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ARGUMENTS THAT MATTER: A PLACE-BASED APPROACH TO TEACHING ARGUMENT WRITING TO RURAL STUDENTS

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"*My family's store needs help*," Beth explained to the rest of her sixth-grade class. *"For years and years—going back to my grandparents—my family's owned the general store a few miles from here over by the highway. We've always had people come in to shop—some are local people and some are people going by on the highway. We don't have as many shoppers now, though, because the new Wal-Mart can sell things for cheaper prices. I want to argue that the government should do something to help small stores. If they don't, small stores like my family's won't exist anymore."*

Beth recently made this statement during a discussion on argument writing at Henry Middle School, the rural middle school she attends in a southern state. (In this manuscript, pseudonyms are used for the school, students, and teachers described.) In accordance with the Common Core State Standards and other rigorous state standards, Henry Middle School has chosen to make argument writing a major instructional focus. While many schools have made this same choice, Henry Middle is unique because of its decision to use place-based pedagogy in combination with instruction focusing on argument writing. To further understand Henry Middle School's decision, we considered the importance of place-based pedagogy and the significance of argument writing.

Place-Based Pedagogy as Culturally Relevant Instruction

Place-based pedagogy is a form of culturally relevant instruction that connects the realities of place to students' learning. The curricular relevance facilitated by place-based pedagogy can be especially useful when working with rural students, whose educational experiences are fraught with challenges, such as funding inequities (Jimerson 211), limited access to educational resources (Gibbs 61), and rural poverty (Johnson and Strange 16). Culturally relevant pedagogy should be a hallmark of language arts instruction, but, in many cases, "culturally relevant" has become synonymous with or limited to multicultural literature. One way to expand thinking on "culturally relevant" is to consider the meaningful environments to which students have attachments and how those places and communities represent *cultural* opportunities for instruction. In other words, place-based literacy pedagogies afford teachers with even more instructional choices to make the language arts curriculum relevant and meaningful for young people. Place-based writing allows students to explore the connections they have with their natural environment and to their community. In a sense, place-based writing instruction provides the *culturally* relevant work to become *locally* relevant, exploring the various cultures experienced in a student's family and community. Place-based advocates contend that rural students are deeply tied to locality by their "sense of place," which David Hutchinson describes as a constructed reality "informed by the unique experiences, histories, motives, and goals that each of us brings to the spaces with which we identify" (11). By drawing on their students' "sense of place," teachers can infuse relevance and community into their instruction: a practice for which Jeff Duncan-Andrade and Ernest Morrell advocate when they advise teachers to implement curricula relevant to students' lives (285).

In addition, place-based literacy practices designed to transform an element of one's community invoke Pablo Freire and Donaldo Macedo's discussion of the emancipatory power of literacy. Students who learn through place-based instruction can develop the ability

to read the "word" and "world," a skill that Freire and Macedo explain enables students to understand not only the texts they study but also the context in which they examine (or produce) those texts (186). Gloria Ladson-Billings asserts that effective culturally-relevant instruction values students' backgrounds and communities as well as academic content (which helps students maintain their sense of identity while still achieving academic success) (160). Place-based pedagogy in rural communities accomplishes this goal, as it emphasizes students' sense of place as well as their academic achievements.

The Significance of Argument Writing

While argument writing has garnered increased attention in recent years because of the emphasis that the Common Core State Standards and other revised state standards have placed on it, this is not the only reason to teach it: research identifies a number of benefits associated with teaching students argument writing. Students who learn to write argumentative essays are able to consider multiple sides of important issues (Lunsford & Ruszkiewicz 50), evaluate pieces of evidence (Wood 22), and develop strong understandings of logic (Hillocks 25). These skills are applicable not just to middle-school argument writing but also to numerous educational and professional situations. Combining the strategies of argument writing with material that is relevant to students' lives and communities can prepare students to advocate for issues that matter to them while also teaching them key cognitive strategies associated with college/career readiness and prioritized by the Common Core State Standards.

About this Inquiry

For a six-week period, Sean Ruday made weekly visits to a rural middle school in a southern state. This school, called Henry Middle School in this manuscript, focused a great deal of its English curriculum on argument writing due to the major role this genre plays in the state's English standards. Henry Middle School's teachers and administrators identified the issue of student disengagement as a challenge on which to focus and chose to use place-based instruction

to address that goal. Prior to this particular inquiry, Sean had previously conducted professional development sessions at the school on writing instruction, as well as place-based and culturally-relevant pedagogy. This inquiry was designed to address the following questions:

1. How does a rural middle school connect the principles of place-based learning to argument writing instruction?
2. What are students' and teachers' experiences with this instruction?

Data Generation

Sean collected the following data for this inquiry over six visits to Henry Middle School: six lesson observation transcripts, three student focus-group transcripts, and one teacher focus-group transcript. Each lesson observation and focus group was audio recorded and then transcribed by Sean. There were six total English classes at Henry Middle School at the time of this inquiry: two sixth grade classes, two seventh grade classes, and two eighth grade classes; Sean observed each of those classes once. In addition, he conducted focus groups with students from each grade; each focus group lasted approximately one hour and consisted of six students. The students in these focus groups were selected by the school's English teachers and were designed to represent a wide range of student ability levels. The teacher focus group was made up of Henry Middle School's three English teachers and lasted one hour.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data and reach a developed understanding of how the students and teachers at Henry Middle School experienced place-based argument writing, we used deductive coding informed by the various possible domains of a sense of place: the biophysical, psychological, sociocultural, and political/economic (Ardoin 113). We considered ways students can draw from these various dimensions as they develop their writing and how teachers can make use of these domains in their instruction. We analyzed the role place played

in students' constructions of arguments and in teachers' argument-writing instruction, reflecting on whether the "place" arguments students made and teachers facilitated were about the environmental aspects of a place (biophysical), personal experience in a place (psychological), the cultures/histories within a place (sociocultural), and politics/advocacy for a place (political/economic). In addition to coding for these place domains, we also analyzed the data for particular instructional practices such as conferring, modeling, mentor text use, and other components of writing instruction that emerged.

Overview

The structure of this manuscript emerges from our interest in providing readers with detailed understandings of students' and teachers' experiences with place-based argument writing while also sharing our findings and analyses. With these goals in mind, we have organized the piece in four sections:

- "Classroom Snapshots," descriptions of lessons taught by the English teachers of Henry Middle School that apply the idea of place-based instruction to argument writing. There are three snapshots in this section, one describing each of the school's English teachers.
- "Focus Group Snapshots," excerpts from the four focus groups conducted as part of this inquiry (one each with selected students from each grade and one with the school's English teachers).
- "Findings," the three findings that emerged from our analysis of the data.
- "Discussion," thoughts on the limitations and effects of this inquiry, including key takeaway ideas educators can apply to their instruction.

Classroom Snapshots

In this section, we present three classroom snapshots designed to help readers understand what place-based argument writing instruction can look like in action.

Snapshot One: Ms. Atkins, Sixth Grade Teacher

"You're going to love this next writing unit," Ms. Atkins exclaims to her students, beginning her lesson on argument writing with her sixth graders. "We're going to be working on argument writing." Her students nod attentively as she continues: "One of the first—and most important—parts of argument writing is thinking about what you might want to argue. Who here likes to argue?"

Most of the students in the class raise their hands, many of them smiling. "I thought so," continues Ms. Atkins. "We're going to spend a lot of time brainstorming possible topics and thinking about the features of a good argument essay. However, I want to start by thinking aloud and modeling for you an example of how someone might come up with an argument essay topic."

Several students sit up and track Ms. Atkins with their eyes, clearly engaged in this mini-lesson. "One topic that I'd like to argue about has to do with the Fall Festival (a yearly festival held each October in this community that features a parade, vendors, games, and activities). I saw a bunch of y'all at the Fall Festival last year."

Ms. Atkins writes "Fall Festival" on the whiteboard and then continues, "One thing that I noticed about this past year's Fall Festival was all of the big, national chains that had vending booths set up. Chick-Fil-A and Dominos had booths set up there last year. While Chick-Fil-A and Dominos both have good food, the Fall Festival is a local festival that celebrates our community, so I think the festival should do more to get more local vendors there. Maybe they could charge the local vendors less money or give them the first chance to reserve a booth. We have great restaurants in this community and I think it would be best if a local festival featured these local restaurants instead of national ones."

Next, Ms. Atkins writes "Argument: Help local restaurants Sell Food at Fall Festival instead of national chains" on the whiteboard.

She then asks the students, "What did you notice about the think-aloud I just did?"

"You talked about something that matters to you," responds a student.

"That's right," replies Ms. Atkins. "I talked about an issue that matters to me, one that's relevant to my life. Next, y'all are going to start brainstorming possible topics for your argument essays. While you do that, I want you to think about what matters to you—that's going to help you come up with good ideas for argument essays."

Snapshot Two: Ms. Rhett, Seventh Grade Teacher

"Good morning, everyone," Ms. Rhett, Henry Middle School's seventh grade English teacher, greets her first-period class. In the previous day's class, Ms. Rhett and her students discussed the attributes of effective argument writing and how to identify strong and relevant argument writing topics. For homework, she asked the students to bring in some possible topics about which they'd like to argue. "Let's get started with some of the argument topics you wrote down for homework. Who wants to start with an example?"

Student hands shoot up around the room; Ms. Rhett calls on a young man towards the back of the class who says, "My topic's about the benefits of participating in football."

"Very interesting," responds Ms. Rhett. "Tell us more."

"Well," continues the student, "A bunch of people say that kids shouldn't play football anymore because it's too dangerous, and I get that some people think that way, but there are so many great things that come from playing football. I want to argue that football's a great sport with a bunch of benefits."

"Very well said," replies Ms. Rhett. "I love that you're picking a topic that you really care about. I also noticed that you mentioned what people who oppose football might say, such as safety issues. That's another important part of argument writing—acknowledging what people who oppose your argument might say—and you did a nice job there."

Another student in the class raises her hand and excitedly shares her argument writing topic: "My idea has to do with football, too, but kinda in a different way."

"Okay, tell us more," Ms. Rhett probes.

"I think the high school (there is one high school in the town where Henry Middle School is located) should expand its football stadium. The football stadium is like the meeting place for everyone who lives here. Even in middle school, we all meet each other at football games, and my brother, who's in college now, and his friends all meet up at the games when they're back home. The stadium's small, though, so I want to argue it should be bigger so people can meet there if they want to."

"An excellent idea," responds Ms. Rhett. "That's another great example of picking a topic you really care about and explaining how you'd argue for it. Really nice work, both of you who shared your ideas."

Snapshot Three: Ms. Bryan, Eighth Grade Teacher

"You guys have been doing great work in all of our discussions about argumentative essays," Ms. Bryan tells her eighth graders, "but today I get to really see what you've done and talk with you about your drafts. While you guys work on your drafts, I'm going to confer with you individually. I'll meet with as many of you as I can and talk with you about how you're doing up to this point. I'll ask you to tell me your topics and summarize what you've done so far. I'll probably ask you a few questions and make some suggestions."

The students take out their notebooks and continue working on the drafts of their argumentative essays, which they began writing in the previous day's class, as Ms. Bryan circulates the room. She sits down with a student named Rachel and checks in: "Rachel! How are things going so far?"

"Real good. I'm liking writing about the topic I picked."

"What topic did you decide on?"

"About the new highway they're talking about building, the one that would take out part of Taylor Park." Ms. Bryan asks Rachel to summarize her ideas and Rachel responds, "I'm arguing against it. I

think that park is important because kids love playing there and sometimes people have get-togethers in the little shelters they have. My cousin had a birthday party there last year and it was real nice."

"Great job of summarizing this argument," Ms. Bryan responds. "Have you thought about the counterarguments that your opposition might make?"

"Yeah, I have," replies Rachel. "I know people want this highway expanded so that it's easier to pass by this area on the way to other places, but those people need to also think about the people of this area. We matter, too, and the park is important to a lot of us."

"Awesome job," says Ms. Bryan. "That's a really nice job of thinking about a possible counterargument and how you'd respond to it. I love how strongly you advocate for the people of this area."

Focus Group Snapshots

In this section, we present snapshot descriptions of the four focus groups conducted at Henry Middle School as part of this inquiry. The first three snapshots highlight focus group conversations by the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students, respectively, while the fourth identifies key focus group conversations by the school's English teachers. These focus group excerpts are included to provide further insight into the students' and teachers' experiences with place-based argument writing.

Sixth Grade Focus Group Snapshot

Sean: Thanks, all of you, for coming to this focus group. So, you've just finished writing argument essays. What did you notice about this writing unit?

Collin: Ms. Atkins talked a lot about us writing about things that we can care about.

Casey: Yeah, totally.

Sean: Does that usually happen?

Casey: Not this much. We did it a little before, but, like, this time, she really talked to us about arguing for things that matter to us.

Riley: Yeah, it was really cool. It felt like we were really talking about things that matter around here.

Sean: I'm interested in something you just said, "Around here." Can you say more about that?

Riley: Yeah, our teacher really was into us writing about things that relate to Henry Middle School or other things in Henderson County (a pseudonym for the county in which Henry Middle School is located).

Sean: Did you like writing about those things?

Riley: Yeah, I really did. It felt like we were really doing things that were important because we were talking about writing about real things. I really liked it.

Seventh Grade Focus Group Snapshot

Andrew: This assignment we did (referring to the argument essays the students wrote) isn't like normal English class stuff.

Sean: Can you expand on that?

Andrew: Yeah, to me, English class is supposed to be vocabulary quizzes, grammar tests, reading comprehension questions, that kind of thing. I never liked English, but I liked this.

Brittany: Me, too. This didn't feel like school, it felt relevant, current, like the opposite of what's usually done in school.

Sean: So, you see what's usually done in school as the opposite of relevant and current?

Brittany: Totally. Those [state standardized] tests they make us take—definitely not relevant and current. They're basically the opposite.

Sean: Do you all think students' experiences in school would be different if more of the work they did was current and relevant to their lives?

(All students in the group state agreement, some nod vigorously.)

Kayla: There's no doubt it would be different. School is usually school, and that's separate from home and things like that. Sometimes teachers try to make things relatable to our interests, but this assignment was the first time schoolwork really seemed to me similar to out-of-school.

Brittany: I'd love love love to do more things like this, where we think about what's going on in our community and our lives. Plus, I learned a lot too, much more than I do from the quizzes and tests and stuff. I think I'll remember a lot more about argument writing than the test we had on a book we read at the beginning of the year.

Eighth Grade Focus Group Snapshot

Jake: Two years ago, we wrote persuasive essays, but I didn't really like them as much as I liked doing these.

Sean: What was different?

Jake: The topics. For that one, our teacher—she doesn't work here anymore—she gave us a worksheet with a list of persuasive essay topics. Do y'all remember them?

Ashlee: Yeah, they just weren't real interesting. I think the one I did was about wearing hats in school. Sure, wearing hats in school would be cool, but I don't care that much.

Sean: So how are the topics of the essays you just finished different from those?

Bryan: The essays we wrote with Ms. Bryan, they were different because of how much she emphasized us writing about stuff we care about. When we did persuasive essays before, it was all, 'Write a persuasive essay because you're supposed to write a persuasive essay.' With this project we just did with Ms. Bryan, it was more like 'Write this argument essay because you have something to say. You have something to argue about. Just make sure it's something you care about.'

Rachel: I know! I loved how, with Ms. Bryan, she really wanted us to write about things we cared about. I wrote about how I don't want the highway that would take out Taylor Park to be built. The world isn't just about people trying to get through places like this to bigger cities. People who live here also matter. Ms. Bryan and this writing assignment gave me a chance to talk about this.

Teacher Focus Group Snapshot

Sean: Congrats, you all. You did a great job on this argument writing project. The students did great work and seemed to love it.

Ms. Atkins: I thought modeling for the students was so important. I don't think they've really done anything before with place-based writing and I felt that modeling for them what place-based argument writing can look like really helped them.

Ms. Bryan: That was my experience also. I've always been a fan of the whole gradual release in teaching, where you show the students something, do it with them, and then ask them to try it on their own. I don't do the gradual release as much as I should in general, but I was conscientious about doing it with this unit and it really helped.

Sean: I wonder what teaching argument writing would be like in a more diverse school. Would it be harder to model place-based argument writing in that kind of environment?

Ms. Rhett: Honestly, I don't think it would matter. Let me tell you why I think that. Even though our students are from the same area and a lot of them have similar backgrounds, they still have different things they're passionate about.

Ms. Bryan: I know what you mean. One thing that really stuck out to me was how many different things students wanted to write about in their argument essays. Even though they were all writing about topics that were relevant to them and had to do with place-based writing, they wrote about a diverse array of things. One student wrote about how much teachers here are paid and why it's important to pay teachers more, others wrote about the environment, another wrote about building a better emergency room at the local hospital because her dad had to go to the ER and it was small and understaffed. Our students are from the same community, but there are different things about the community that matter to each of them.

Findings

In this section, we present and describe the following findings that emerged from our analysis of the data collected during this inquiry (each of which is discussed below):

1. Students' arguments represented many domains of place.
2. The common thread among students' arguments was a sense of social activism.
3. Students' explorations of different domains of place were facilitated by the teachers' instruction.

Finding One: Students' Arguments Represented Many Domains of Place

Instead of focusing solely on a particular feature of place such as biophysical, psychological, or socio-cultural, the students' place-based arguments represented a wide range of domains. In a focus group discussion, Ms. Bryan explained that this did not surprise her:

> Some people might think, 'Oh, all these students are rural, so they'd all do the same things for place-based argument writing,' but that's definitely not the case. They all wrote about different things, about different aspects of place. I expected this because of the different personalities, interests, and values they all have.

Students also acknowledged the various domains they and their peers addressed in their argument essays; in the eighth-grade focus group, Rachel discussed this phenomenon:

> *I loved how everyone wrote about different things on their argument essays. I wrote an argument against the new highway, someone else wrote about building a Civil War museum, and another person wrote that we should have more sports teams for girls in our school.*

Another student, an eighth grader named Danielle, expressed a similar sentiment:

> *I wrote my argument essay on how we need a bigger and better emergency room at [the local hospital], and I was the only one who wrote about anything like that. I thought that was very cool, because when people said what they were writing about, it was like they were showing what they were about. This project let all of those different ideas really shine through.*

All of these comments reveal the range of domains represented in the students' argument essays and suggest the importance of acknowledging the different forms that one's sense of place can take. As Ms. Bryan asserted, it would be easy to assume that rural students from the same community may all feel strongly about similar aspects of place, but reductionist thinking like this would be contrary to students' authentic selves—or, as Danielle explained, what individual students are "about." The specific domains and topics represented in the argument writing of Henry Middle School students speak to the diversity of their unique experiences, values, and perceptions.

This finding provides an important insight about the complexity and nuance embedded in these students' senses of engagement and cautions against teachers making generalizations in place-based and culturally relevant instruction. The most effective instruction that integrates students' out-of-school lives, home cultures, and individual identities does not assume that students have particular interests because they possess certain attributes or are from a particular location (Winn and Johnson 11), but rather gives students opportunities to explore aspects of their lives, interests, and cultures that are particularly meaningful to them.

The various domains of place that these students chose to address emphasizes the importance of guarding against assumptions and implicit biases, as well as the significance of ensuring that all students have opportunities to apply academic skills to aspects of their lives in ways that are personally relevant. Larry Ferlazzo (121) calls this concept a transfer of learning—an opportunity for students to apply

academic skills and strategies they learn in one setting to another. In the instructional context described in this article, students took the idea of argumentation and applied it to contexts that were meaningful and relevant to them. Such transfer-based practices provide students with opportunities to make their academic experiences personally meaningful and maximize the potential of place-based pedagogy. By giving students opportunities to explore the components of place that most resonated with them, the teachers in this study helped their students adapt the material to their individual identities and interests.

Finding Two: The Common Thread among Students' Arguments Was a Sense of Social Activism

While students at Henry Middle School explored a variety of place domains in their works, their argument essays were linked by their senses of social activism and desires to bring about actual change to some aspect of their communities. Ms. Rhett explained her belief that social activism was a unifying theme in her students' works:

> The common thread was definitely my students wanting to make a difference in some way in the community, wanting to make something better. I noticed some similarities in their topics, like some students writing about similar issues such as improving the funding to our schools or enhancing something about the appearance of the town, but there were so many unique distinctions to all of the students' essays as well. Nobody wrote about exactly the same thing, but everyone's essays were about enhancing something in this community.

Ms. Rhett's observation was echoed in the responses of many students who asserted that, while their particular topics were different, a desire to enhance some part of their communities was present in all of their works. For example, a seventh grader named Brittany noted, "*My classmates and I wrote about a lot of different topics, but all the topics had something in common: they all were about making things here [in the community] better*." Kayla, another seventh grader, expressed a

similar sentiment, "*I think we were all united in this [argument writing assignment] because we all argued for things that we think can make life better in our school or in this county. I thought that was really cool.*"

The emphasis on social activism that emerged in these students' argument essays echoes Randy Bomer and Katherine Bomer's call for curriculum that is more aligned with social issues and opportunities for activism than traditional educational practices that focus only on skills with no connection to real world issues (11). The students at Henry Middle School successfully valued their individual interests while also advocating for their community in general. The success that Henry Middle School's students had when combining students' individual interests and opportunities for personally relevant advocacy suggests that these two entities are important to student engagement and success. Student choice is an important component of effective, high-interest writing instruction (Fletcher and Portalupi 38), but, for these students, the combination of choice and the framework of community-based advocacy facilitated student engagement and success.

