more authoritative sources.