Writing experiences like these students had can help young people grasp the emancipatory power of literacy (Friere and Macedo 185) in a relevant and engaging way that helps them see their work in English class as meaningful to their individual lives. For an illustration of this, recall Brittany's comment from the seventh-grade focus group snapshot about place-based argument writing: "*this didn't feel like school, it felt relevant, current, like the opposite of what's usually done in school*."

These students' writing experiences speak to the importance of representation in the materials and activities with which students engage in school. In this project, the students at Henry Middle School felt like their identities and interests were represented through the instruction and assignments that called for them to advocate for issues of particular importance to them. The importance of students' backgrounds and cultures is often addressed in discussions of reading instruction, such as Rudine Sims Bishop's statement that "readers often seek their mirrors in books" (ix). While the literature that students encounter in school

is often taken to task for only representing dominant cultures (Tschida et al. 28), the experiences of the Henry Middle School students suggest that such a perspective should also be applied to writing instruction. The place-based pedagogy used to instruct these students gave them opportunities to see important, community-oriented issues in their instruction and provided them with support that helped them address important issues in their own lives and communities. It is also important to note that the origins of place-based instruction in environmental or outdoors education have long advanced the idea that lessons focused on community engender greater civic mindedness. This study suggests that, in addition to making the content more relevant, place-based writing tasks can also promote the principles of citizenship.

Finding Three: Students' Explorations of Different Domains of Place Were Facilitated by the Teachers' Instruction

The instruction delivered by English teachers Ms. Atkins, Ms. Rhett, and Ms. Bryan played a major role in the fact that the students of Henry Middle School explored distinct domains in their argument essays. Riley, a sixth grader, asserted that teacher modeling was important to her feeling empowered to explore place domains that mattered to her:

> *It was totally great that Ms. Atkins showed us examples of her argument essay while she talked to us about writing ours. She told us about her idea and then showed us examples of her first draft, her revisions, and her final draft. This made me feel like I could write a good argument essay, too. I saw her write about something that mattered to her and I was like, 'I can write about something that matters to me.'*

Ms. Atkins was pleased that Riley recognized this in her instruction and concurred that this was an important aspect of her approach:

> I'm thrilled that she noticed that and felt the way she did. That's exactly what I was going for, to help the students feel able to explore place domains they care about by showing them my work and my ideas.

Similarly, the other English teachers at Henry employed similar modeling strategies to help their students feel comfortable and able to explore meaningful place domains in their works; Ms. Bryan commented that she "noticed the students really liked seeing an example" of an argument essay because "it helped them think of all the different things they could write about. Seeing my example," she continued, "helped them realize they can go in so many ways with this." Ms. Rhett felt similarly, noting, "Sometimes kids think teachers are looking for just one topic, like there's a 'right' topic. I think showing the students an example of an argument essay helped them understand there are different topics you can pick."

However, the teachers also noted a caveat to modeling argument essays for students; Ms. Rhett explained:

> It was really important, though, for me to tell the students that they don't need to write about the same topic I was. I wanted to make sure they know that the topic I was showing them was an example, not an expectation.

Ms. Atkins's comments on the topic echoed this idea: "Yes, that's really important. I told my students that I was writing about something that matters to me and that, similarly, they should write about something that matters to them." Ms. Bryan agreed that it is important for teachers to be very clear when telling students to explore topics of their interest instead of replicating topics their teachers have modeled: "Sometimes kids see something a teacher has done and say, 'Oh, that's the topic [the teacher] wants me to write about. Because of this, it's definitely important that teachers tell students to explore their interests, not the teacher's interest."

These instructional practices that value students' unique and individualized place-based interests align with the idea of moving

beyond a single-story perspective in which only the perspectives of the dominant culture are shared and privileged (Adichie 2009). Up to this point, the idea of disrupting the single-story framework has been primarily applied to the materials students read (see Tschida, Ryan, and Ticknor). Through their instruction, Ms. Atkins, Ms. Rhett, and Ms. Bryan applied the idea of disrupting the single-story framework to writing pedagogy: these teachers showed their students that they could explore issues that mattered to them and that they were not limited to specific topics. A single-story framework that only privileges dominant cultural perspectives might communicate to rural students such as those described in this study that their unique experiences and identities are not encouraged in school; however, the modeling that these teachers provided ensured that such a perspective did not exist in their classrooms.

Ms. Atkins, Ms. Rhett, and Ms. Bryan's instructional practices successfully combined teacher modeling with instructions that students should explore topics of their own interests in their argument pieces, allowing for the students of Henry Middle School to benefit from both the clear expectations that accompany modeling and the engagement associated with exploring relevant, high-interest topics. The modeling these teachers provided facilitated their students' chances of success and their levels of engagement. By modeling what an effective argument essay looks like and how to successfully navigate the writing process, they gave their students clear expectations and understandings of what they would need to do to achieve similarly successful results. In addition, the fact that these teachers modeled what it looks like to select a high-interest, personally relevant writing topic conveyed to their students that they should also select topics that are meaningful and relevant to them, a practice that maximized student engagement and valued their individual identities and perceptions of place, thereby guarding against the presence of a single-story perspective.

Discussion

This inquiry into place-based argument writing, while modest in size and scope, provides promising results. Further work on this

topic can expand on our findings by conducting larger-scale studies that go beyond the scope of one instructional unit in a single school. It would be interesting to study how teachers adapt place-based argument writing activities over time, analyzing what adaptations they make based on what they identify as successful and problematic. Similarly, a study that follows students as they write place-based argumentative works in multiple grades and analyzes the ways their works develop could provide insights into not only their development as writers but also their increased understandings of what place-based argument writing is and can look like. In addition, a larger-scale study that analyzes how these instructional practices are enacted across a wider range of schools and students could further shed light on what educators can learn from these practices.

This inquiry makes important contributions to the growing body of literature on place-based learning because of the information it provides about the variety of topics represented in students' essays, the spirit of social activism present in all students, and the instructional practices used by the Henry Middle School teachers to facilitate students' explorations of distinct place domains while also providing them with clear expectations of both place-based writing and argument writing in general. Based on our findings related to the students and teachers of Henry Middle School, we recommend that teachers take advantage of the opportunities that place-based argument writing instruction provides. Argument writing instruction that allows students to explore the domains of place most relevant to them, integrates the principals of social action, and uses teacher modeling to demonstrate the possibilities and potential of place-based argument writing can result in the engaged students and meaningful work that took place at Henry Middle School.

We present two key takeaway ideas related to place-based writing instruction that address important ideas that we feel educators can glean from our inquiry:

1. Don't generalize students' interests.
   An essential component of our findings is the importance of acknowledging the diversity of student interests in a

specific setting. It can be easy for educators to approach a particular student population and make assumptions that those students would find a certain topic, idea, or practice relevant because the students possess certain attributes, but research advises against making those assumptions, noting the distinct natures of all students, even those appearing to possess many common attributes (Ruday and Azano 97). This inquiry further supports the importance of valuing students' individual backgrounds and interests and guarding against making generalizations about students' passions, experiences, and knowledge based on their locations and demographics. The idea of avoiding generalizations is especially relevant to teachers working with rural students: while it could be thought that rural communities, because of their smaller population and shared reference points, could primarily contain individuals with the same or similar interests, our work advises against this. Individuals, such as our students, can experience the domains of place in a variety of ways. The best instruction will account for and embrace this.

2. Combine choice with opportunities for advocacy.

In addition to emphasizing the importance of students' individual areas of interest, our study shows that the opportunity to advocate for the importance of those interests is an important aspect of student engagement and meaningful instruction. Place-based writing is a great vehicle for this combination of choice and advocacy, as it allows for students to identify topics in their communities that matter to them and argue for their importance to a wider audience. We encourage teachers to apply a place-based focus to argument writing instruction to maximize the effectiveness of both of these instructional components; in this inquiry, the students' place-based writing would not have been as meaningful without the opportunity for them to argue for its importance and would have lacked

a strong sense of purpose if not connected to their communities and backgrounds.

This case study provides not only insights into meaning making for rural students but also showcases how place or community can provide rich opportunities for argumentative writing. Yet, these examples are not limited to rural learners. Place-based pedagogies are applicable to students in any context. It is important for young people to consider the ecologies and economies, the communities and contexts in which they live and learn. Educators can take some key "next steps" based on this study by giving students opportunities to write for authentic audiences and purposes. For example, students could give TED-talk style presentations about the place-based topics most significant to them or capitalize on their new literacies by creating websites that include their argument essays and other supplementary information, such as relevant pictures and information about the author of the piece and why that individual is drawn to the topic.

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CHAIN OF DEPENDENCIES: A NEW VISUAL HEURISTIC TO DISCOVER THE UNDERLYING LOGIC OF AN ARGUMENT

Mark C. Marino and Jessica Wells Cantiello

Mind maps, bubble maps, and other graphic organizers have been popular tools in education for decades. In fact, most students arrive in college having used some form of them. However, most of the scholarship on the subject focuses on the ways in which these tools can help middle and high school students build on prior knowledge to facilitate content understanding (Griffin et al.; Goodnough and Long) or develop their reading comprehension skills in literature classes (Morris). In addition, much of the work on mind mapping more recently has focused on the pros and cons of digital vs. hand-drawn maps and the effectiveness of mindmapping software (Tucker et al.; Lamont).

In composition studies, mapping is often identified as a component of prewriting, but most scholars do not offer well-articulated discussions of the process and how it can be useful for the development of student writing. In fact, some scholars decry the bubble map as an oversimplified tool that doesn't always work as intended. Jacqui Dornbrack and Kerryn Dixon's review of high school curriculum in Cape Town includes one common, if perhaps somewhat extreme, critique of the strategy: "the visual nature of the mind map, which should be a generative tool, appears to be reduced to a meaningless task as is evident from the generic cloud bubble with four or five words attached." While Dornbrack and Dixon note a particularly egregious demonstration of the bubbling technique, the bubble map can at times generate similar lackluster results either due to student apathy or poor instructor modeling. Their concern is likely shared

by many writing teachers, who have seen firsthand that though students can generate these webs of ideas fairly easily and with little direction, these associative visualizations do not offer much by way of developing the logic of the paper. To build on the bubble map to better serve the needs of developing sophisticated arguments in a college-level writing course, we have developed the Chain of Dependencies, a visual heuristic which combines creating the associative diagrams of bubble maps with developing more complex logical relationships between ideas and identifying the necessary context to make a more complex argument to a well-informed skeptical reader (i.e., an academic).

Mind maps are commonly attributed to Tony Buzan, a British popular psychologist, but the technique has a much longer history in the writing classroom and in knowledge representation itself. Katherine Watson traces the system of logical representation back to third-century Neo-Platonist philosopher Prophyry, who offered his students visual representations of logic to represent "a concrete way how human reasoning progresses." And no doubt the technique of writing like ideas together in clusters is as old as writing itself. In fact, some form of bubbling surely predates sentence writing. However, the process of visualization via bubbling likely entered rhetoric studies in the early 1980s when the process movement gained popularity, and with it came the need for tools to use during the early stages of the writing process in order to identify and develop topics and foci (Yood).

Organizational theorist Martin J. Eppler offers a comparative analysis of similar visualizing approaches, including conceptual maps, mind maps, conceptual diagrams, and visual metaphors. By Eppler's typology, a concept map is "a top-down diagram showing the relationships between concepts, including cross connections among concepts, and their manifestations" (203). A conceptual diagram is "a systematic depiction of an abstract concept in pre-defined category boxes with specified relationships, typically based on a theory or model" (203). A visual metaphor, often seen in the "infographics" of today's internet, is "a graphic structure that uses the shape and elements of a familiar natural or manmade artifact or

of an easily recognizable activity or story to organize content meaningfully and use the associations with the metaphor to convey additional meaning about the content" (203). Finally, the mind map is "a multi-colored and image-centered radial diagram that represents semantic or other connections between portions of learned material hierarchically" (203). While Eppler primarily sees these visualizations as ways to depict knowledge, as heuristics they can be used to discover connections and relationships between ideas, which is indicated in many of the definitions quoted above.

Our principal goal was to evolve the mind map from a tool primarily used to generate an assortment of content into a tool that could also be used in the formulation of an argument by exposing underlying arguments. In our heuristic, we hoped to build on the successes of mind mapping, brainstorming, and other visual heuristics by deepening the line of inquiry involved in relating one bubble to the next. We wanted a tool that went beyond generating ideas and establishing *associations*; we wanted one that would aid in the process of developing *arguments*.

In developing this tool, especially because we were shifting away from the traditional goals of mind mapping (i.e., coming up with an idea for what to write about) to a different objective (i.e., developing an argument and deciding what information was needed to convey that argument and how to organize that information), we entered into a larger theoretical conversation about purpose and audience in the writing classroom. Traditional mind maps, like those discussed in the aptly titled "Mind-Map Your Way to an Idea" (Kirchner), align with the notion of writer-based prose, wherein the writer is essentially writing for herself. This is often a necessary stage in the writing process, particularly for developing writers or those struggling with writer's block, since generating context with oneself as the intended audience is much easier than writing for some faceless other. It should be noted that some instructors and scholars, following from the influential theories of Peter Elbow and others, advocate the development of writer-based prose not simply as a means to an end but as an end in itself, a way for students to take ownership of their own writing and experiences. Our writing

classes, however, strive to help students create a reader-based prose, building on the notion that academic writing is about joining a conversation with other people interested in what you have to say. Thus, one goal for our new heuristic was to help (or really, force) students to envision the reader very early in the writing process and figure out what the reader would "need to know" in order to be convinced of the claim the student wanted to make.

Linda Flower, who popularized the notions of writer- and reader-based prose, explains this concept this way:

> In the best of all possible worlds, good writers strive for Reader-Based prose from the very beginning: they retrieve and organize information within the framework of a reader/writer contract. Their top goal or initial question is not, "What do I know about physics, and in particular the physics of wind resistance?" but, "What does a model plane builder *need to know*?" (34, emphasis added)

By integrating these need-to-knows into the earliest stages of the writing process, the Chain of Dependencies aims to move students away from the need to shift from writer- to reader-based prose during drafting or even revision. The idea is that by keeping the reader in mind throughout the process the students will, eventually, internalize the notion of reader-based prose and begin to see writing as part of Flower's "reader/writer contract." In the shorter term, we wanted the tool to help students decide what kind of context to provide and the necessary order of their points, in terms of what the reader would need to know and in what order.

However, we were concerned that such a tool might merely lead to an information dump. Students have a tendency to mistake large quantities of information, even if well wrought, with conveying a cogent argument using that information as support. For that reason, we stressed that the tool would be used to uncover underlying assumptions rather than merely accumulate background information. By thinking about the reader, writers would need to explain and unpack every assumption, traveling backwards into

their thought process through adding more and more bubbles. What was important, then, were not just the bubbles, but the connections between them and where they came from, the ideas that gave meaning to the relations between the bubbles.

The Heuristic

The Chain of Dependencies (CoD) is a flexible, visual heuristic designed to aid students in the development of sophisticated college-level arguments. However, the device can easily be adapted for writers of any age or experience.

In our experience, it is best to introduce the tool using mind mapping and bubble diagrams as a point of reference, but being careful to highlight the differences between what they may have done before and what this tool can help them do now. Most students by the time they reach college have used some form of bubble diagram; however, most will admit that the tool is useful primarily in the ideation or brainstorming phase and not in the developments of arguments. In college writing classes, students need to move from collections of ideas, as might be found in the three main points of a basic five-paragraph essay, to a coherent argument. That means it is not enough to have ideas; a student must know the relationship between the ideas.

The students begin with their principal assertion. This might even take the form of a thesis. In our working example (see Figure 1), we use an assertion that the film *Pulp Fiction* captures the zeitgeist of the 1990s. We draw that in the middle of the diagram. Then we ask what readers might *need to know* in order to understand that claim. Obviously, they would have to know what the zeitgeist of the 1990s is, and so we introduce the concept of "retro" as one possible avenue. Immediately, a problem arises. What did "retro" mean in the 1990s? What was retro, meaning what did people look back on with nostalgia? Also, what was the nature of that nostalgia? Was it a dreamy wish for the past, the way the 1970s looked back at the 1950s in a pop-culture pastiche such as *Grease*? Or was it a distorted, twisted nostalgia, like the work of David Lynch in *Blue Velvet*? Certainly, there's no right answer, but we offer a sense that

the nostalgia epitomized in *Pulp Fiction* is laced with and shaped by irony.

From there we move in a variety of directions. To understand the nature of the film, readers would need to know the plot of *Pulp Fiction*, the genre of Tarantino movies, and perhaps something about post-modernism. On the other hand, to better understand the nostalgia of the film, readers need to understand the nature of race relations and drug culture in the 1990s as contrasted with previous decades. None of these relationships is simple, nor can any be explained merely by the diagram. However, by creating this chain of relationships, in which each item tries to address what knowledge each claim depends on, we are able to trace out a set of assumptions that ultimately inform and constitute an argument.

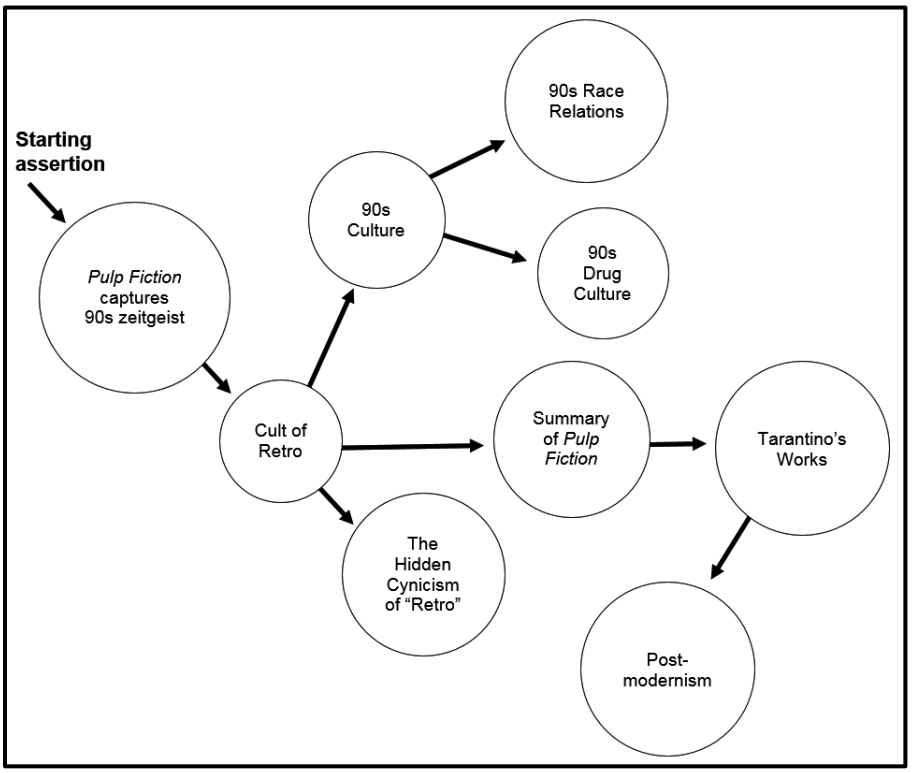

Figure 1: Sample Instructor-Generated CoD about Pulp Fiction

This original Chain of Dependencies was created for an Advanced Writing in the Arts and Humanities class, so the focus on a single film and its relationship to culture worked well in that context. When teaching a lower-division class thematically focused on education and intellectual development, Jessica created the following sample chain based on an argument she was writing for a collection on the state of English studies (see Figure 2). Like the *Pulp Fiction* chain, this CoD begins with a fairly well-developed

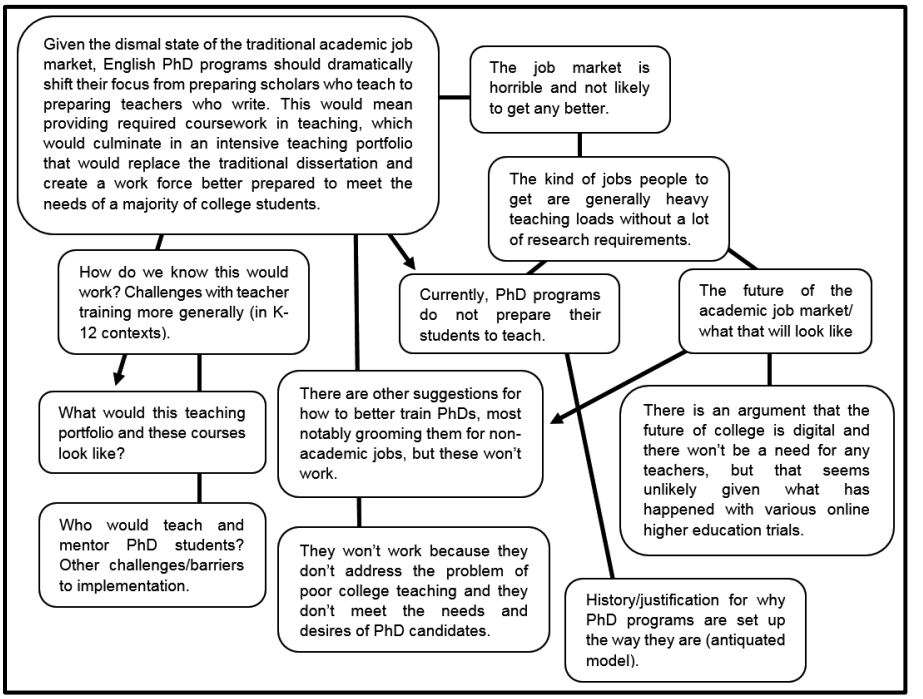

Figure 2: Instructor-Generated CoD about Graduate Studies in English

thesis statement, highlighting the role of this particular heuristic beyond the initial idea-generating phase of the writing process. However, unlike the original model, this chain has a variety of organizational options, as evidenced by the three arrows emerging from the original bubble, representing the three major things a reader might need to know if provided only with the thesis statement: the state of the job market, how Ph.D. programs currently train their students, and what the proposal would look

like. So, in this model, the writer is rehearsing different structural schemas while also exploring the connections between ideas. Like the previous chain, this is not a complete plan for an entire essay, but it does flesh out some necessary context and provide multiple visions for a conceptual structure moving forward. Unlike the previous chain, which is a teacher-generated engagement with a hypothetical paper topic, this one stemmed from the instructor's real-life writing process, thereby serving not only as a model of a CoD but a reminder to students that their instructor is also actively involved in writing and that these tools have applications outside of the classroom.

Case Studies

We used the CoD several times in classes. Mark used it twice for his introductory college-level course focused on identity and diversity, for two separate papers each. In the first paper (although the third in the assignment cycle), students were asked to evaluate the relative diversity in a social (though not necessarily online) network. They had to consider the obstacles to and contributing forces to diversity, which could be measured with respect to any, or any combination of, identity characteristics. In the fourth paper, students needed to evaluate the effectiveness of a program or policy designed to increase diversity within a different network. Both assignments required complex reasoning and the interrogation of underlying assumptions.

While Mark used the tool early in his paper sequence, Jessica assigned the CoD in preparation for the final paper in the same introductory writing course focusing on a different thematic (education and intellectual development); the assignment asked students to advocate for an approach to solving an entrenched educational issue. This assignment was unique in that some students were exploring an issue brand-new to them, while others had written an earlier paper with a similar topical focus, though different argument. This influenced the development of the CoD because some students (those who had done research for a previous paper) were able to provide more contextual need-to-knows in the bubbles, whereas

the students who were delving into a new topic often framed their need-to-knows as questions and used the tool as an impetus for further research.

One student used the CoD to explore the role of the Black Student Union (BSU) in helping to foster diversity on campus (see Figure 3). The CoD led her to reflect on the history of BSUs at predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). That history led the student to reflect on the differences in the contemporary BSU, that it is constituted of "*20 or so different org[anization]s,"* which led her to consider the racial makeup of the fraternities and sororities on campus; since black fraternities and sororities are also part of the BSU, she further considered the history and goals of those Greek groups. When reflecting on the open nature of the BSU, she encountered the misconception that BSUs are only for black students. Looking into the BSU also helped her turn her eyes outward to the larger networks in which the BSU engages, including the Black Alumni Association; its scholarships for Black students, which help diversity on campus; and their mentorship program, which connects students to "*big industries*." A final link points to "*my experience*."

The paper the student wrote offered a strong analysis of the role of the Black Student Union raising many of the points from the CoD in a coherent fashion. It was clear from analyzing the arguments that the CoD had helped her consider the role of the Black Student Union, beyond its overall relationship to diversity on campus. More importantly, in the essay, it was clear that the student recognized logical relationships between these associated points and was able to clearly signpost those in the essay itself. In fact, the chief weakness of the essay grew out of a portion of the essay that discussed part of her experience that, perhaps not coincidentally, is not fully developed on the CoD.

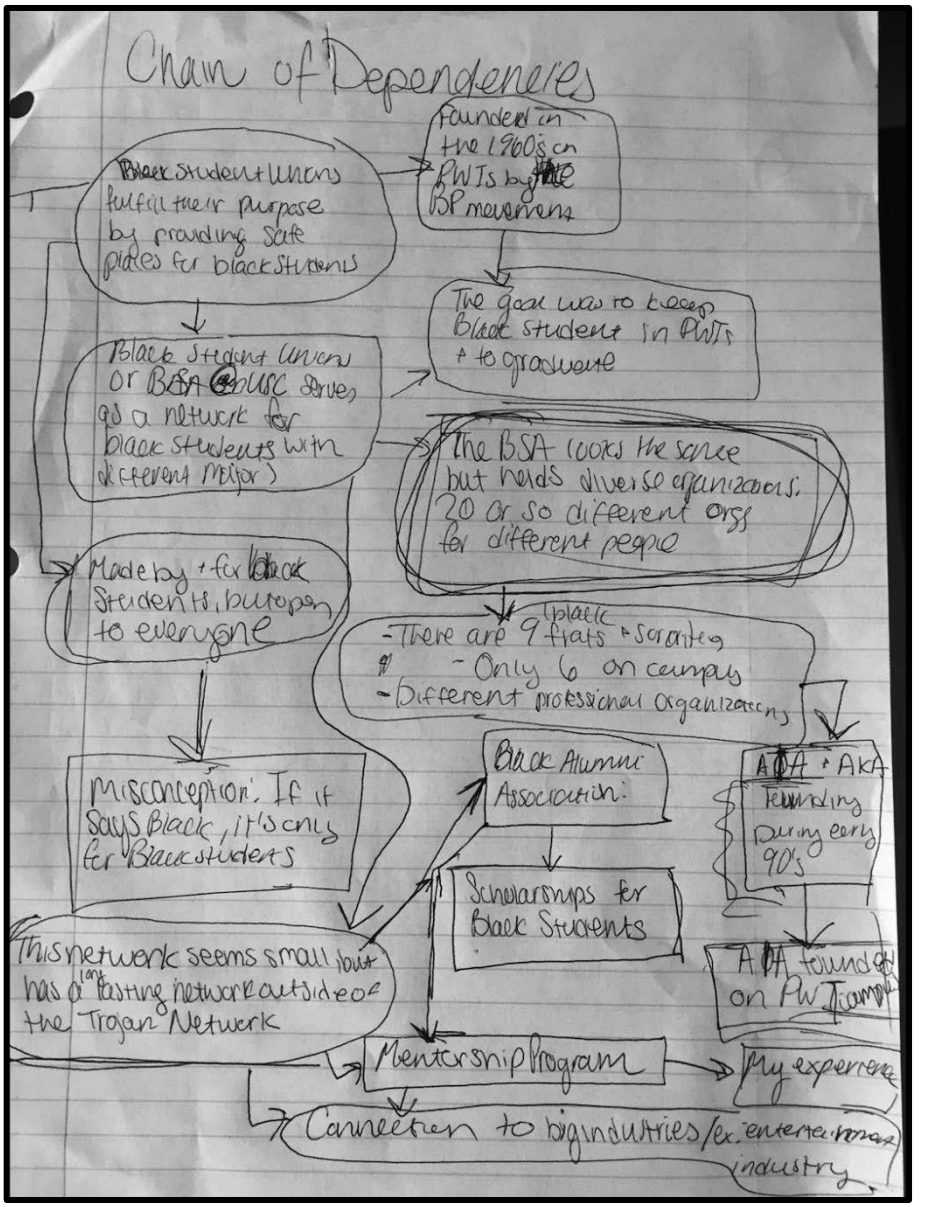

Figure 3: Student-Generated CoD about BSUs

Another of Mark's students analyzed the network Snapchat for its potential for enabling or limiting diversity (see Figure 4). She used a diagramming program to create hers and used the process in a very

different way. Rather than tunneling through the history of Snapchat, she considered various affordances of the platform.

This student used the CoD not to pursue the social context of a human network but the affordances and uses of an electronic network. The first link leads off to a consideration of the ten-second combustion of Snapchat media, which the student felt put "*more control in the sender's hands*" and hence "*more privacy*," while also leading to "*no tangible reference to image sent*" which she found led to "*no judgment*" and members being "*free to post for the sake of sharing rather than the pursuit of likes.*" At the same time, as a social media with "*sharing moments*," Snapchat also led to "*unspoken judgment*" and "*intimate knowledge*" of "*day-to-day activities*." These features lead to a "*fear of looking lame*," a belief in the authenticity of images and "*unplanned images*." Note how the student also marks two paradoxes, the lack of judgment and unspoken judgment as well as the self-censoring of "*leaving out details of daily lives*" and so-called "*authentic images*." This heuristic led this student to write a sophisticated essay analyzing the affordances and paradoxes of Snapchat. The student's organization of this seemingly more organized CoD led to a paper that was equally well structured. However, it is worth noting that the relationship between the ideas in the CoD is not hierarchical, despite the appearance of the branching tree-like structure. Instead, this CoD is highly dialogic, with the student raising ideas only to suss out their internal contradictions or paradoxes. Also, it is easy to see on this CoD the places where the student notices connections with other ideas.

Such clarity perhaps suggests that an electronic version of the CoD is preferable to a hand-drawn one, but we feel that such a reading mistakes form and product for a useful process. Certainly, the second student was able to identify paradoxes and contradictions. However, we see in the first example a student who is discovering relationships between ideas as she goes, as indicated by changes to the printed text, multiple arrows drawn, and multiple outlines of boxes for emphasis. We cannot easily see the process of discovery in the second instance, which is more polished, but not by any means a superior use of the CoD. In fact, the better use of the CoD

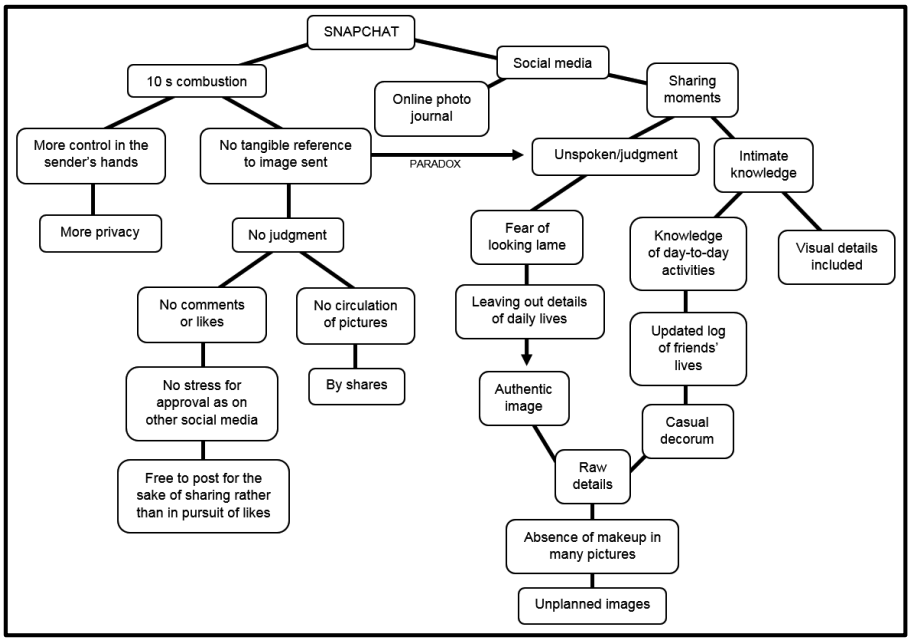

Figure 4: Student-Generated CoD about Snapchat

is no doubt as a process document, one that is meant as a stepping stone to understanding rather than as another showpiece in a final portfolio. We recommend these as tools of thought more than signs of perfected process.

In Jessica's class, a student used the CoD to explore his proposal that a theory from calculus could help improve how financial aid is calculated for middle-income students (see Figure 5). His CoD shows his acknowledgement that a reader would need to be introduced to a number of threads in his argument, including the details of the theory, their relationship to financial aid calculation, and the conversation around financial aid in educational circles, and the role that middle-income students play in that calculation. The frequent use of multiple arrows stemming from certain bubbles and connecting across the map illustrates the interconnectedness of the ideas but also highlights the challenges that this student faced with organization in the final product. Returning to the map throughout the process helped this student eventually determine a useful order

that took reader-response into account; he realized that it would work better to provide the necessary context, including the flaws in the current financial aid structure and current attempts to address those flaws, before providing the details of his proposal. In fact, he commented on this choice explicitly in the cover letter he submitted with his portfolio, which included this comment:

> *. . . in the first and second writing projects, I focus too much on arguing for my position before addressing any questions or backgrounds that need to be addressed. In my writing project 4, I addressed previous approaches to solve the current financial aid system, problem within the system, how the middle-income class is defined, and what exactly the current formula is before making an argument. I also found addressing the 'need-to-knows' very helpful in making a stronger argument and paper in general.*

This student clearly internalized the use of the CoD for argumentation rather than idea creation; in the same letter he noted that he plans to continue to use a different heuristic "*in coming up with creative ideas*" and then transition to the CoD to "*make an argument*."

While he didn't state it explicitly, the CoD seems to have served as a kind of visual outline that allowed the student to know that he would get to the main thrust of his argument without needing to rush it. In short, he saw that he would eventually get to the math, but that the math would only be interesting or justified to a reader *after* the contextual information and a nuanced analysis of the complexity of the issue at play.

Student Feedback

Student feedback suggests that the CoD is helping to meet our original goals. The majority of students claimed that the tool was beneficial and enjoyable. While many students noted that they liked the visual nature of the tool, it was striking how many also commented on the way in which it helped specifically with organization, connection, and identifying counterargument or

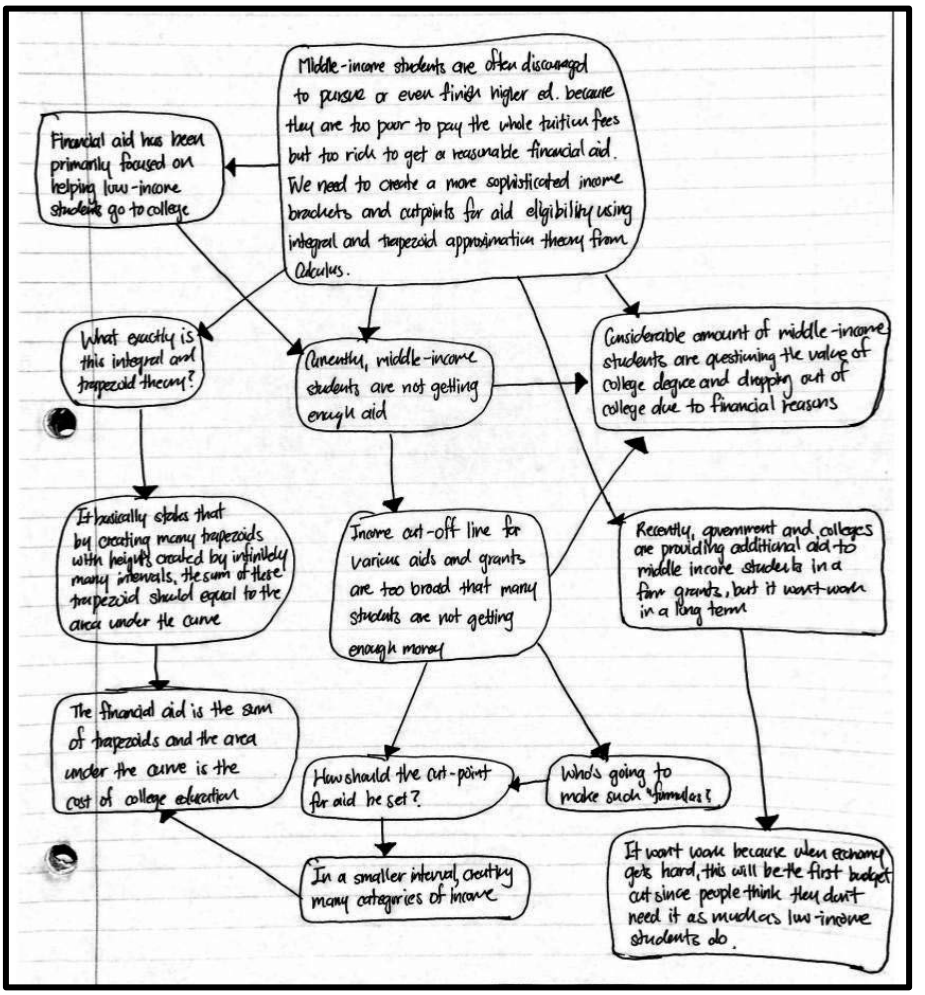

Figure 5: Student-Generated CoD about Financial Aid

"*holes*" in the logic. On this last point, student feedback suggests that doing the CoD before drafting may help students develop more complex theses that take into account different positions or potential counterarguments, or at the very least explore those counterarguments before they are proposed later in the process, often during peer review.

Here is a selection of student testimonials that illustrates these themes:

The chain of dependencies helped me to organize my thoughts and make links between my main points to create a cohesive argument. The chain of dependencies also helped me see holes in my arguments that I was then able to address in my essay.

***

The Chain of Dependencies helped me think of issues that I would need to bring up in my paper that I didn't think of before. It helped me with connecting all the different ideas I wanted to bring up in my paper. The CoD helped me most with my WP4 because I had so many separate ideas that I wanted to talk about and it helped me connect them. Also, I had to communicate to an audience that didn't know much about the topic so it helped me think of possibilities that I would need to address.

***

This activity helped me with figuring out what points of the issue I need to address. It helped me make connections across different topics and understand what points in history/current events to focus on. It also identified my biggest counterargument: whether this is more of a social issue than a procedural issue, and if a social issue can even be dealt with. But, it also helped me question if my solution to the procedural issue can in turn solve the social issue.

In short, most students found that the CoD did more than merely help them develop their thoughts; it helped them construct their essay.

However, the CoD did not work for everyone. According to some students, the heuristic lacked sufficient structure or seemed too "*chaotic*." For those students, it seemed to help them "*get their ideas down*" but didn't facilitate the ordering of points or development of logical connections in the way it did for other students. Others claimed that such heuristics rarely help them. While it is difficult to tell what would help the latter group of students, certainly the sense of "*chaos*" could be minimized by helping students to cull their CoDs or perhaps by offering more structured examples as points of reference. It would also be useful to emphasize the interaction between different writing tools and

the recursive nature of the writing process in general. The CoD can work well as a bridge between a more free-flowing idea development process (like free-writing) and a more formal outline, or it can be useful to return to it when stuck during drafting. Explicitly modeling the flexibility of the tool and its role as part of a toolbox of writing strategies might help address the concerns of both of these groups of detractors.

Perhaps the most positive feedback came in the form of a CoD that a student made for a paper in a subsequent class. While it is good to see what students can do with a heuristic in a writing class, it is gratifying to know that they find it useful in the challenging writing tasks that follow.

Ideas for Development and Expansion

In feedback, some students said they would have liked more of a structure given to them for the CoD. Since creating a structure of the argument is a second task, after the heuristic, we need to consider building secondary exercises that help the students spend more time drawing from their CoDs in the organization of the argument. Rather than overloading the students with a multiplicity of objectives when they are in the development phase, we could build this as its own class activity once the basic CoD has been developed.

As with any visualization heuristic, if students want to give minimal effort, they can create a relatively simple product and not reap much benefit (i.e., as you sow . . .). That problem could be overcome by requiring a specific number of links in every chain. However, as with most writing tasks, merely increasing the requirements of a task rarely will overcome half-hearted efforts. That said, if the problem was a weak understanding of the use of the tool, using more developed examples on the board in class might help to give students more directions to pursue.

Despite our warnings, sometimes a student's paper still developed into an "info dump." In order to counteract that tendency, in later experiments with the heuristic, we spent more time emphasizing the search for underlying assumptions, rather

than "context" more broadly. This emphasis seemed to help students see this heuristic more as creative and critical exploration of their own reasoning rather than merely as a tool for developing the informative context necessary to understand examples.

Other useful suggestions from the students included making CoD a group activity and making or finding an online tool that could create a CoD and allow the writers to edit it easily. Certainly, such tools exist, but we still wish to explore the use of CoDs in the lightest-weight, most easily accessible form, namely pencil and paper. The suggestion of making it a group activity is certainly useful, and it could also be employed in peer groups to encourage students to think with others. A final suggestion was "*having small ideas at first, and then making big (key) ideas built up from those smaller ones*." This suggestion indicates that the tool may be useful earlier in the writing process as well, even before the student develops the working thesis. Though this signals a kind of return to (and perhaps comfort with) the more traditional mind-mapping goals, identifying the most basic assumption and moving toward more complex and abstract ones could also help students.

We are continuing to use the CoD in various contexts and look forward to seeing it develop. However, as with most tools, we realize that its evolution will depend on the creative engagement of students and faculty who use it, experiment with it, and revise it to meet their needs.

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STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF DIFFERENCE IN TRADITIONAL VS. MULTIMODAL ASSIGNMENTS: A CALL FOR CLOSER CONSIDERATION

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In writing about the electronic composition classroom in 1991, what might now seem like a long time ago, Gail Hawisher and Cythia Selfe advocated for wise use of technology in the teaching of writing and admonished faculty not to jump into new composing practices without "the necessary scrutiny and careful planning that the use of any technology requires" (55). Since then, many teachers have incorporated technology into their instruction, particularly in requiring that students compose in a variety of modes, often sound and image, as well as in a variety of digital mediums. In 2006 the results of a CCCC Research Grant survey of writing faculty at over thirty-two institutions of higher-education in the United States revealed that 93% of the thirty-eight self-selected respondents had students analyze and compose multimodal texts (Anderson et al. 75). Few in the field of composition would be surprised to see first-year writing assignments that call for creating PowerPoint presentations, political cartoons, or blogs. Some, though, would be surprised by the breadth of multimodal assignments ushered in by electronic technology. Multimodal composing discussed in the field's scholarly literature has become so varied as to include original music (Shipka, "A Multimodal;" Shipka, "Sound Engineering"),

computer coding, and "collections of objects a la Walter Benjamin's Arcades project" (Ball and Moeller 8).

Given this rapid and profound change in the teaching of writing, it is prudent to step back and thoughtfully examine the multimodal revolution. In this article we present the results of our study in which we investigated students' perceptions of traditional versus multimodal assignments. We examined which type of composing students prefer and asked students to compare their inclination to consider their audience and their impression of intellectual rigor for each type of composing. Though multimodal assignments are becoming ubiquitous, ours is one of only a handful of studies that have contrasted multimodal assignments to traditional ones. Among others is Shawn Stowe's study in which he used surveys and interviews to learn about university students' feelings in composing traditional and multimodal assignments over the course of a semester. He was especially interested in their preference and reasons for their preference, as were we. Our study importantly differed from his in that we contrasted assignments that had identical rhetorical demands and evaluation guides, making the comparison particularly focused.

Other comparative studies, such as Kara Alexander et al.'s., did not specifically ask students to contrast their impressions of audience as ours did, but they came to similar conclusions through reviewing students' comments on open-ended questions about the affordances of various composing modes. In addition to posing a pointed audience question, our study, unlike others, directly asked students to contrast the rigor of traditional and multimodal assignments. A number of researchers' whose primary purpose was not investigating rigor, nonetheless came to conclusions and raised questions about the intellectual demands of multimodal composing, as do we. This was so in Alexander's et al.'s study mentioned above, in Daniel Ringrose's case study in a history course in which he replaced a traditional assignment with two multimodal assignments, in Irene Clark's investigation whether or not knowledge of academic argument in traditional papers would transfer to a multimodal

composition, and in Kristen Purcell et al.'s extensive survey of secondary English educators' impressions of multimodal compositions.

The direct comparison of equivalent assignments and the targeted questions that we used to explore audience and rigor extend previous research and paint a portrait of difference. Our study, complemented by others' research, affirms that the learning experiences for each type of composing are not synonymous. In drawing together findings on preference, audience awareness, and intellectual rigor, and in conjunction with scholarship on language and cognition (Bloom; Erhard et al.; Ong; Perry; Wolf), we hope to spur further exploration of the kinds of learning engendered when composing in distinctive modes. We hope to promote discussion about what may underlie the variation in learning and what the consequences may be for student development. We need to be cautious not to conflate traditional and multimodal assignments. Each can lead to distinctly different educational outcomes for students.

The Multimodal Revolution

Multimodal assignments have assimilated into educational practice for significant reasons. The predominant argument put forward encouraging faculty to incorporate multiple modes and media into their instruction is the need to acknowledge and respond to the sea change in communication that has taken place in recent decades. Various modes and their accompanying technologies are now pervasive in personal, workplace, and academic environments. In acknowledging this development, Selfe exhorts faculty to offer students "the full quiver of semiotic modes from which to select" (645) noting that certain audiences and purposes are better served by multimodal communication than by traditional alphabetic writing. Similarly Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis, Kathleen Blake Yancey, Gunther Kress ("Literacy"), and Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen ("Multimodal Discourse") all implore faculty to expand the means for human communication through teaching a variety of media. A number of scholars ground that argument by saying that teaching multimodal composition is essential in order for people to achieve agency in their workplace and civic arenas.

Stuart Selber and J. Elizabeth Clark concur that writing in the twenty-first century demands the ability to compose in more than one modality. Others, including Chanon Adsanatham et al., affirm these ideas stating, "As teachers, we can highlight the rhetorical options—showing how multimodal composing enables more varied means to deliver, to invent, and to construct and communicate knowledge" (315).

It follows that writing faculty have been at the educational forefront in acquainting students and colleagues with this new generation of assignments. A perusal of presentation titles at conferences and journals in writing studies over recent decades will confirm that multimodal/media assignments have become one of the main foci. Prestigious awards have been bestowed upon writing programs that advance multimodal composition. For example, in 2012 the College Composition and Communication Writing Program Certificate of Excellence was awarded to the University of El Paso's First-Year Composition Program whose two-semester course sequence culminated in a film festival of winning documentaries created by first-year composition students ("UTEP First Year"). The escalation of multimodal/media in writing instruction is also evident in the guidelines and goals of writing programs such as the University of Connecticut's Writing Across Technology initiative (Department of English) and in program statements such as the National Council of Teachers of English Position Statement on Multimodal Literacies and the Writing Program Administrators Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition which reads, "In this Statement 'composing' refers broadly to complex writing processes that are increasingly reliant on the use of digital technologies. Writers also attend to elements of design, incorporating images and graphical elements into texts intended for screens as well as printed pages" (Council of Writing Programs Administrators).

It is safe to conclude that the unprecedented access to and ease of transporting and creating digital content, particularly sound and image, has dramatically changed how people compose and share ideas, which in turn has altered the teaching of writing and the nature of assignments in higher education—as it should. It is time,

however, to more systematically consider the impact of new technologies on teaching and learning. Much of what has been published about multimodal practices in journals in composition and rhetoric consists of well-considered arguments urging faculty to embrace digital technologies along with accompanying pedagogical advice. Close examination of the differences between multimodal and traditional assignments has been lagging. Knowing more about the nature of composing in specific modes, and the consequent effect on intellectual development, will provide faculty with crucial information for prudently deciding why, when, how, and how much to incorporate modes other than the written word into their instruction.

Emerging Differences

As multimodal assignments proliferate, differences in composing using various modes are beginning to emerge. A few scholars have drawn attention to the need to understand the varied capabilities of specific modes. In speaking of the "revolution in the landscape of communicating" (9) Kress noted:

> The means of dealing with meaning are different; we need to understand how meanings are made as signs in distinct ways in specific modes, as the result of the interest of the maker of the sign, and we have to find ways of understanding and describing the integration of such meanings across modes, into coherent wholes, into texts. (37)

The dissimilar building blocks for creating meaning may limit what each mode can produce, and for teachers, importantly, what students can learn. Adsanatham et al. (2013) remark, "Composing with words, sounds, images, and motion using a video camera and audio editing software call forth different composing actions and processes from writers" (316). In deconstructing differences further, David Bruce points out that "word>clause>text" are the building blocks of written texts whereas "frame>image>sequence" are the building blocks for video composition (427).

Rhetorical choices look similar at a macro level since whether composing with the written word or in other modes the composer must consider audience and purpose; however, if examined more closely, the choices and the thinking processes are not identical. Some have assumed that the knowledge gleaned from composing in one mode, medium, or genre would transfer to another. Dale Jacobs notes that the choices a comic book writer makes are applicable to rhetorical choices a student makes when composing traditional academic texts and speculates that the thinking a student develops in creating comics should transfer when composing alphabetically. However, the transfer of knowledge between modes has not been well studied and assumptions about transfer must be carefully considered. When Irene Clark examined whether or not students could transfer knowledge from their written academic argument into a media argument she found that students did so problematically. In fact, she observed that students' knowledge of written word texts appeared to transfer inappropriately to their academic multimodal blog (38). Clark cautions teachers not to assume that because students use media plentifully that they can take their knowledge of academic writing and use it to compose in new media (39). As Clark says, "Because new media so profoundly impact our students' lives, we must explore its potential in the writing class—critically and carefully, without assuming that familiarity with new media will enable students to use them appropriately in an academic setting" (40).

In the C's research survey noted earlier that examined the integration of multimodality into composition curricula at the university level, most faculty did not appear to view students' learning experiences as different when students create multimodal compositions in contrast to when students write traditional papers. In response to the question "What is being displaced when teachers engage students in these writing practices?" (referring to multimodal practices) 76% (n=31) responded that they believed nothing was being displaced (Anderson et al. 70). The nominal discussion in the field of differences in composing in various modes has led to a prevalent misconception that traditional and multimodal

assignments are largely interchangeable and, as a result, many faculty do not consider the type of thinking and abilities alphabetic and non-alphabetic composing each engenders.

In my instructional forays into using multimodal assignments, I observed differences in how students responded to these types of prompts, the foremost being that many students responded with enthusiasm to multimedia assignments, but they had difficulty upholding a thesis using logic and research in some mediums, such as video. When I discussed this issue with one of our university's writing center consultants, Sara Alpert, she also noted differences in how students composed in various modes. Together, with help from a colleague in psychology, Christopher Leupold, Sara and I embarked on a study in which we explored whether or not students view a primarily alphabetic-based assignment differently from a primarily sound and image-based assignment. We asked first-year university students which type of assignment they prefer composing, a traditional paper or a multimodal electronic presentation, then queried them about their choice, including their impressions of audience and intellectual rigor. We discovered that students' perceptions of audience and cognitive difficulty were markedly different for these two types of assignments. Further, we learned through their written comments explaining their preference that students were aware that certain modes are better suited to achieve specific rhetorical ends.

Defining Multimodal for Our Study

In order to investigate differences in traditional versus multimodal assignments, we first had to define multimodal for the purposes of our survey instrument. Investigators conducting the previously mentioned C's study on multimodality chose not to define the term in their survey; instead, they asked faculty respondents how they would define *multimodality*. They discovered that writing faculty defined *multimodal* in varying ways. Sixty-two percent said multimodal "included a range of communicative modes including media such as audio, video, animation, words, images, and others" (Anderson et al. 68). Fifteen percent of the faculty in the study said they could

not define the term, and seven percent defined it as composing digital texts, such as websites, or composing analog texts using digital technologies, such as papers with images (Anderson et al. 69).

In perusing the literature, it became clear that researchers and teachers grapple with what constitutes a multimodal text or assignment, particularly since the words *mode*, *medium*, *media*, and *genre* have been conflated in the scholarly literature. Each of these terms represents a complex concept, the discussion of which is ongoing and beyond the scope of this article.[1] However, among notable scholars, some consensus has been reached. Though medium, media, and genre are important in understanding multimodal assignments and texts, fundamentally the definition of *multimodal* is centered on the concept of mode. Kress and Van Leeuwen state that, "any text whose meanings are realized through more than one semiotic code is multimodal" (177). Tracey Bowen and Carl Whithaus define *multimodal* saying "it involves the conscious manipulation of the interaction among various sensory experiences—visual, textual, verbal, tactile, and aural—used in the processes of producing and reading texts" (7). Simply put, Alexander et al. define *multimodal* as using more than one mode in a composition, such as composing with sound and image, or words and image (5).

The general consensus of what constitutes a mode, however, does not assure that compositionists agree upon what constitutes a multimodal text or assignment. In practice, some would not concur that a research paper with the inclusion of one graph is a multimodal text. The degree to which more than one mode must form the basis of a multimodal composition is not agreed upon, nor is the degree to which that mode must be comprised of original content. Not all faculty would find a composition consisting solely of borrowed material an appropriate response to a multimodal assignment. Douglas Eyman attempts to sharpen the field's understanding of this in saying:

> I also see the primary interest of our field as what I term digital rhetoric—the application of rhetorical theory and practice in and through digital media. I make a distinction,

> too, between digital literacy (being able to effectively use semiotic resources to accomplish particular tasks) and digital rhetoric (making use of semiotic resources in the process of invention—not just *using*, but actually *making* digital texts). (qtd. in Walker et al. 329)

Given the difficulty of defining *multimodal*, when creating the survey for our study we sought terminology that students would understand in order to distinguish assignments that are primarily alphabetic from assignments that are primarily sound and image-based. We decided against using the word *multimodal*; rather, we arrived upon terms easily recognizable to them: paper and electronic presentation. Further, we decided not to specify the extent to which their final product had to be original; the assignment we created allowed them to borrow content as they thought appropriate to suit the purpose of the assignment.

Methodology

Survey Instrument

As stated earlier, our interest was to explore if students view a traditional alphabetic assignment differently from a multimodal assignment. Our survey presented students with a persuasive prompt and asked them if they would prefer to respond to the prompt by composing a paper consisting mostly of written words, or an electronic presentation consisting mostly of sounds and images (see Appendix A: Survey Instrument). Through this contrast we set out to explore the extremes of a continuum where words predominate at one end, and images and sounds predominate on the other. We chose a ubiquitous, time-honored assignment, that of taking a stand on an issue of their choosing, then supporting their stance. The prompt remained the same regardless if they chose to compose the paper or the electronic presentation. We pointedly chose to contrast a paper to an electronic presentation since both are assigned frequently as major grade components in courses in higher education, sometimes with one leading into the other, sometimes with one replacing the

other. Importantly, papers traditionally are associated more with the written word and electronic presentations are associated more with image and sound.

Students' could choose to use any text-tool, including Microsoft Word, Google Docs, PowerPoint, Prezi, etc. Though not explicitly stated in the prompt, students' choice of medium also was left open in that they could deliver their composition in paper and print, or deliver their composition electronically over the Internet, all mediums typically used for turning in assignments. Notably, their preference for composing the paper or the electronic presentation was based on a hypothetical assignment. They did not complete the assignment, only stated a preference, reasons for their preference, and their impressions of composing for each type of assignment. Our reasons for making the assignment hypothetical were both practical and strategic. Firstly, we wanted to have as large a sample size as possible and believed it unlikely that a great many faculty would be willing to make the hypothetical assignment a real one and incorporate it into their syllabi. More importantly, we wanted to reduce the classroom/teacher affect if students were to carry out the assignment. Teachers could influence students' preference by subtly favoring one type of assignment over the other, or inadvertently influence students' impressions about composing for each type through their instruction. Because the prompt initiated an imagined scenario, students had to rely on the repository of their past experiences with papers and electronic presentations so their answers to the survey questions would be less focused on one experience.

In all settings where the survey was distributed, the assignment prompt was read aloud to clarify to students that if they chose the paper, words must primarily forward the argument, though images and sounds could supplement the text, and, that if they chose the electronic presentation, images and sounds must primarily forward the argument, though words could supplement their presentation. Furthermore, participants were reminded verbally before starting the survey not to imagine that the presentation would be given in front of the class, but that it would be turned in and viewed

exclusively by the professor, as would the paper. One evaluation guide was included in the survey (see Appendix A: Survey Instrument). Students knew that they would be evaluated on identical criteria regardless whether they chose the paper or the electronic presentation.

After students indicated on the survey their preference for the paper or the presentation, they were provided a textbox to give reasons for their choice, followed by additional questions asking them to compare the paper and the presentation on various measures. The answers to objective questions were tallied, and students' textbox comments were coded and categorized using Atlas software. In creating the categories for our coding and in coding the students' responses, Sara offered a student's interpretive lens on each student's textbox comments, and I offered a compositionist's perspective. We reached agreement on categories through collaborative discussion with my making a point not to overshadow Sara's interpretations. We then returned to students' textbox comments to tally their responses for inclusion in the categories.

Participants

The participants of our study consisted of first-year students at Elon University, a private, comprehensive institution in the Southern United States that emphasizes the liberal arts. The university enrolls roughly six thousand undergraduate students with an acceptance rate of approximately sixty percent. Most students who attend the university come from the East Coast, come from families whose socio-economic status is above the national norm, and come to the university directly from high school. The survey was distributed in 2013 with IRB approval to 179 first-year students, approximately half in classes and half in residence halls, with no one surveyed twice. Of those, fifty were eliminated from the study, a few because they were not first-year students and the rest because they misunderstood the instructions, explained more fully under the limitations of the study. The final data pool consisted of 129 participants.

Results

Students' Composing Preference

In answer to the survey question "Which would you most likely choose to compose: a paper or an electronic presentation?" students chose composing the paper over the electronic presentation by a small margin (see Figure 1). An examination of students' textbox comments revealed varied reasons for their preference. The paper was a fallback/default choice for many (to view the categories that emerged from the textbox comments of those opting for the paper, see Appendix B: Trends in Textbox Comments). Fourteen students made comments that they chose the paper because they had more experience writing papers or they were concerned about how they would be graded on an electronic presentation. They found composing the electronic presentation uncomfortably open and less prescribed.

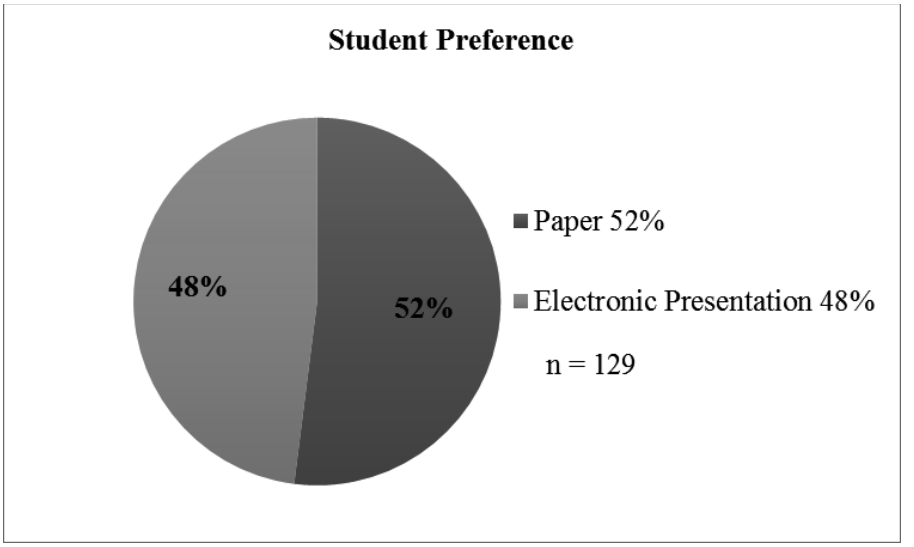

Figure 1: Students' preference for responding to a persuasive assignment as a paper or as an electronic presentation.

For many students the paper was the safer, more familiar choice. Representative quotes from the textboxes of these students included comments such as:

I like how the expectations for papers have set limits which for me makes it easier to follow through. Since multimodal projects have broader limits, it makes it harder for me to know I've done enough or too much, or if I've done what is expected of me.

***

I am not creative. Requirements are usually laid out better for a paper.

***

I would more likely choose the paper because it is what I have had the most experience working on, therefore I am more comfortable writing a paper even though an electronic presentation sounds very fun, interesting and interactive.

An additional six students reported choosing the paper because they often encounter troublesome technology issues, not that they were fearful of, or particularly inexperienced with, electronic presentation software programs, but that they found it too easy to run into technology quagmires. Representative textbox comments included:

I get bogged down with technical difficulties and waste a ton of time trying to format [an electronic presentation] correctly.

***

I always get hung up on the little details [of technology] and forget about my core argument.

In considering the textbox comments, we can discern that twenty more students might have opted for the electronic presentation if it were not for their lack of experience with electronic presentations and possible technological hassles. With more multimodal composing experience and with increasingly user-friendly software, it may be the case that the majority of students would opt to compose the electronic presentation, preferring composing primarily with images and sounds over words.

Contrastively, the perceived openness that drove some students to opt for the paper was the same reason other students opted for the electronic presentation (to see the categories that emerged from

the textbox comments of those opting for the electronic presentation, see Appendix B: Trends in Textbox Comments). Representative textbox remarks from these students include:

***

[The electronic presentation] allows for more creativity. It lets me impress the teacher with flair and creative ideas rather than facts.

***

. . . the [electronic presentation] allows for more interesting ways to deliver information.

Seen from a broader perspective than composing, whether or not a student chose the paper or the electronic presentation may, to some extent, be explained by an individual's general comfort level with novelty and uncertainty.

However, what most determined whether or not students chose the paper or electronic presentation was their perception of which type of composing better suited the assignment. Forty-one students commented that they chose the paper because they thought it would be the better medium for this assignment. The following comments taken from the textbox remarks of these students help illuminate the reasons for their choice.

Although I am comfortable creating and executing an electronic presentation, I feel I can present my arguments more thoroughly in a paper.

***

I can say more in a paper and delve deeper into the subject matter.

***

. . . because there will be a defined thesis, evidence, etc. Words convey the message more directly, or at least more definitively.

***

I would choose to write a paper because I can put my own words into a paper. With the electronic presentation, it would almost completely be things other people have said. But with the paper, I am using my

own words, and writing style to convey the type of message I want to convey.

The eighteen students who thought that the electronic presentation would be the better medium for responding to the prompt gave as the primary reason the unique power of images.

With the use of pictures and graphs I could better my argument.

***

Images are more powerful than words.

Students' Perceptions Regarding Audience

In answer to the survey question "With which type of assignment would you be more likely to think about your audience?" by a large majority, students reported that they think more about their audience when composing electronic presentations (see Figure 2).

Few participants made textbox comments about audience in our study and all of the comments were made by participants who chose the electronic presentation. Clearly, most students report thinking

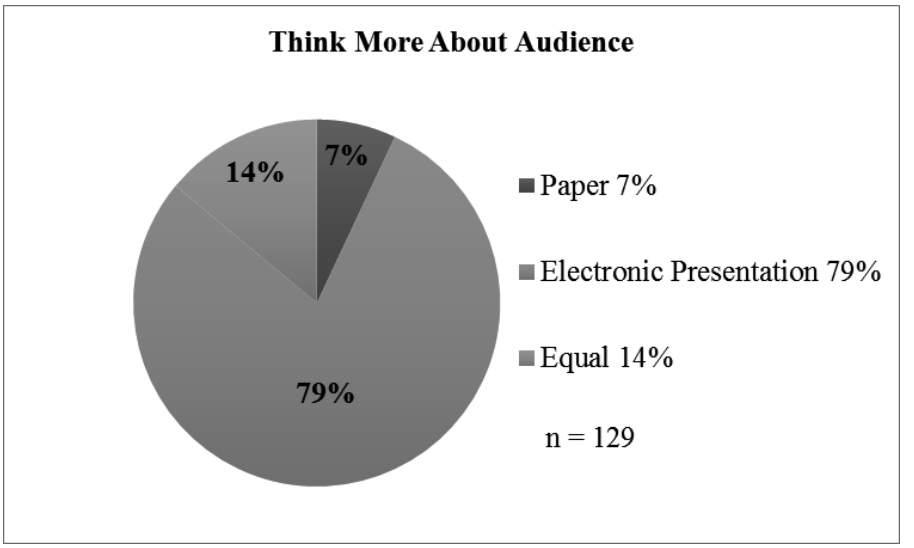

Figure 2: Students' response to whether they think more about their audience when composing a paper or composing an electronic presentation

more about their audience when assigned an electronic presentation, even a presentation that is not given in front of the class. Representative textbox comments included:

> *Electronic presentations entertain the audience better, more personable.*
>
> ***
>
> *I'd rather have an electronic presentation because it allows me to be more creative rather than having to entertain an audience only through words.*

Students' Perceptions Regarding Intellectual Demand

Students' response was also skewed in answer to the survey question "Which type of assignment is likely to be more intellectually demanding, a paper or an electronic presentation?" By a large majority, students in our study found papers more intellectually demanding (see Figure 3).

Whether or not students chose to write the paper or the electronic presentation, their textbox comments made clear that they found the paper harder in a variety of ways typically associated with academic rigor.

> *I learn much more with (the paper).*
>
> ***
>
> *Electronic presentations are easier to slack on in terms of research.*
>
> ***
>
> *I love writing but I am too busy and would rather do a PowerPoint than write a long paper.*
>
> ***
>
> *(An electronic presentation) takes less time and effort.*
>
> ***
>
> *It is a lot easier to find pictures than to write a paper.*
>
> ***
>
> *Electronic presentations are for slackers.*

Textbox comments also revealed students had a sense of accomplishment upon completing a paper. No such comments were made about the electronic presentation. Comments included:

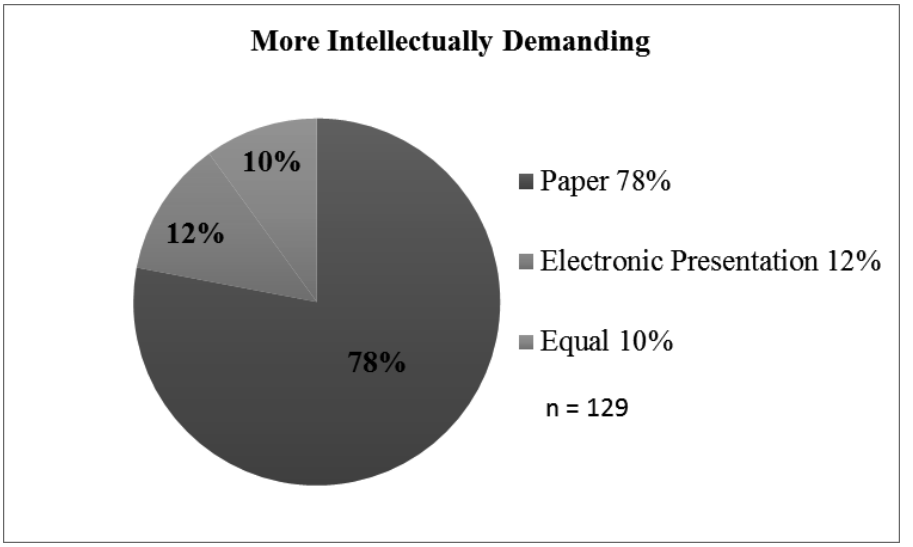

Figure 3: Students' response to whether composing a paper or an electronic presentation is more intellectually demanding

I get more out of (writing a paper) and would do a better job.

***

Although papers are more difficult, I enjoy the end result and feel more accomplished than I do with an electronic presentation.

Limitations of the Study

Firstly, a limitation of our study that could be of some consequence in interpreting the results is that students only imagined responding to the prompt. Their answers relied on past experiences with papers and electronic presentations, as we wanted. However, perhaps in actually composing a paper or electronic presentation their answers to the questions regarding audience awareness and intellectual demand might be different.

Secondly, our participant pool was not a large one. Fifty students were removed since the wording in their textbox comments indicated that they thought they would be giving an electronic

presentation in front of a class, even though they were instructed not to imagine this. We believed this imagining could affect students' responses to the question asking which type of assignment would they more likely think about their audience, so they were taken out of the data pool.

Lastly, as with many studies, our results would be more reliable and generalizable if the sample size were larger and more diverse, particularly diverse with regard to participants' educational and socioeconomic background. Our participants' affluence could determine their exposure to and training in using digital technologies; nonetheless, our results often echoed those of other researchers who conducted similar investigations at a variety of institutions.

Discussion

Students' Preference for the Paper vs. the Electronic Presentation

In our study as in studies conducted by Adsanatham et al. and Alexander et al., students were divided about whether they prefer composing primarily alphabetic assignments or primarily image-sound based assignments. Given the many variables in the assignments used across studies, it is difficult to draw a firm conclusion about which type of composing students prefer. However, our study, Shawn Stowe's, and Alexander et al.'s studies as well as Debra Journet's observations, reveal that similar motivations underlie student preference.

The study that most approximates ours was a master thesis done by Shawn Stowe. However, unlike our study, Stowe sought to explore changes in preference during a semester long multimodal-oriented composition course in which students were given both alphabetic and sound and image-based assignments. At the beginning of the semester, students preferred multimodal composing over traditional writing more than two to one (33). However, by the end of the semester, many students reported that they felt less confident with multimodal composing in comparison with their level of confidence at the beginning of the semester and preferred

it less (27, 33. 47). This finding surprised Stowe who conjectured the result was a consequence of students having been asked their preference at the end of the semester when they were anxious about the completion of a multimodal project (27).

As in our study, students in Stowe's study who reported that they preferred more traditional composing to multimodal composing gave as reasons that they had more instruction and were more practiced in writing traditional papers (47-48). Two other studies found similar results. Adsanatham et al. noted that students expressed discomfort about creating a video and did not want to take risks composing in a medium that placed them in an inexperienced position; by contrast, students felt more practiced and capable in writing papers (319). Additionally, in a study to be discussed in more detail to follow, Alexander et al. found that "students expressed a preference for the clarity and safety offered by a print text" (18).

As in our study, Stowe found that students who preferred multimodal composing commented that such composing is more creative and quicker (48-50). Multimodal assignments, it appears, are generally seen as more fun. In her post-semester course evaluations, Journet found that multimodal assignments were students' favorites of the semester (116). Aside from students who are worried about how they will be graded on multimodal compositions, students find much that they like in composing in non-alphabetic modes.

In our study, the foremost reasons students offered for their composing preference were based not on prior familiarity with a mode, nor ease and creativity in composing in that mode, but on whether or not using written words, or using sounds and images, would be best for conveying their meaning. This finding complements the results of Alexander et al.'s study. They investigated students' understandings of the affordances (meaning the potentials and limitations) that various semiotic modes offer for communication. They gave pre- and post-questionnaires to fifty first-year students who composed both a print and a multimodal assignment. Multimodal was defined as "using more than one mode in a composition such as

sound and image, words and image" (5). The nature of their assignment was different from the prompt we used. Ours was a persuasive task; Alexander et al. assigned a descriptive/explanatory task. Their prompt asked students to profile a person, place, or activity. In their study approximately half the participants were required to complete the word composition before the multimodal composition, and the other half completed the multimodal composition before the word composition (5).

Consistent with our results, Alexander et al. reported that the clear majority of students considered the affordances of a mode when composing; however, it is important to note that students in their study were prompted to reflect on modes:

> Through composing, comparing, and reflecting on print and multimodal composition, students in this study became more aware of how modal affordances work to convey meaning. They realized that various semiotic modes contain unique possibilities and limitations, which make the modes particularly capable of communicating specific meanings. . . . Their observations help teachers understand how first-year students perceive and approach their assignments and how they are able to distinguish modal and rhetorical possibilities depending on what type of composition they are creating. (19)

Exposure to different semiotic codes, particularly if instruction includes reflection on those codes, likely provokes consideration of choices when composing and heightens students' awareness of rhetorical situations, which helps explain students' perceptions of audience when composing a multimodal electronic presentation in comparison with a paper.

Students' Perception of Audience

Students in our and Alexander et al.'s study reported that they pay more attention to audience when including sound and/or image in their composition. Alexander et al. found that students conceive of their audience more concretely when composing multimodal

texts; in fact, no student in their study mentioned envisioning a specific audience when commenting on their printed essays, similar to our study in which no student who chose to write the paper remarked about audience. In Alexander et al.'s study, only six out of fifty participants mentioned any reader at all for their written text. Yet, for their multimodal texts, all the students in their study envisioned a specific audience (11).

We speculate that students may envision their audience more often and more concretely when composing multimodal texts for several reasons. Firstly, media of many kinds populate students' worlds, more so than academic papers. Nearly everyone, and particularly young people, are frequent recipients of podcasts, wikis, websites, blogs, and videos which enable them more readily to slip into the shoes of an audience receiving messages steeped in image and sound. Their abundant exposure to, and their understanding of, media are conversely why some scholars contend that faculty should assign multimodal tasks with the expectation that their rhetorical understandings of media texts will transfer to academic papers.

In addition, rather than turn in a paper to a teacher, when students compose texts that are reliant on sound and image they frequently present their final products to fellow students in class presentations or on websites. The rhetorical situation for many multimodal texts is real and keenly felt as a result of public exposure, spurring students to consider their audience. Historically for students, alphabetic composing is rhetorically constricted, often used as a means to show a teacher what one has learned rather than as a means to reach real audiences for an array of purposes. It may be that the discrepancy in how much students consider their audience would narrow significantly if students' traditional texts were read by more than the teacher and written for purposes relevant to their aims. This discrepancy serves as a reminder that teachers should continue to use real audiences for multimodal texts and to create varied authentic communication situations to make alphabetic writing potently rhetorical.

Students' Perception of Intellectual Rigor

We believe that the most significant finding of our study is that students view primarily alphabetic composing as more intellectually demanding than primarily sound-image based composing. Whether one type of composing is cognitively more taxing, however, has been a point of some contention with teachers and scholars of composition. Outside of anecdotal remarks and assumptions, few investigations have been conducted to explore how types of composing differ with regard to intellectual rigor or to uncover what particular cognitive development each type of composing engenders.

Unlike our study, students in Stowe's study who preferred multimodal composition made few claims that it was easier (51). Scholars, such as Diana George, also defend the rigor of multimodal assignments anecdotally by noting that in her class evaluations, "Not one of these students seemed to think that their visual argument was any less complicated or took less research or thought than the typical assignment essay that they were also assigned in the course" (28). Jody Shipka identifies ways that composing multimodal texts evoke challenges similar to alphabetic texts:

> I have found it helpful to highlight for colleagues the complex decisions-making processes students report engaging in while producing work for the course, reminding them that while the students' final products may not resemble more familiar or traditional looking academic texts, the framework still requires that students conduct research, compose various kinds of written texts, and respond both purposefully and appropriately to different kinds of rhetorical situations. ("Toward a Composition" 107)

The complexity of multimodal assignments is explicated as well by Adsanatham et al. with regard to video composing:

> Combining spoken voice, music, effects, and even silence alongside displayed alphabetic text, images, and animation,

> video composing demands a great deal of rhetorical consideration and invention. Keeping track of multiple moves and textual layers as they occur can help composers make more informed decisions before delivering their finished video project. (318)

However, some studies have indicated that traditional forms of alphabetic composing are more amenable to rigor, at least specific kinds of rigor. In addition to students in our study expressing this opinion, many teachers have stated similar views. In 2013 the Pew Research Center published the results of a study examining the impact of digital technologies on student writing. They surveyed 2,462 advanced placement and National Writing Project secondary teachers and noted as a major finding that these educators thought truncated forms of expression frequently used in digital communication "are hindering students willingness and ability to write longer texts and to think critically about complicated topics" (Purcell et al.).

In their study examining the affordances of traditional versus multimodal assignments, Alexander et al. also indicated that students' multimodal texts lacked depth of thought:

> Students perceive both potentials and limitations in multimodal texts. The potentials include layering, implicit persuasion, a clearer understanding of the audience, creativity, and affective appeals; the primary limitation is difficulty in constructing a clear, well-supported thesis . . . findings also show that students' multimodal compositions tended to privilege appearance and surface messages rather than critical inquiry into the complexities of the profile subject. (6)

In her study of transfer, Irene Clark found students' written essays were well argued but their multimodal extensions of those written essays were lacking:

> . . . each essay contained compelling support from credible sources. However, unlike the print essays, in which all sources pertained directly and appropriately to the idea being

> argued and were adequately introduced and discussed, the essays posted on the blogs included items that were only peripherally related to the ideas being addressed and some of them were inappropriate for formal academic writing because they consisted simply of unsupported assertions. (35-36)

We speculate that three factors may explain, to a large extent, why students in our study viewed composing the electronic presentation as less intellectually demanding than the paper. The first factor is based on the degree to which a composition is original. To create original images and original sounds typically is more intellectually demanding than borrowing already composed audio, video, or static images. Students' responses to assignments that require multimedia often are liberally comprised of borrowed works; whereas, with more traditional papers, students' texts typically are comprised of their own words with sparse, strategic insertions of quotes or images. Though a collage or remix of others' works can result in an original work of art, artistry is not usually the main objective of assignments in first-year composition or indeed, most courses in academia. Outside of courses in the arts and communication, time is rarely devoted to educating students on the finer points of composing with images and sounds, such as in teaching students about cinematography or composing a musical score, the kind of knowledge needed for original creations using sound and image.

A second factor, the text-tools and the genres they spawn, may also account for the perceived difference in intellectual demand between composing primarily with words or primarily with sound and image. A large, multi-institutional study conducted by the WIDE Research Center at Michigan State discovered that first-year writing students placed more value on writing academic research papers in contrast to common forms of digital composing, such as blogs and wikis (Grabill et al.). In terms of assessing the demands of an assignment, it is widely acknowledged in education that assignments asking students to relay information are generally less demanding than those asking students to analyze information, or those asking students to formulate a thesis or stance, particularly

when a thesis demands significant support through means of logic and corroborating evidence (Bloom; Perry). Perhaps many students do not value composing with sound and image as much as with words and view it as less rigorous because a number of the genres they have encountered spawned by multimodal and digital assignments have not required them to engage in higher-level thinking, such as engaging in a sustained, reasoned argument supported by scholarly sources.

In transferring knowledge, Irene Clark concludes that students need help understanding how to incorporate new media elements into a text in order to substantiate, develop, and refute academic arguments (39). Alexander et al. affirm the difficulty students have when not using written words for higher order thinking. They observed that students had "difficulty in developing a clear thesis. Many students, in fact, expressed reservation about the quality of their multimodal argument because they were unsure how to make a clear point" (16). Such an inability was reported as well in two case studies in which Ringrose replaced a traditional paper with a multimodal project in a history course. He found that students' multimedia projects were "visually stunning . . . yet often empty of meaning" (221), and he lamented that students "gather information in discreet visual bits even when the connections between them are tenuous" (222). Though still committed to experimenting with multimodal projects in his discipline, Ringrose concluded, "A crucial pedagogical lesson to draw from these two projects, therefore, is that it is extremely difficult to make and sustain a complex argument in the multimedia format" (221).

It may be the case that the written word is better than sound and image for supporting a thesis. Cheryl Ball and Ryan Moeller touch on this point in discussing the difference between the scholarly and the creative. They posit that the difference between the academic essay and the multimedia presentation could be thought of as paralleling the difference between the scholarly and the aesthetic. Ball and Moeller speak of a scholarly electronic presentation as one that would contain a significant amount of words:

> Here we are defining a scholarly electronic presentation as one that employs the logic of linear arguments to persuade an audience. The most common association of a scholarly electronic presentation would be the academic article or essay. In contrast (as is often the case) is the aesthetic electronic presentation, which we define as the use of persuasive and emotional appeals made through multimedia. A common example of an aesthetic electronic presentation would be a photograph, an animation, or a video with a soundtrack, for instance. (9)

In writing about blurring the boundaries between the scholarly and the creative, Ball and Moeller use as an example Michael Wesch's YouTube video, "The Machine is Us/ing Us." They draw attention to the fact that though Wesch composed with image and sound, "the logic of his argument is still embedded in words, words that he recorded himself typing on screen–yes–but words, and thus traditional, academic structures, nonetheless" (3). As Journet observes, composing with words is "generally characterized by evidence-based argument; hierarchal and logical organization; coherence, elaboration and cohesion; and certain stylistic qualities, such as clarity, consciousness, and even elegance" (112). In considering the work of a number of scholars, Alexander et al. identify the affordances of print text as "linear, sequential logic and evidence showing time and sequence." In contrast, they identify the affordances of audio as "accent, tone of voice, mood, or music," and the affordances of video as "movement, process, and passage of time" as well as showing meaning and representing space and simultaneity (2).

Some consensus, then, has been reached among scholars that words are the vehicle of rational thought, and that sound and image are particularly suited for conveying expressive functions; all modes, however, create understanding and meaning. It may be words' special capacity to transform thought and create new ideas that accounts for students reporting that alphabetic assignments are more intellectually rigorous than sound and image-based assignments.

Many faculty may value traditional assignments more as well since rational thought via words is the fodder for scholarship in the academy.

The third factor that we speculate may account for students perceiving alphabetic assignments as particularly intellectually demanding may go beyond originality, genre, and the logical affordance of words; it may be that the cognitive challenge posed by composing with the printed word is a consequence of our biology. Maryanne Wolf contends that reading requires multiple cognitive processes, whereas speech and vision are more closely related to our basic genetic make-up. She notes that learning to read is dependent on the environment and is less pre-programmed and natural (8-9). "If there are no genes specific only to reading, and if our brain has to connect older structures for vision and language to learn this new skill, every child in every generation has to do a lot of work" (19). This implies that it is harder to engage with written language in the creation of meaning than it is with sound and image. Wolf quotes cognitive scientist Pinker who said, "Children are wired for sound, but print is an optional accessory that must be painstakingly bolted on" (19). If reading is challenging in this way, it follows that composing with words might be as well.

If semiotic modes are not all the same, composing using words and composing using sounds and images likely call upon and develop different intellectual abilities and different areas of the brain. In a study of expert and novice writers, researchers found differences in the brain activity of each group while participants were composing. Even before beginning to write, novice creative writers activated the visual centers of their brains, while expert creative writers activated the area involved in speech (Erhard et al.). Though not an investigation of the differences between alphabetic and sound and image-based composing, this study indicates how practice in composing with words had developed the language area of the brain and leads to speculation that composing with sound and image would develop other areas.

Relying upon work of scholars, such as Walter Ong (2013), who have noted the connection of complex thinking with the written word, Wolf additionally draws upon neuroscientific studies that

have investigated the relationship of writing with brain circuitry. In doing so she forwards the far-reaching claim that the invention of writing changes the circuitry of the brain and consequently the intellectual evolution of our species (3, 21). "As humans learned to use written language more and more precisely to convey their thoughts, their capacity for abstract thought and novel ideas accelerated." (66). Wolf argues that our species' intellectual evolution now "is changing before our eyes and under our fingertips" as a result of digital technologies (4). She makes the case that texts that do not allow for sustained interaction with words nurturing deep and complex ideas are not only undermining our ability to immerse ourselves in thought, they are also changing the way we can think by physically altering our brain structure. These are important matters for faculty to consider. As teachers we are not simply "filling" brains; we are building and transforming them.

Implications for Teaching and Research

It is welcome news that our and Alexander et al.'s studies found that students' pay attention to the affordances offered by various modes of composing. Particularly when students have a stake in the outcome, such as in earning a higher grade, many thoughtfully consider what each mode offers in meeting the demands of an assignment, and they consider what composing strengths and weaknesses they bring to that mode. It is incumbent for us as educators to design assignments that offer students choices of modes and to design assignments that engage students in a variety of modes over the course of a semester. To further develop their understanding about affordances, we can accompany these assignments with reflection about the nature of composing in each mode.

It is useful to know as well that students are more keenly aware of audience when composing with sound and image than when composing with the written word. Educators could capitalize on students' audience awareness with media as a segue for approaching audiences in traditional genres. However, Irene Clark's study cautions that students' knowledge of media did not transfer well to

academic genres. If teachers begin an assignment having students compose with media, they may need to invest time in guiding students to adapt their understandings to a more traditional mode or genre. As Clark notes:

> In particular, when we include new media in our courses, we need to help students understand how multimodal essays are similar to and different from the print essays with which they are already familiar and show them how to incorporate new media elements thoughtfully and coherently, not simply downloading them as they might on a blog or Facebook page. We must also choose our new media genres carefully, evaluating their suitability for the purpose of our courses. . . . (40)

Fundamentally, suitability is key. As students noted in explaining their preference, some types of assignments, particularly those that require academic argument and analysis, may be best accomplished primarily through alphabetic means. Faculty need to consider not only the suitability of modes for the objectives of an assignment and the course overall, but also may need to think more consciously of the type of thinking an assignment calls forth. For assignments that require mostly sound or image, faculty could consider if the assignment requires more than reportage, and the extent to which the final creation is original. If desirable, depending on the assignment, the intellectual ante could be enhanced by requiring more written words to extend ideas, by requiring scholarly sources be consulted, or perhaps by requiring that a media assignment is based on a thesis-driven paper. Faculty also could accompany an image or sound-based assignment with a word-based essay that analyzes the rhetorical aspects of the composition.

The rigor of media-based compositions may also be enhanced through means of evaluation. Assessment of multimodal compositions can, and needs to, vary depending upon the modes, mediums, and genres required of an assignment. This is new territory for many faculty. Chanon Adsanatham (153), Daniel Anderson et al. (72), and Elizabeth Murray et al. (par.1) have pointed out that grading

media assignments can be daunting and that faculty express discomfort about grading fairly. Faculty rightly wrestle with the extent to which they should weigh technical skill, rhetorical savvy, and aesthetics in grading media assignments. It makes sense that if faculty are unsure of their expectations for multimodal assignments, students, as mentioned previously, see these assignments as more unstructured, informal, and less definitive than more traditional ones. Some scholars and teachers are exploring and addressing the challenge of grading media-based compositions (Adsanatham; Borton and Holt; McKee and DeVoss; Odell and Katz; Wyatt-Smith and Kimber). As more consensus and specific criteria emerge for what constitutes quality in various types of multimodal compositions, evaluation will become more transparent to both teachers and students. These advances could engender more depth of thought in the composing process and prompt students to focus more on substance over style, and content over delivery.

What our study and the work of other scholars suggest is that traditional writing assignments and assignments that are not primarily alphabetic are different animals, capable of accomplishing different aims, and in so doing, honing different abilities. Faculty can err in thinking they can replace a paper with a multimodal presentation, or vice versa, and assume that students would be engaged in parallel learning experiences and developing corresponding skills. Even an assignment with an argumentative script written in advance and then spoken in an electronic presentation or as part of a video is not quite the same as a written argument composed for a paper. Because a scripted multimodal argument is presented, or in other words is spoken aloud as opposed to read silently by an audience, the argument likely cannot be as complex. As Vincent Ferraro and Kathryn Palmer point out, spoken arguments must accommodate listeners' needs in recognizing that the audience cannot slow down their pace, pausing, and re-reading in order to consider what has been said. A good spoken argument requires a ". . . tradeoff between comprehensiveness and comprehension." Ferraro and Palmer point out that "trying to put too much into a

speech is probably the single most frequent error made by speakers."

It behooves writing specialists, working independently and with scholars in related fields, to conduct analyses that illuminate the differences between composing for traditional versus multimodal assignments so that we can better understand the decision-making processes and learning outcomes of creating meaning in various modes and mediums. Investigations that examine students' perceptions, such as the one we conducted, are first steps toward advancing this understanding. Moving beyond self-reports and anecdotal evidence to more formal studies will enable the field to engage more fruitfully in deliberative discussion about the types of assignments that best suit the goals of first-year composition and higher education. Just as we call upon our students to be critical consumers of the way technology is altering their world, faculty need to be critical consumers of the way technology is altering our teaching and our students' learning.

Note

[1]A *mode*, as explicated by Jeff Bezemer and Gunther Kress, "is a socially and culturally shaped resource for making meaning. Image, writing, layout, speech, moving image are examples of modes" (171). Bezemer and Kress go on to define *medium* as "the substance through which meaning becomes available to others," and offer oil on canvas and paper and print as examples of mediums (172). Similarly, Tracey Bowen and Carl Whithaus state that a *medium* is the means for transmission and reception of information, and offer the Web as an example (3). They also point out that the term *media* can be used synonymously with *medium* (169). Bowen and Whithaus contribute the notion of the *text-tool*, which they define as what is used to create a text. They name email, instant messages, webpages, Facebook, and wikis as *text-tools* and explain that *text-tools* and *mediums* generate different genres, sometimes hybrid genres, but in themselves, text-tools and mediums are not genres (3). They define *genre* as "ways for students to organize their experiences and, through identified conventions, relate those experiences to others within a particular social context" (6). To illustrate the difference, they offer as an example that a wiki (a text-tool) can be used to create different genres. Some wikis are dictionary-like entries, while other wikis are encyclopedia-like entries (3).

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APPENDIX A
SURVEY INSTRUMENT

For this assignment take a stand on a controversial issue of your choice. Any issue on which reasonable people disagree is a possible topic, i.e. the death penalty, gun control, the legalization of marijuana or prostitution, etc.

Either choose to write a 5-8 page paper, or to create a 5-8 minute electronic presentation.

If you choose the paper, your words must forward your position and create your argument. Any images or sounds should be in the service of your words.

If you chose the electronic presentation, your images and sounds must forward your position and create your argument. Any words should be in the service of your images and sounds. For the electronic presentation, you can use any electronic medium such as a video, PowerPoint, Prezi, or a combination. This electronic presentation will be turned in. You will not be present when it is viewed.

For either the paper or electronic presentation, use MLA documentation for all material that you use that is not your own, including others' ideas, words, images, or sounds. Be certain throughout your work to document your sources and conclude your paper or electronic presentation with a Works Cited list. Your audience is your professor, who will grade your paper or electronic presentation based on the following criteria.

Evaluation Rubric
Support for the Stand: Ideas and/or images and sound convince the reader to agree with the stand.
Organization: The organization of the ideas/slides/scenes is thoughtful and persuasive.
Editing: The work is well crafted and professional looking. Written material is well edited. Images or sounds are easy to see and hear.
Documentation: Sources are well chosen, credible, and properly cited.

Which would you most likely choose to compose?

The Paper *The Electronic Presentation*

Why?

1. With which type of assignment would you be more likely to think about your audience?

Paper *Electronic Presentation* *Equal*

2. Which type of assignment is likely to be more intellectually demanding, a paper or an electronic presentation?

Paper *Electronic Presentation* *Equal*

APPENDIX B
TRENDS IN TEXTBOOK COMMENTS*

*A student's response sometimes consisted of a number of phrases and sentences. Parts of one participant's response may be coded under more than one category.

Number of Responses	Category
41	Paper is better suited to argument/I am able to express myself better/more.
9	I have more experience with papers.
6	I feel more accomplished composing papers.
6	Electronic presentations pose technology problems.
5	Papers have clearer expectations.
4	Papers provoke more learning.

Figure 1: Categories and Tallies of Textbox Comments for Students Who Chose the Paper

Number of Responses	Category
18	Electronic presentation is better suited to argument/ I am able to express myself better/more.
11	Electronic presentations take less time to compose.
9	Electronic presentations are easier to compose.
9	Electronic presentations are more creative.
6	I am not a good writer.
5	Electronic presentations are less restrictive.
4	I am technologically savvy.

Figure 2: Categories and Tallies of Textbox Comments for Students Who Chose the Electronic Presentation

ENGAGING AND INTERACTIVE PRACTICES FOR ONLINE WRITERS: FOSTERING WRITING DEVELOPMENT AND SELF-EFFICACY

Jennifer Coon, Laura Gabrion, and Rachel Smydra

Each semester, students express a lack of confidence about their writing skills and doubts about their abilities to improve over the course of fifteen weeks. In response, writing instructors strive to establish an environment conducive to improving students' writing skills and self-efficacy. In a face-to-face course, instructors can implement affective learning strategies in close proximity, and as a result, the dynamic between teacher and student fosters a positive learning environment with opportunities to discuss drafts, conduct peer reviews, assist in revision decisions, and promote reflective practices. Employing these same strategies in an online course would appear to be difficult, if not impossible, to enact. As universities increase online course offerings, including both first-year and advanced writing, constructing effective online writing classes that offer rich opportunities for students to grow as confident writers can be particularly challenging. Consequently, investigating and implementing practices that support the growth of self-efficacy, a factor that contributes to achievement (Pajares 144), prove paramount for online writing instructors.

Longitudinal research confirms that students need to develop positive associations with college through successful and reaffirming experiences (Kuh et al. 557; Tinto and Goodsell 14; Upcraft and Gardner). Thus, while instructors should employ strategies that strengthen student writers' skill development, they should also incorporate strategies that increase students' confidence levels as

writers. In particular, online instructors should strive to develop deeper relationships with students and implement practices that appeal to the four "sources of information—enactive, vicarious, exhortative, and emotive" (Bandura 195); simply "[increasing] faculty-to-student interaction" (Barefoot 14) can impact these four contributing factors. In face-to-face classes, instructors have employed affective learning, writing as process, and expressive pedagogy principles to provide the "personal, behavioral, and environmental influences" (qtd. in Schunk and Pajares 35) necessary to promote positive changes in writing behaviors. By using these same strategies in online spaces, instructors can create interactive opportunities that result in transformative learning experiences aimed at improving writing skills and self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy Theory

Albert Bandura's self-efficacy theory is "based on the principal assumption that psychological procedures . . . serve as means of creating and strengthening expectations of personal efficacy" (193). Over time, instructors have found his theory to be a useful framework because it works concurrently with social constructivist and writing process methodologies to nurture substantive development in students' writing and their beliefs about writing (McCarthy et al. 465; Pajares 153; Shell et al. 97). Since efficacy is one's perception that he or she can perform specific actions well, Bandura's theory asserts the idea that this perception can be manipulated by "psychological procedures," including treatments or interventions to students' "performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological states" (195). Self-efficacy results from students' evaluations of such information, often in combination with the context in which they receive it. For example, if a student observes the positive negotiation of an adverse or challenging situation, he or she will process this, and in turn rise above the fear of failure to attempt seemingly difficult actions. Since greater self-efficacy in writing contributes to writing behaviors that rely more consistently upon engagement, persistence, and diligence (Pajares 140), Peter Shea and Temi Bidjerano suggest that positive efforts and strong practices of immediacy in online environments are "crucial to the

development of a theoretical framework for online education," where, in the absence of a conventional classroom structure, "learner agency" may be even more important.

Current Perceptions about Teaching Writing Online

The number of students engaging in online learning continues to increase. Data show that "from fall 2016 to fall 2017 [. . .] the number of all students who took at least some of their courses online grew by more than 350,000, a healthy 5.7 percent" (Lederman). However, poor student learning outcomes and a lack of student satisfaction still undermine the validity and rigor of the platform in the minds of some educators. Several scholars note that alternative learning environments, particularly online courses, create stress and apprehension for a variety of reasons (Kim and Frick 3). Other researchers attribute student struggles to the nature of the online platform since performance in an online course "requires learners to be confident performing internet-related actions and be willing to self-manage their learning process" (qtd. in Kuo et al. 34). Still others, however, pinpoint the lack of interaction with their instructors as the primary impediment to motivation and performance.

Multiple studies of online learning environments emphasize the student-teacher interaction as an essential aspect of positive course outcomes (Baran et al. 422; Gikandi et al. 2347; Kuo et al. 45; Simpson). In general, a strong student-teacher relationship is central to most learning environments, especially those that are pedagogically framed by social constructivism; consequently, the online platform with its lack of proximity and immediacy, particularly nonverbal immediacy (Baker 5-6), can jeopardize effective student-teacher relationships. In addition, the asynchronous exchanges of information by students and teachers prohibit the "two-way reciprocal communication" (Kuo et al. 36) that facilitates relationship-building. Finally, online learning can fail to simulate the personal connection that many students find indispensable in a face-to-face classroom, thus creating a significant pitfall considering that teacher presence

correlates both with students' incentive to learn (Baker 21) and self-efficacy (Shea and Bidjerano 1727).

Students attempting to meet expectations in online courses may encounter layers of issues that impede performance. Navigating online spaces can be a very stressful act (e.g., being present, interacting with classmates, completing assignments, and attempting revision and reflection). It can also be an isolating environment. Students do not have the physical interaction and support of their classmates and instructor. Instead, they rely in large part on their confidence in their abilities and their regulation of their activities (Nemati and Thompson 84). Further, Hamid Nemati and Marcia Thompson's research determined that students must rely on personal characteristics in the online environment to persevere. If students feel as though the instructor exists as a distant entity who simply dictates content and procedures, quite possibly, their self-efficacy will remain static. However, by signifying the relationship between teacher and student as central to efficacious academic growth, this relationship, based upon its mutuality, can also promote the positive emotions necessary for the growth of self-efficacy. In application, Bandura's theory of self-efficacy encourages targeted intervention, and fittingly, teachers can influence the development of students' positive self-beliefs (Pianta et al. 370). The question, however, is what do such interventions look like in an online writing course? Creating an affective learning environment is one step in the right direction.

Affective Learning: Building Online Student-Teacher Relationships

When it comes to writing, several issues can impede the confidence necessary for student success at the college level. Students may feel ill-prepared or ill-equipped to succeed in online writing courses; many sincerely doubt their ability to improve. Regardless of the causes of students' low levels of self-efficacy, reversing this lack of confidence is critical in writing courses because there is "a generalized interrelation between beliefs and performance for . . . writing" (Shell et al. 97).

Online instructors can use the affective learning model to mitigate students' uncertainty and contribute to the positive growth of their writing self-efficacy.

Affective learning "relates to students' interests, attitudes, and motivations" (Gano-Phillips 1), and Credence Baker's study of 699 college students concurs that increasing an affective component of learning, such as building comfortable relationships, motivates students intrinsically to engage in learning. Earl's foundation of "Intrusive Advising" methods applied to the online classroom works nicely to outline goals for interaction (Varney par. 3):

- Incorporate deliberate intervention to enhance student motivation
- Use strategies to show interest and involvement with students
- Implement intensive advising designed to increase the probability of student success
- Aim to educate students on all options
- Approach students before situations develop

Instructors can shape these goals for use in the online platform, according to the NCTE, by leveraging the "inherent benefits of the electronic environment" via the use of private messages, blogs, audio recorded feedback or forums. Anticipation of a new situation, such as an online course, can produce negative states, such as stress and anxiety, that can fester and result in loss of control and diminished self-efficacy beliefs (Shea and Bidjerano 1725). Therefore, establishing a strong rapport with individual online students via email or video before classes start, or in the first week, can alleviate their sense of apprehension or intimidation about the platform. Figure 1 exemplifies a welcome letter for online students. Sent as a video/audio clip or an email prior to the start of the semester, such messages can initiate student-instructor communication, motivate students to prepare for the course, reveal something about the instructor, and encourage students to manage their efforts, thus reducing stress.

To address issues compounded by asynchronous communication or lack of two-way communication that might impede the instructor-student relationship or damage self-efficacy, instructors may choose to support students via Skype meetings, Google Meet, synchronous online dialogues/forums (as supported by educational platform software), or regular chats via services like Remind.com. If we are to believe Shea and Bidjerano (1724) who suggest that student self-efficacy is a powerful construct in understanding student learning and academic achievement, we can then also surmise that those students who respond to the enhanced immediacy practices in online learning will accomplish far greater levels of success in their composition classes. The model of affective learning shows a foundation built on social presence and teaching presence (Shea and Bidjerano 1722), and both foster and feed a student's sense of writing self-efficacy. When implemented, instructors will find before them motivated students with well-developed affective learning skills.

Writing as Process: Improving Online Feedback

Writing process theory has shaped writing pedagogy for over fifty years, and its most significant contribution has been its recursive set of strategies (i.e., inventing, drafting, revising, polishing) aimed at making writing purposeful (Flower and Hayes 372). In addition, by moving feedback from a summative to formative position, opportunities for growth in students' skills and confidence have increased. Writing as process entails three main phases: invention, composition, and revision. According to Jason Gulya, using the writing process strategy encourages students in two ways: they come to understand "writing as inextricable from thought" and start to take intellectual risks as they become more comfortable "with letting writing push them in new directions rather than aiming to sit down with exact ideas of what they are going to write" (566). Incorporating assignments that revolve around writing as process can be time-consuming for online instructors since success depends on both feedback and revision; however, responding to the current content of their work and the direction it must take for improvement is of great value to students. They want high quality

Amy,

Welcome to Advanced Critical Writing!

Some consider critical thinking a lost art because of technology. This semester offers you the chance to brush up on the important elements of argument, so you can gain confidence in constructing your own arguments.

By discussing key aspects of arguments, you will discover why focusing on the logical construction of an argument helps writers avoid falling into the trap of building and responding to an argument with a raw, emotional appeal. Learning these techniques now will serve you well both personally and professionally.

I recorded a video (Week 1: Course Intro) that provides an overview of the syllabus, expectations, forums, grading, and assignments; you can find this required viewing assignment in Week 1 on Moodle. This presentation should answer many of the questions you may have about how to navigate the course. Also, by week's end, please email me the following:

- Three topics you are interested in covering this semester
- Why they interest you
- Aspects of writing you hope to improve

Look for more details next week about specific course information. Feel free to email me with any questions you may have at this point. I look forward to a productive and engaging semester!

Figure 1: Welcome Letter for Online Student

feedback that is interactive and timely, but accomplishing that in an online class is often difficult.

Jerome Delaney et al. recommend creating a congenial atmosphere where students can seek help, offer alternative explanations, and get feedback on their ideas. Developing and integrating formalized writer's conferences that focus on student perceptions about paper topics or research is ideal. Instructors can conduct conferences in a face-to-face setting if the student is local, or via Skype/Google Meet if the student is taking the course from another location. Since these conferences concentrate on the initial stages of writing and research, instructors may ask students to outline what is working and what is not working in their writing thus far in the semester. Each conference can consist of a mini-lesson resulting in an action

plan. However, the goal is to build the confidence of the student writer when these choices are accompanied by hesitation. By indicating that their chosen topic will yield profitable research, even if it needs a bit of shaping to meet the assigned research goals, students are able to move forward from these conferences with confidence about their research methods. This type of pre-research preparation is mere confidence building. Zimmerman agrees that students who are confident in their academic abilities usually prepare themselves more effectively than students with lower levels of confidence (qtd. in Larseingue 431). He writes that "self-perceptions of [one's] ability contribute to a calm and thoughtful approach to task completion and problem solving (Zimmerman, 1989) and the use of analytic strategies for improving performance" (Bandura & Jourden, 1991; Bandura & Wood, 1989; Wood & Bandura, Bailey, 1990) (qtd. in Larseingue 431). An increase in immediacy practices via conferencing can therefore contribute to an increase in students' writing self-efficacy and its associated behavioral byproducts, such as the ability to tolerate course workload demands (Larseingue 432).

Instructors can achieve additional components that work to build self-efficacy through modeling. Beth L. Hewett notes that the intimacy of these conferences provides reassurance to the student that he or she is a valuable individual. These moments give instructors a chance to model tone, tact, social constructs, audience, and other strategies so students can learn to stay focused on their writing (Hewett 11). For example, a screencast that explores the student's consideration of purpose and audience can clarify how to further develop these elements. Instructors can also model for students verbal techniques, timing, nonverbal expressions and gestures, and cueing, which Brophy says "project[s] a level of intensity that tells students that material is especially important and deserves close attention" (77). Furthermore, Steven A. Meyers' work concedes that an instructor's purposeful demonstration of care can increase students' motivation and engagement and ultimately can advance their education (208). Building layers of understanding for students connects them to the material and reinforces both their self-efficacy and the likelihood they will surpass the minimum expectations of the assignments.

Self-efficacy can be fostered in a specific domain, as mentioned above, as well as through vicarious experiences; for example, students can learn from the experience of others. Thus, students create "social comparison and interpretation of the experiences of others who have been successful or unsuccessful in performing similar tasks (Bandura, 1997)" (qtd. in Shea and Bidjerano 1724). Peers play a role in establishing each other's self-efficacy in the online composition classroom, as shown in Figure 2.

Student 1: It looks like we've been able to put together some good sources. What do you guys think due to our time constraint now breaking it up and each of us putting together some evidence for one of our reasons and we can put it all together? I'd be willing to do the taxes or business advantages unless someone had another idea for putting our ideas together.

Student 3: Thanks … for putting together our information and organizing it in this post! I think these reasons are perfect and really help our argument become strong. Here's a link I found from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. They assessed more than 10,000 scientific studies on the medical benefits and adverse effects of marijuana. The review found that marijuana, or products containing cannabinoids, which are the active ingredients in marijuana, are effective at relieving chronic pain.

Student 2: I think that's [sic] a good idea! I can go through our sources and write a paragraph or two about the different health benefits that come with legalizing marijuana.

Student 3: Good idea! I could focus on the lowering jail/prison populations.

Student 1: Thank you everyone for gathering some helpful articles/evidence! Student 2 said she would focus on the health benefits, I could focus on the jail populations. Student 4 said she could focus on either the business or tax advantages so, Student 5, if you wouldn't mind focusing on one of those topics? Perhaps Student 4 could do the business opportunities as she brought up earlier and Student 5 could focus on the tax advantage? I was thinking we could post our paragraphs here and then one of us can bring them all together in the end for the official post.

Student 2: That sounds good! I added another discussion topic a little bit ago including my part about the health benefits, and if anyone needs ideas or is having troubles with their part I would be glad to help! Just let me know.

Figure 2: Collaborative Work for an Online Group Project

When absent from the classroom environment, students must grapple with whatever limited contact they have with peers. Therefore, creating collaborative assignments may offer students opportunities to measure how well they can accomplish the course objectives. Instructors can suggest discussion group forums, Google Hangout,

or peer editing spaces that enable classmates to leave written, audio, or video comments for their peers. In the online setting, students work to construct their own academic and social experiences, and Shea and Bidjerano (1724) establish that self-efficacy beliefs are open to change through social comparison.

Finally, being comfortable in one's writing skills enables confidence in critical thinking and revision. An IRB-approved study at Oakland University provided data on one online first-year writing class which show that 66% percent of the 22 students found themselves "very comfortable" when it came to making revisions of their work based on individual conference outcomes. Students in this first-year composition class reflected on the comfort level they experienced. Figure 3 presents Alex K.'s reported experience.

> "I had a solid research plan for my paper … I became very comfortable with revisions … In our conference, [my instructor] amended some of my work and it helped me a lot … Professor _____ answered [my] questions. I'd give my comfortability a 5 [the highest possible number] because I understood the comments and internalized the feedback."

Figure 3: Student Comment on Revisions of Online Assignment

In another first-year writing class, required revision plans (see Figure 4) provide the impetus students need to consider an approach for revising carefully, and discussing students' revision goals, via online conferencing or screencasts, allows instructors and students to develop an interpersonal relationship that has the potential to "promote positive development" (Pianta et al. 368). With the revision plans, students anticipate and negotiate instructor feedback, which leads to calculated revision strategies aimed at the improvement of their texts. The revision plans serve another purpose as well; they are intended to connect students to their writing but also to their instructors because they give students a "conceptual vocabulary to 'talk' about their] writing" (Berzsenyi 72). When writers engage in the revision stage, they often find the end product to be more successful in regards to accomplishing its goals. Therefore, while using instructor feedback to revise seems to be a process students must navigate alone,

especially in online courses, it must be dialogic; instructor feedback becomes fundamentally more valuable to students who are encouraged to consider which aspects of their essays will benefit most from careful and critical revision. In using these variations on guided practice, instructors and peers can enhance students' self-efficacy, and students can develop strategies that improve their writing.

Revision Plan

In the space below, write the issues that you have **selected** to focus on for your revisions. Make sure that you prioritize these issues. Next, indicate a specific plan for addressing this issue in the revision process. These issues should not be related to grammar or citation errors, as such issues can be addressed in the proofreading process. Remember, you might use this space to defend a particular strategy you intend to proceed with despite instructor feedback indicating otherwise. Finally, explain the rhetorical benefit of each revision step. How will the change further develop, for example, your ethos or your essay's purpose?

Priority	Selected Issue/ Concern/Problem	My Plan	Rhetorical Benefit
1	Not discussing the opposing side to my argument.	I plan to write a brief argument for the opposing side, and see where I can fit that into my paper.	Logos: It will allow the reader to see the evident logic within my paper.
2	I am concerned that I did not use enough quotes within my paper.	I plan to reread my essay and count how many quotes I used. If a paragraph does not have a quote I may add one to give more emphasis.	Logos/Pathos: If the quote is a personal quote then it would relate to pathos, but if I add another factual quote then it would relate to logos.
3	I used a real life example in this essay of a player who died, and whose brain was very damaged, maybe that was not a good idea?	I plan to reread the paragraph where I tried including a real life example regarding my topic. If it seems to drag the paper on, I will take it out of my essay.	Ethos/Logos: Keeping the example gives me credibility. Taking it out may shine more light on the logic of my essay.
4	I did not discuss my findings with my Google survey about football injuries, and I am debating if I should	I think that my essay flows very well as it is right now, if I reread it and something is missing, my plan is to add in my findings with my survey.	Ethos: Creating my own survey and discussing the findings would give me as a writer a lot of credibility in the readers' perspective.
5	Is my viewpoint on the topic stated clearly, and correctly in the right parts of the paper?	My plan is to have a family member read my essay and I will ask them what they think of my viewpoint, and if they thought it was properly explained in the essay.	Pathos: My viewpoint is trying to shift the readers' emotions, so that they may side with me on this controversial topic.

Figure 4: Student-devised Revision Plan (form adapted from "Effective Assignment Sequencing")

Expressive Pedagogy: Using Reflection to Enhance Online Learning

Dating back to the 1960s, expressive writing emerged as a means for a writer to investigate the role as writer, aspects of voice, and connections to a reader. Much like writing process theory, expressivism developed as a reaction to the formal product model that preceded it. Important composition scholars, such as Peter Elbow and Donald Murray, advocated practices that released student writers from the restraints of accuracy in an attempt to restore their confidence by simply alleviating the stress and anxiety that impede writing self-efficacy (Grabe and Kaplan). Thus, for years, writing instructors have incorporated assignments that allow students to explore a sense of themselves and their voices.

Wendy Bishop states, "Expressivist pedagogy employs free writing, journal keeping, reflective writing, and small-group dialogic collaborative response to foster a writer's aesthetic, cognitive and moral development" (19). The writer takes center stage in regards to audience, message, and language choices as he or she controls the message accordingly. In this way, instructors motivate students to become more self-aware and to examine their voices and how they resonate. Imagination also plays a major role in this strategy according to Ann E. Berthoff, who notes that making sense of things embodies writing as process and imagination helps students visualize and assign words to represent meaning (28). What writers imagine and the words they choose to describe such images are all writer-driven (Berthoff 28). The practice of writing expressively fosters ways for students to construct knowledge; however, students also "improve self-belief," which, when coupled with "competency," nets success in the classroom (Tutticci et al. 133). According to Christopher Burnham, assignments that entail reflection prove essential in the classroom because they encourage students to grow "intellectually, cognitively, and ethically" (21).

Across the educational spectrum, educators and practitioners have discovered that using the metacognitive process of reflection, which in the Latin origin means "to turn back" or "to bend," creates a space for students to explore and show personal and academic growth

("Reflection"). Reflection places a pivotal role in Jack Mezirow's transformative learning theory; it stimulates learning, as Mezirow indicates, especially if "learning is defined as the social process of constructing and appropriating a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience as a guide to action" (223). Mezirow believes transformational learning occurs through the reflective process because it offers writers the chance to self-examine their assumptions, interactions, and "operating premises of action" (223). Writing instructors, however, struggle with how to incorporate reflection into the online classroom since many students enter the space with a lack of experience and low self-efficacy in regards to their reflection capabilities.

As previously noted, instructors can apply purposeful interventions to improve students' self-efficacy regarding writing skills (Bandura 211). However, if instructors want to employ reflection as a tool to improve writing self-efficacy, they must construct assignments designed to make these outcomes possible. Research shows that even though students say they prefer unguided reflection, instructor-created boundaries nudge students toward the production of better content. In addition, students benefit from a detailed grading rubric and opportunities for revision. Several of the suggestions below serve as elements instructors can blend or personalize to fit both the course and student needs.

Reflection Models

Choosing or blending reflection models offers students the opportunity to integrate theories and practices or experiences to change and expand their perspectives. Because high school instructors sometimes employ passive learning and construct assignments with free reflection in isolated contexts, students may enter a college classroom with the ability to notice things pragmatically and ethically but with few skills and self-efficacy to navigate Mezirow's process of transformational learning; this becomes even more difficult in a virtual classroom.

Consequently, Jonathan Rix and A. Paige-Smith suggest that instructors should incorporate pathways to overcome "restricted reflection" (31), especially in online writing classes.

To overcome limited reflections, instructors can employ several strategies to foster self-efficacy through writing critical reflections.

John Sandars indicates that "the potential of reflection for individuals may not be fully realised without the help and support of another person" (688); therefore, even though some instructors prefer loose boundaries for reflection, they should carefully construct guided reflection assignments as well to fuel the best opportunities for transformative learning (see Figure 5).

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages
Guided Reflection	Reflect on relevant topics/course goals Provides prompts	Too restrictive Limited opinions/stylistic elements
Free Reflection	Explore a variety of thoughts and experiences More personal/introspective Unanticipated domains (Sturgill and Motley)	No content restrictions Difficulty staying on task No standard regarding length or quality
Dialogic Reflection	Reinforce key concepts and guide responses Receives feedback from instructor and peers Exposure to other perspectives (Sturgill and Motley)	Writing to the group/groupthink Discretion/perceived judgement may affect authenticity (Sturgill and Motley)
Expressive Reflection	No feedback until end of semester Less filter/more authentic/varied responses	Lack of feedback/direction Lower level of critical thinking
Public Reflection	Wider audience Extends discussion outside of class/ Facilitates broader thinking about issues and contexts	Writing to an audience may affect construction Problems with comments More reserved
Private Reflection	Smaller audience Protects confidentiality	Less engagement Limited feedback

Figure 5: General Models for Reflection

Levels of Reflection

Online writing instructors can also choose from or blend four different levels of reflection; each fosters its own level of inquiry and exploration. Gibbs, Johns, or John Driscoll's frameworks of reflection work well to move students through the rhetorical stages of reflection. The model below, based on Driscoll's, provides descriptions and examples that show how student writers actively engage in reflection about their experiences (see Figure 6).

Type of Reflection	Description	Example
Description	Describes the experience: What did you do? How did you feel?	With five minutes left in my writing professor's online office hours, I clicked on the link and within seconds, her image appeared, and she acknowledged my presence. I had learned early in the semester that my professor is always willing to take time to talk to students. Consequently, I settled back in my chair and started my one-on-one workshop with my teacher even though I could tell she was tired. Nevertheless, she asked me about my current ideas and research. After I closed the window to her office hours, I felt better about my topic and had a better sense of what kind of research I need to include to make this a great paper.
Analysis	Describes the experience including personal judgment: What did you learn about yourself, the community, and the process?	Working in small groups this week made me think about group work and desired outcomes. With a lot to do in the upcoming week, I felt overwhelmed and unprepared to work with my group on peer-editing. One girl in the group completed her paper and was eager for us to read it and provide feedback. I could tell she was frustrated with her group. From this experience, I learned that I need to set aside more time to write papers so that I can use the online peer-editing sessions to improve my paper and to help others improve their papers.
Dialogic	Collaboration examining of one's role in the experience with analysis and critical thinking.	When I stand back now and replay the scene in my mind, I can see how defensive the professor was when I questioned her about her grading scale. I requested more explanation about her rubric and point system, but the professor did not seem happy that I was asking her to provide me with details. Honestly, her reaction made me start to question whether I had a right to ask her about the grade I received and if I had understood the assignment in the first place.
Critical Reflection	Considers the social and political contexts and implications: Assumption analysis, contextual awareness, imaginative speculation, and reflective skepticism (Brookfield)	In the service learning project this semester, we went to a local homeless shelter to work with residents of a year-long program that helps them find jobs or earn a GED. I can see now how I made assumptions about their ability to perform at a desired level. With different backgrounds, interests, and experiences, I don't think the instructor's materials adequately prepared me. However, working with the residents this week made me think critically about stories, communities, and personal responsibility to community partners. Next week, I want to engage more with some of the residents so that we can offer them a greater sense of how literature can serve as a conduit for understanding people's perspectives.

Figure 6: General Types of Reflection

Reflection Rubric

In addition to crafting transformative reflection exercises, instructors should provide students with feedback by using detailed rubrics as well. Using a rubric similar to David Burton's (see Figure 7) to grade

critical reflections creates an opportunity for students to assess if they can or did competently produce high-quality entries that generate connections between the writer, the material, the experience, and future applications of the knowledge.

Criteria	Excellent (1)	Very Good (2)	Satisfactory (3)	Needs Work (4)	Unsatisfactory (5)
Writing Quality	Demonstrates strong writing skills. Excellent grammar, syntax, spelling, and formatting.	Good writing style with solid ability to express meaning. Very good use of mechanics and grammar.	Writing style shows meaning adequately but some grammar and syntax errors.	Little expression of ideas, feelings, and description. Needs work with grammar and syntax.	Lack of expression, ideas, and description. Many grammatical errors.
Description (WHAT HAPPENED?)	Indicates insights into issues and implications. Aware of complexities of issue and situations.	Some insights into issues, and challenges. Shows some level of critical thinking/ complexity	Shows some gains from the experience but few and/or simplistic insights.	Assignment completed but little connection between experience and personal impact.	Resistant or limited to change of attitude. No desire to consider other points of view.
Insights/ Understanding (HOW AND WHY?)	Creates a personal plan of action/ challenge based on course material/ experience.	Creates a plan based on events and course materials.	Increased sensitivity, change of attitude. Shows awareness of connections.	Completed assignment but little connection between experience and personal impact.	Resistant or limited to change of attitude. No desire to consider other points of view.
Commitment and Challenges (NOW WHAT?)	Creates a personal plan of action/ challenge based on course material/ experience.	Creates a plan based on events and course materials.	Committed to class but more development needed for progress.	Somewhat committed to change and meeting challenges.	Lack of immersion and commitment to experience and change.
Progress and Leadership Development (WHAT CONNECTIONS?)	Significant growth and personal development. Clear connections. Stated goals/ objectives.	Increased sensitivity, change of attitude. Shows awareness of connections.	Some progress and leadership.	No progress or plan. Repetitious content regarding connections and experience.	Negative or indifferent in reflection.

Figure 7: Student Critical Reflection Rubric

Instructors can delete or substitute related criteria for each type of reflection assignment if some of the elements do not apply to each task. Assignments can also entail peer assessment; since peer-led learning is a move toward student-centered teaching and more collaborative teaching spaces, peer-led groups offer students spaces to solve problems and exchange ideas (Naude et al.). In an online setting, rubrics posted online provide a writing plan and a system for individualized feedback. Peer groups can also use rubrics in forums or in collaborative documents to target classmates' strengths and weaknesses in reflective writing.

Constructing effective reflection assignments creates scaffolding opportunities for other methods, such as guided revision and instructor feedback, that move students to become more confident and better writers. In addition, depending on the intended student learning outcomes and the course materials, instructors can employ a variety of prompts, guidelines, peer interactions, and feedback exchanges to construct a sense of writing community through reflection assignments that avail themselves to improving students' self-efficacy as well.

Final Thoughts

Undeniably, methods for writing instruction have advanced greatly over the past half century. Educators and researchers continue to discover the benefits of teaching writing as a process and as a social act; online classroom activities should espouse aspects of both ideologies. The relationship between instructor and student can be developed and strengthened in virtual environments and, similar to face-to-face classes, it is a necessary component for student success. In fact, Jan Hughes and Qi Chen assert that "teacher-focused interventions aimed at creating and sustaining affectively positive, encouraging relationships with students represent a critical need" (par. 49). Some of those interventions include providing interactive feedback during stages of the writing process; others require a greater emphasis on reflective writing. Such targeted practices will further solidify and subsequently build students' self-efficacy (Bandura 201), allowing them to rely upon their own self-beliefs to tackle future writing challenges. The development of self-confidence in writing is an important condition of aptitude: students "with strong efficacy [are] better writers" (McCarthy et al. 469). Therefore, online writing instructors should consider instructional methods that promote, nurture, and sustain the development of self-efficacy, which will in turn shape students' attitudes about writing and their potential for success.

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Reviewed by Lester J. Manzano

In light of increased calls for accountability in higher education and pressure from state and federal officials to address concerns about the quality of higher education (Kelchen), over the last several years the landscape of higher education has evolved into one where colleges and universities have shifted their focus onto student success (Ascione). National conferences that focus on student success abound, and research and reports on this topic are only growing (NASPA). Conversations about student success have surfaced across higher education and across all media. These conversations are taking place on college campuses among those who are tasked with effecting change and fostering student success. It is indeed a common occurrence at colleges and universities: Faculty and administrators discuss the challenges faced by at-risk students who struggle to succeed at their institution. Then, a few months later, they discuss the accomplishments of students who persisted to graduation. One such place where these types of conversations were taking place was California State University, Northridge (CSUN). It was these types of discussions that sparked the development of CSUN's Learning Habits Project, a longitudinal research study for which findings are presented in Elizabeth Berry et al.'s book *Learning from the Learners: Successful College Students Share Their Effective Learning Habits*.

On the heels of Richard Light's *Making the Most of College*, which explored undergraduate students' experience from their own voices, the Learning Habits Project's goals were "to track, over four to six years, several groups of newly enrolled first-year students who were most likely to succeed at the university, . . . to gain insight into their characteristics and academic approaches, . . . to find out about their *learning habits* and, most especially, how and why they

work" (p. xv). This project was different in that, unlike research that has focused on at-risk students or on large sets of quantitative data, the project "focuse[d] on student strengths, not their struggles" (p. xv). In other words, the research project approached learning about student success from an asset-based rather than a deficit-based perspective, meaning that they focused on practices and habits that were characteristic of successful students, rather than investigating the negative factors that may have hindered unsuccessful students from achieving academic success. In examining these successful strategies, Berry and colleagues present in their book findings from multiple interviews conducted with over seven-hundred students, thus centering the voices of students themselves.

The book is divided into five parts, each including one to four chapters written by various members of the twenty-person project team, which included faculty and administrators across academic disciplines and across the university. The book presents the origins and overview of the research project, provides insights into the project's findings and key themes, and concludes with recommendations for faculty and administrators. In Part 1, "Project Parameters," Bettina Huber provides an overview of the Learning Habits Project, including a thorough description of the research approach which consisted of administering open-ended surveys at the end of each academic term as well as conducting multiple face-to-face interviews with each student participant over the course of their undergraduate careers. The project invited incoming students whom the researchers predicted would be successful on a variety of academic success metrics. Specifically, eligibility for the study included having a high school grade point average (GPA) of 3.50 or higher and/or meeting testing requirements for direct entry into college-level work in writing and mathematics. The research team tracked four cohorts of first-year students who entered CSUN in 2007, 2008, 2010, and 2011, totaling more than seven-hundred students, and they combined qualitative data with student-records data as part of their analyses. In presenting information about the student participants, Huber provides a detailed comparison between students who participated in the project and students who were invited to

participate but declined the researchers' invitation, focusing on entry and background characteristics (e.g., high school GPA, parental educational attainment), persistence and academic success measures (e.g., one-year continuation rate, GPA at end of first year), and racial and ethnic background.

Part 2 of the book, "Differing Patterns of Engagement within Major Student Subgroups," highlights findings from the research project related to various subgroups within the study. First, Steven Graves presents a surprising finding regarding the experiences of first-generation college-going students (i.e., students whose parents do not hold a bachelor's degree). Graves found that, "overall, first-generation students perform as well, and occasionally better, on several metrics of college success than their peers from bachelor's degree families" (59). Graves then elaborates on findings, indicating the significant role that family background plays on students' motivation to succeed in college. Similar research has centered familial relationships as a form of capital that helps students succeed in college (Yosso 79). Next, Huber explores gender differences (although limited to a binary definition of gender as "men" and "women") in learning habits that contribute to women's higher persistence rates, compared to men. In short, Huber argues that women developed study skills and social-interaction skills in high school, coupled with a more realistic understanding of the challenges of college-level work, that allowed them to develop learning habits that lead to success in college. Finally, Huber explores the perception of a campus's student diversity and its perceived impact on learning, finding that gender, combined with academic major, affected students' views regarding whether or not a campus's diversity has an effect on learning.

Although Part 2 of the book provided interesting and detailed analyses of student characteristics and their relationships with student learning, the heart of the book—indeed, the aim of the Learning Habits Project—focuses on the learning habits described by the student participants and the ways that these habits contributed to their success in college. Part 3, "Key Themes in Teaching and Learning," offers readers an in-depth look at the

study's findings related to students' learning habits and what students shared about classroom teaching. Specifically, through the presentation of direct quotations gleaned from hundreds of interviews, the authors present students' perspectives on effective teaching practices, including those related to mastering college-level reading, developing writing proficiency, and using technology in the classroom. In Chapter 6, "Reading with Understanding: What Do College Students Say?," Linda Bowen and Elizabeth Berry address the challenge of promoting college-level reading and comprehension, noting that most students are ill-prepared for the quantity and level of challenge characteristic of academic reading assignments. They argue that mastering college-level reading advances writing proficiency, yet they acknowledge that most universities do not provide specific courses or curricula to address the "reading problem" (145). They discovered that most student participants in the Learning Habits Project developed their own strategies to manage the volume of reading required of students. They close the chapter with describing the Reading Matters Initiative at CSUN, a university-wide effort to enhance reading skills, and offer teaching strategies that assist students in engaging with academic texts.

In Chapter 7, "Gains in Written Communication between the Freshman and Junior Years," Irene Clark and Bettina Huber present findings from a smaller study that was part of the larger Learning Habits Project. This "writing study" involved the review of writing samples from a subset (10 percent) of the student participants. The researchers collected writing samples in the form of an argumentative, thesis-driven essay from each student's first year and junior year. They then utilized a locally-developed rubric to measure change within six writing dimensions: context and purpose for writing and critical thinking, organization and cohesion, content development and coherence, genre and disciplinary conventions, appropriate reliance on sources and evidence, and control of syntax and mechanics. Their findings indicate that most students improved in their ability to write argumentative, thesis-driven essays, most notably in the area of "appropriate reliance on sources and evidence." Clarke and Huber also suggest that the improvement of

writing from first year to junior year was influenced by factors including a first-year writing course's focus on process and genre awareness as well as the types of writing prompts instructors assigned.

Finally, in Chapter 8, "Students and Technology: PowerPoint Fatigue and the Rabbit Hole of Internet Stuff," Donal O'Sullivan explores the use of technology in the classroom, and, in Chapter 9, "Sliding into Learning: The Power of Webnotes," Carrie Rothstein-Fisch and Sharon Klein discuss the use of electronic lecture notes in aiding students' learning. As O'Sullivan notes, the Learning Habits Project took place over a nine-year period, beginning in 2007, when the adoption of technology use in the classroom expanded significantly, from learning management systems and PowerPoint to the use of smart tablets and "clickers." The researchers' findings suggest that the student participants welcomed instructors' use of technology, but only if used well and if its purpose was to help them succeed. In particular, students shared that the availability of online lecture notes or "webnotes," which are electronic lecture notes made available to students while an instructor delivers a lecture, is beneficial to their engagement in the learning process.

Part 4, "Fostering Student Initiative," delves into co-curricular activities that influence students' engagement with learning processes. These include the utilization of libraries or tutoring and learning resource centers, as well as joining campus organizations and study groups. Mark Stevens and Peter Mora present findings on academic help-seeking behaviors among participants, and Daisy Lemus and Mary-Pat Stein describe self-regulated learning strategies such as time management, organization, and planning. Finally, Huber discusses how participation in the Learning Habits Project may have contributed to student participants' success in college. Specifically, Huber argues that the process of reflecting on one's learning made them conscious of how they were engaging in their learning activities. In other words, the process of *thinking* about their learning habits contributed to their engagement with their learning habits that led to academic success.

Finally, Part 5 of the book offers conclusions as well as recommendations for faculty and administrators who seek to

implement policies and practices that support students' success. While each chapter in the book includes recommendations related to the chapter's specific content, the final section in the volume provides broad recommendations related to teaching and learning, as well as faculty development activities.

As a whole, *Learning from the Learners* provides a thorough presentation of a mixed-methods (qualitative and quantitative) research project that explores learning habits of contemporary college students from the perspective of students themselves. Indeed, with such an approach, there are strengths and weaknesses. First, the volume's focus is on students' voices, rather than on researchers' understandings of what constitutes student success or effective learning strategies. While highlighting students' own perspectives on effective learning strategies is a significant contribution of this volume, this approach is, at the same time, limited by the inability to demonstrate the extent to which students' self-reported learning strategies, as opposed to other factors (e.g., background characteristics, academic engagement, and campus environments) contributed to their persistence through graduation. Still, by learning about successful college students' learning habits, the authors are able to inform policies and practices that could be applied to all students. The detailed presentation of the study's research approach and procedures as well as the collection of excerpts from student participants' interviews provides tangible examples that instructors can share with their students in support of their success.

Next, while the Learning Habits Project was specific in time, place, and context to a diverse, urban, comprehensive university in Southern California, the authors argue that few studies have examined students' learning habits within this type of institution. These findings may be helpful to faculty and administrators at colleges and universities with similar institutional profiles and resources where attention to persistence and student success is of growing importance in the current higher-education context. In particular, the chapter on college-level reading challenges notions of whether such a skill needs to be formally addressed in the curriculum explicitly (i.e., through specific course work or across

disciplines), and the chapter on writing proficiency adds to the conversation on the challenges of teaching writing as a stand-alone course, as opposed to teaching writing within disciplines or across the curriculum.

Finally, the project's involvement of students who were predicted to be successful (i.e., entering college with a 3.50 high-school grade point average and/or having satisfied entry requirements to begin college-level work in writing and mathematics) reflects a shift in studies, from one that attempts to identify factors that hinder student success to one that explores strategies employed by successful students. This asset-based approach to understanding student success focuses on existing strategies for successful students, foundations on which educators can build to further foster students' persistence through higher education. The alternative is a deficit-based approach that seeks to identify gaps or problems with students' learning strategies. While the latter may reinforce notions that resources and attention must focus on gaps in learning, the former takes the approach of understanding effective learning strategies that may be applied to all students in an effort to foster greater student success.

Through this volume, instructors, curriculum designers, and student development educators alike would gain valuable insights into the learning habits of successful college students. The authors' recommendations, based on their insights learned from the Learning Habits Project, focus on enhancing faculty development opportunities for improving classroom-teaching techniques and on incorporating opportunities for students to reflect on their own learning. With a focus on students' descriptions of their own learning habits, the volume provides insights into how students learn, information that would be useful to instructors across disciplines.

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Reviewed by Erin Lehman

Contingency touches every faculty member and therefore every student in higher education today. It's often draped in varied terms, such as "lecturer, adjunct, temporary faculty, contingent faculty, and visiting professor" (7). One result of this inconsistency in naming is that few students, parents, and K-12 teachers realize that contingency is an ever-present, unspoken backbone of American higher education.

Over seventy-five percent of all faculty in American colleges and universities work in a contingent or non-tenure-track position, according to a widely-cited 2012 survey (Coalition on the Academic Workforce). Given the widespread reliance on non-tenure-track faculty, professional bodies such as CCCC and MLA publish and update statements outlining "reasonable workloads and protections against unnecessary changes" for those off the tenure-track (Conference on College Composition and Communication).

The "CCCC Statement of Working Conditions for Non-Tenure-Track Writing Faculty" recommends transparent hiring practices, appropriate space to meet with students (without violating FERPA or Title IX standards), access to health insurance, and a living wage—outlining what equitable treatment of non-tenure-track faculty *should* look like. Similarly, the MLA currently recommends an idealistic minimum compensation of $10,900 per 3-credit-hour course (Modern Language Association). Despite such recommendations, the reality for contingent faculty is much different. In the 2012 survey mentioned earlier, the average pay for a 3-credit-hour course was $2,700 (Coalition on the Academic Workforce). The voices in *Contingency, Exploitation, and Solidarity: Labor and Action in English Composition* take on the realities and possibilities of contingent faculty by outlining actions and describing attempts to challenge labor inequity in the composition field.

This collection captures the complex relationships and power structures that contingent teaching creates. Like many young women working in higher education, my first paid teaching position was working as an adjunct faculty member in the writing department of a local university. Later, I was hired by a community college for a full-time faculty position (there is no tenure at the institution where I currently teach). Then, I was promoted into the program chair role, where I hired and fired full-time and adjunct faculty in order to staff the English schedule of course offerings.

Now, a decade into my career, I am considered a non-tenure-track, full-time faculty member. Though I hold the titles of department chair and associate professor (after applying for and earning rank reclassification), I am issued a nine month contract each August. Throughout my career, and especially working at a community college, I have been involved in contingent labor first-hand. At times, the lack of equity between full-time and part-time teaching roles has made me uncomfortable. Other times, I am keenly aware that I have profited from the under-paid labor of my writing instructor colleagues. In many ways, we (students, faculty, administration, and community stakeholders) all do.

I suspect that many people working in higher education composition departments (myself included) both recognize the lack of equity on campus and realize they should do something about it. *Contingency, Exploitation, and Solidarity* intends to show the unsure reader a broader picture of labor in the composition field so that she might begin organizing on her campus. The collection of eighteen chapters is written by non-tenure-track, tenure track, and writing center faculty—eleven of the chapters are co-written—and reaches into a variety of campus contexts. The collection tells the stories of contemporary contingent activism—some successful and others less so—to highlight such stories and provide specific examples for organizing.

The Introduction opens with a discussion of the roots of this project spurred by the rise of public interest in contingent labor in higher education. Editors Seth Kahn, William B. Lalicker, and Amy Lynch-Biniek aim to set this collection apart from the typical

responses to contingent labor, which are described in the Introduction as horror, anger, and empty promises. Instead, Kahn writes that the book is "more about taking concrete steps to fight both exploitation of contingent faculty and the denigration of composition studies" (7). The effect of this matter-of-fact approach is that the collection comes across as professional, purposeful, and action-oriented.

The book was first published online and is available as a free PDF (the entire text and/or individual chapters may be downloaded) from https://wac.colostate.edu/books/perspectives/contingency. The free access to the entire text makes it clear that the editors and authors are committed to making the book a democratic project. The paperback is also available through online retailers for $36.95.

The book can be read cover to cover or used as a guide by following reading threads. The editors outline five threads in the Introduction:

1. Self-advocacy
2. Organizing within and across Ranks
3. Professionalizing and Developing in Complex Contexts
4. Local Changes to Workload, Pay, and Material Conditions
5. Protecting Gains, Telling Cautionary Tales

Editors Kahn, Lalicker, and Lynch-Biniek justify their use of reading threads rather than sections: "Because we expect many readers to be downloading individual chapters . . . we opted out of *sections* that inevitably tried and failed to categorize these multifaceted arguments, and decided instead to articulate *threads* that we believe connect arguments across chapters" (emphasis theirs, 10).

The reading threads allow for chapters to fall within multiple designated topics. Of the eighteen chapters in the book, fifteen are linked to two or more threads; none of the chapters is linked to all five threads. As the editors suggest, there is overlap among the identified threads. For example, three of the five threads (Self-advocacy; Organizing within and across Ranks; and Local Changes to Workload, Pay, and Material Conditions) emphasize practical

actions for organizing and enacting change. At the same time, the suggested threads shrug off traditional sections in favor of a more decentralized organization, allowing for multiple and conflicting themes and perspectives to emerge. This style of organization connects with the collection's larger intent to resist the current arrangement of the academy.

Thread 1: Self-advocacy includes chapters written largely by non-tenure track faculty about efforts to effect change. Grouping only four (4) chapters, this is by far the smallest reading thread. Even a book like *Contingency, Exploitation, and Solidarity* cannot avoid the reality that contingent and part-time faculty simply have less compensated time to research and write than tenured faculty. The only chapter to fall under Thread 1 alone is "Adjuncts Foster Change: Improving Adjunct Working Conditions by Forming an Associate Faculty Coalition (AFC)" by Tracy Donhardt and Sarah Layden.[1]

Donhardt and Layden's AFC first started with a request to include part-time writing faculty in the university's online faculty directory. Those unfamiliar with treatment of contingent faculty might be shocked to hear the administration's reasoning for declining the request: "there were 'too many of us' and so the task of maintaining the list from semester-to-semester for faculty who come and go would be too time intensive for any of the full-time staff members" (190). Donhardt and Layden offer to maintain the directory for part-time faculty and realize that the online system automatically generates a biography for all faculty at the institution. Adding a part-time faculty member's biography to the directory requires someone checking a box:

> Until our request, that box had simply remained unchecked for anyone with part-time status. And thus, the harsh reality of our plight was evident from the start: a faculty record was automatically created for us but intentionally shut off by the administration. We won the right to check that box. (190)

Donhardt and Layden capture how easily the administration renders part-time faculty invisible in the institution.

Donhardt and Layden go on to engage in a two-year process to gain visibility, gather their own data, and organize public events which bring local and national media coverage. Eventually, they make several important gains for part-time Liberal Arts faculty, including some funding for presentations, more office space, and small raises. Donhardt and Layden's chapter is both humbling and motivating; it left me wanting just a few more Thread 1 chapters authored by part-time faculty.

Thread 2: Organizing within and across Ranks includes eleven chapters and is the largest reading thread designated by the editors. The chapters in Thread 2 highlight the ways contingent faculty reach across the tenure line to change and improve existing policy. These chapters also capture the complexity of organizing, how powerful campus context can be, how loaded and political the process is—even how news travels from room to room on campus. In many ways, this reading thread gets to the heart of the book's topic; without this thread, the collection could not deliver on the book's title.

The chapter "Despair Is Not a Strategy," by Anna K. Nardo and Barbara Heifferon provides the activist reader ideas for how to remain persistent in the face of years of setbacks. Nardo and Heifferon recount double-digit instructor layoffs, high administration turnover (which leads to inconsistency and empty promises), and an ineffective attempt to unionize with a professional lobbyist. After a decade of poor morale stemming from budget-related instructor layoffs, the faculty group LSUnited leverages the open comment portion of a monthly board meeting to secure raises and job security. This chapter, along with several of the Thread 2 chapters, fulfills the activist reader's expectations for this collection because Nardo and Heifferon detail local organization attempts.

Among the eleven chapters included in Thread 2, "Building Our Own Bridges: A Case Study in Contingent Faculty Self-Advocacy" by Lacey Wootton and Glenn Moomau stands out. Wootton and Moomau describe how—with a little encouragement and a little

outrage—contingent faculty rewrite the description of their own role in the faculty manual. With subheadings like "Alliances" and "Realize that the Process is Fundamentally Political," this chapter explicitly advises the faculty-activist to accept the political nature of organizing: "Perhaps the most important lesson we can take from the decade of preparation and advocacy is the realization that change is a finely tuned political process" (210). Wootton and Moomau slyly remind the reader that a strong reputation can be leveraged as a political strategy. Many teachers reading this journal—presumably with positive reputations due to their classroom and campus efforts—might relate to Wootton and Moomau's insight and consider how their own reputations might be valuable, confidence-boosting assets for organizing.

Thread 3: Professionalizing and Developing in Complex Contexts captures the problematic nature of professional work and professional development for contingent faculty. If asked to do too much, professional opportunities walk the line of exploitation. If too few opportunities are presented, then the result may be exclusion and isolation for contingent faculty. In a recent CCC Symposium article about curriculum standardization, Chris Gallagher suggests that highlighting professional work might be a way to advocate for better working conditions: "Whenever possible, we should use assessment to make instructor working conditions, along with student learning conditions, visible and to agitate for improving those conditions" (497). Chapters in Thread 3 explore these professional work and professional development complications.

On one hand, Jacob Babb and Courtney Adams Wooten argue in "Traveling on the Assessment Loop: The Role of Contingent Labor in Curriculum Development" that contingent faculty should be included in professional work such as curriculum discussions. Some administrators recognize that contingent faculty are exploitable and, to shield them from additional work, administrators avoid engaging contingent faculty in professional opportunities. Babb and Wooten criticize this reasoning: "Such a stance strikes us as an infantilizing maneuver that deprives contingent faculty of the chance to engage in professional and curricular development" (170). Babb

and Wooten go on to describe their beneficial experiences as graduate teaching assistants engaging in portfolio review workshops. From these workshops, Babb and Wooten (both now WPAs themselves) were able to develop their own approaches to curriculum development; ultimately, the experience of being included in professional work despite their contingent role was valuable for the authors.

On the other hand, "Hitting the Wall: Identity and Engagement at a Two-Year College" by Desirée Holter, Amanda Martin, and Jeffrey Klausman traces issues with offering too many professional opportunities to contingent faculty. The work itself and resulting accolades can be misleading. Both Holter and Martin are accomplished composition faculty members; Holter assumed her performance and engagement in departmental assignments would protect her from structural and curricular changes adopted by her department, despite being an adjunct faculty member. Holter reflects upon her situation: "My aspirations for full-time employment, as well as my perceived job security and stability, have merely been a façade, inherent in the structure of the labor system at two-year colleges and elsewhere, which dangles incentives before adjuncts in order to keep them 'on the hook.'" (239). In some cases, contingent faculty are led to believe that developing and working within the department will better position them for a full-time role, which rarely materializes. Holter's story—one of two contingent faculty stories highlighted in "Hitting the Wall"—shows her growing disillusionment with the professional work and opportunities that she has taken on.

Thread 4: Local Changes to Workload, Pay, and Material Conditions highlights campus-level conditions and organization attempts. Thread 4 includes nine chapters and is one of the larger threads, but no chapters are listed singly as Thread 4 chapters. This thread functions well as a guide for faculty and administrators reading to learn strategies to bring to their own campuses.

One might expect this thread to dwell in the practical, and the thread does offer specific, actual examples. But the chapters in this thread also emphasize the theoretical grounding for equitable composition labor and the way such theory may be in service to

practice. For example, in "Head to Head with edX," Michael Murphy argues: "We have little chance of improving the material conditions of writing teachers unless we insist emphatically on the real, demonstrated complexity and urgency of their work" (73). Murphy suggests that composition instructors should know the history of the field to explain the value of the work they do in the classroom.

Again in "Contingency, Solidarity, and Community Building," Lalicker and Lynch-Biniek describe the process by which full-time, non-tenure-track faculty are converted to tenure-track faculty after five consecutive years of teaching. In order to validate and protect this clause, Lalicker and Lynch-Biniek share nine principles that assist in the contingent to tenure-track conversion process. Principle 9 is "Support contingent faculty for whom the tenure track means embracing composition as not just a teaching assignment but as a scholarly endeavor" (99). Similar to Murphy's reasoning, an academic approach to the composition discipline leads to improved outcomes for contingent faculty.

As the editors remark about the purpose of this entire collection, "departments that exploit contingent faculty the worst are almost always the ones that respect the intellectual value of composition the least" (7). The chapters in Thread 4 emphasize the value of seeing composition as a discipline and the problems that arise when campuses fail to do so.

Thread 5: Protecting Gains, Telling Cautionary Tales includes seven chapters that emphasize the effectiveness of storytelling. Arguably, storytelling seems to be an unnamed theme of the entire collection because each chapter is engaged in the work of storytelling. The act of taking care to tell these stories validates the identities, expertise, and actions of contingent faculty.

In "The Uncertain Future of Past Success: Memory, Narrative, and the Dynamics of Institutional Change," Rolf Norgaard emphasizes that documenting and discussing gains are important because institutional memory can be short; institutional memory can be distorted and distracted by retellings. "Competing narratives can arise . . . at moments of institutional crisis or doubt when commitments

and values can lend themselves to counter-narratives" (146). Norgaard explores how comfortable attitudes about gains for contingent faculty and a change in administration can expose the tenuousness of the current narrative.

As Norgaard analyzes the narrative of momentum (for contingent faculty) on campus, he seems to speak to the power and problems of contingent faculty and narrative: "It matters who tells the story. When just enough of them turn silent, and just enough new faculty enter the institution without being schooled themselves in this institutional narrative, the story can turn. Narrative requires, and is itself a product of agency" (147). It matters who speaks—and it's revealing who is given the opportunity to speak. After reading Norgaard's chapter, I thought about my own campus. What is the current narrative, who is writing it, and who is given speaking roles in it?

Contingency, Exploitation, and Solidarity invites readers to consider their own working conditions and the campus where they teach—and if not their own campus, then the college they attended, the university their daughter attends, or the institution their students plan to attend.

Like non-tenure-track positions, this collection of voices is varied and each chapter could be standalone. If the intended audience is contingent faculty, then it does make sense to emphasize multiple perspectives. As a reader, I found myself drawn to individual stories of contingency and using them as placeholders—either this is what my situation and campus is like, or perhaps mine is "better" or "worse." But I also sense that the intended audience is not contingent faculty because many of the chapters are written by faculty and administrators speaking from a position of authority about changes they've attempted or enacted.

I wish to conclude with a few critiques and ideas for future work on this topic:

- First, I would love to hear from students on the topic of contingency. After all, the institution's treatment of faculty often reflects its attitudes toward students. I suggest a

chapter that tackles the following question: How does contingent labor in the composition classroom affect first-year students?

- The organization of the entire collection, especially when read cover to cover, is unclear. Keeping in mind the intended audience of contingent faculty, I question whether the reading threads help readers locate and digest the content in a useful way. Assigning chapters to reading threads is an interesting idea, but in this case has resulted in broad categories that tend to obscure rather than specify placement.
- Finally, if there were to be future editions or other books on this topic, they could more carefully consider the implications of gender, race, sexuality and ability as they affect contingent teaching roles. Eileen Schell's Foreword seems to suggest a missing conversation on diversity when she questions: "How is contingency tied to the bodies of workers and students that are marked as non-normative and different" (xiv). *Contingency, Exploitation, and Solidarity* seems to overlook issues of gender, race, sexuality, and ability—issues that are critical when it comes to contingent faculty and the treatment of students.

Readers—both faculty and administrators—could use this collection to see a broader picture of the labor issues affecting contingent faculty nationally. Readers should download and read individual chapters that apply to their situation in order to analyze their working conditions and campus contexts—and possibly begin organizing locally. *Contingency, Exploitation, and Solidarity* does not seek to provide the final word: it's "less about envisioning a utopia toward which we strive—particularly because we don't all agree what that utopia looks like" (7). Instead, the collection will complicate the reader's understanding of the ways contingency affects the teaching of composition across institutions.

Note

[1]In full disclosure, I participated in Donhardt and Layden's AFC for about one year when I taught for IUPUI in 2009-2010. However, I did not participate in the writing of the chapter. I did not realize that anything had been written about the AFC until I began reading this collection. I'm including a discussion of Donhardt and Layden's chapter in this review because it's the collection's only chapter where the activism of part-time faculty is detailed by part-time faculty (though both authors have become full-time now), rather than across ranks.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Now Accepting Submissions for the fall 2019 Guest-Edited Teacher to Teacher Section Theme: Real Revision

The JTW is happy to announce the continuation of its newest section Teacher to Teacher. This guest-edited section is devoted to K-12 reflections written by and for K-12 teachers. The fall 2019 issue of JTW will welcome back Brandie Bohney as guest editor for the Teacher to Teacher section. Bohney is a former Carmel High School teacher (Carmel, IN) who is now completing her Ph.D. at Bowling Green State University. The theme for the fall 2019 issue is Real Revision: Encouraging Students to Resee, Rethink, Rework.

Writing teachers almost universally agree that helping students understand that revising is more than proofreading and spell-checking is an uphill battle. And with increasing demands on teachers to do "more writing," time for integrating strong revision practices often gets lost in the push for greater quantities of writing assignments rather than quality of time spent on each one. That said, as writing instructors, we know that revision—the ability to resee, rethink, and rework our writing—is one of the most important skills students can learn. How, then, do you approach revision in your classroom? What practical strategies do you use to help students see revision not as punishment for doing something wrong but as part of a larger process? In what ways do you help students get past merely checking for conventions in peer review to focus on content and meaning? How do you encourage students to "kill [their] darlings" and rewrite elements that are not working? Do you assess for process and revision?

Brief submissions (roughly 750-1200 words) that reflect on practical application and classroom practices that apply to this

theme should be sent as a Word document to jtw@iupui.edu with the subject heading "K-12 Reflection." The deadline for submissions for our fall 2019 issue is August 1, 2019. All submissions will be reviewed by the Guest Editor in consultation with the JTW Editor. Contributors will be notified of the Editors' decisions by September 30, 2019.

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