

Multimodality, Ethnodrama, and the Preparation of Pre-service Teachers of Writing

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Given the prevalence of multimodal texts in today's world, it is not surprising that adolescent literacies are as dynamic, multimodal and visual as the texts with which they interact (Roswell & Burke, 2009). As Kress & Van Leeuwen (1996) have outlined, the multimodal texts that make up a large percentage of our world consist of a range of modes (auditory, kinesthetic, spatial, visual, verbal, linguistic, tactile), their mediums (materials, colors, sound, pictures, lighting, print), and technologies (video games, film, photography). Research indicates that when adolescents interpret the design of multimodal texts, they are engaging in a process of interconnecting modes and sign systems with cultural meanings (Duncum, 2004; Felten, 2008; Hocks, 2003; Johnson, 2008).

If adolescents are to interrogate how multimodal texts function in cultural contexts, they need to develop a meta-language that helps them interrogate the relationships between the modes and the cultural meanings available to participants in any given context (Roswell & Burke, 2009; Serafini, 2011). Unfortunately, too often there is a disconnect between the multimodal realities of the reading and writing lives of adolescents outside of school and their print-based lives in school. Standardized forms of writing, decontextualized from actual audiences and real world purposes, prevail in schools; the dynamic, multimodal nature of adolescent reading, research, and writing receives less attention.

However, when adolescents have opportunities to compose multimodal texts, they are more likely to engage in real world

writing (Vasudevan, Schultz & Bateman, 2010). They become more intentional writers and develop their own recursive writing processes as they share and reflect on their writing with their peers, families, and teachers (Vasudevan et al., 2010). In the process of sharing, they fine-tune their purposes, draw on a broader range of modes, and learn how to interconnect the features of their texts with specific audiences (Vasudevan et al., 2010). When viewing multimodal texts in collaborative settings, adolescents use their previous knowledge of textual designs and the responses of their peers to infer the purposes of writers (Cloonan, 2011). In short, reading and writing multimodal texts supports adolescents in conceptualizing the work of real world writers and the kinds of cultural impacts made by different texts.

With this paper, I discuss a multilayered pedagogical approach to teaching future teachers of adolescents. This was the first class I taught as an Assistant Professor, and I was in search of a pedagogical design that would foster professor and student knowledge construction about the affordances of multimodal textual analysis and composition for future teacher conceptions of writing instruction. My goal was to foster collaborative inquiries into how to use multimodality to bridge teacher and adolescent literacies. My goal was also to learn with future teachers how to design writing instruction for adolescents through which they could transfer multimodal compositional principles to their everyday reading and writing. I found that the multimodal project I designed and the ethnodramatic framework—which included the act of working to honor and re-present the literacy stories of several

adolescents from young adult literature—provided particularly useful resources for enabling students to co-author their own critical language for textual interpretational and compositional processes. As I continued to research visual literacy scholarship, I realized I might have provided students design-based principles up front. However, this study demonstrates how ethnorama and multimodality can support students in discovering their own critical meta-language for the work of writers through an authentic inquiry-based experience.

Within this pedagogy, pre-service teachers both designed and interpreted multimodal texts. They used multiple modes to analyze and re-present Young Adult Literature. They critically examined the relationships between each of their multimodal texts and the range of interpretations possible within our classroom context. Pre-service teachers were positioned to formulate production and design-based understandings of reading and writing that influenced their conceptions of writing instruction. They drew upon the deep understandings of the power of multimodal textual analysis and composition acquired through this project to imagine aligning writing instruction with adolescent multimodal literacies.

Multimodal Composition: Reading and Writing as Design

In order to understand the design-based understandings of reading and writing developed by pre-service teachers in this course, this first section provides an overview of visual literacy scholarship. In their work on theorizing the grammar of visual design, visual literacy researchers refer to three sites of interpretation: “production, the image itself, and viewing” (Rose, 2001 in Serafini, 2011, p. 345; see also Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006). The production process involves designers

using the range of modes and technologies to position themselves within broader social, institutional, and ideological contexts. Kress & Van Leeuwen (1996) explain that producers select the modes (auditory, linguistic, spatial, tactile, visual, verbal), technologies, and discourses through which they present their content. They define discourses as “socially constructed knowledges of (some aspect of) reality” (p. 4). In other words, producers choose and integrate modes in order to convey a narrative of some kind. The narratives or discourses a producer integrates help shape the reader’s interactions with the modes and technologies of the text (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). Each of the producer’s choices of modes and discourses speaks to his or her alignments with larger belief systems.

The image of designers refers to the positioning of characters and people within the texts to represent certain kinds of relationships within broader social, institutional, and ideological contexts. The viewing refers to the positioning by producers of various readers/audiences in response to the kinds of “demands” or “offers” the participants in the text make on the readers (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). A “demand” involves a direct gaze from a participant in the image at the viewer, while an “offer” includes the absence of a direct gaze. There are any number of derivations on “demands” or “offers,” such as long shots or close ups, oblique, high, or low angles through which the viewer is invited into varying degrees of intimacy with the image participants (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006).

Visual literacy scholars recognize that the way an audience will interpret the narrative structure and meaning of a design is furthermore contingent on his or her own social positionings, identities, and knowledge of the cultural and institutional influences on the writer’s design choices

(Duncum, 2004). Audience interpretation is also contingent on the specific features of any given text and the varying degrees of the text's alignment with other conventions and sign systems, what Hocks (2003) refers to as "transparency" (p. 632). The more exposure a reader has to a range of genres and writing traditions, the more the reader will be able to interpret the design principles in operation and the alignments of writers with specific communities and cultural forms of expression.

Each of these three components of multimodal texts—production, image, and reception (Rose, 2001)—has implications for reading and writing. When analyzing multimodal designs, visual literacy scholars understand that readers are operating on at least three main planes. They are locating the sources and intentions behind a producer's design, the nature of the relationships of the people represented in the image, as well as the affect of the multiple modes on various audiences in specific contexts (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Serafini, 2011). Furthermore, visual literacy scholars understand that a producer's integration of modes provides a frame that influences the ways readers are allowed to interact with the text, including what kinds of meanings are possible for them to create (Duncum, 2004; Hocks, 2003; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). The degree to which any text invites multiple perspectives and competing interpretations also impacts reader agency. Texts that provide multiple reading pathways or interactive technologies expand the range of interpretations the reader can form (Hocks, 2003).

In visual literacy scholarship, "different modes of communication (visual, acoustic, spatial)" work together "without one being dominant" (Roswell & Burke, 2009, p. 106). As Roswell and Burke (2009) explain, each mode offers certain potential meanings that another might not offer. Words, images, verbal

and visual texts interact dialogically, casting new meanings on one another and shaping different possibilities for affecting readers' interpretations (Hocks, 2003). Digital media or "complex visuals" add even more layers, such as dynamic storylines and "related texts" and "supporting genres that accompany the story" (Roswell & Burke, 2009, p. 115). With film, participants move and interact, and there are multiple frames for any given moment, shifting camera angles, and narrative structures that align with different genres. Each frame provides new ways of conveying themes and symbols in the story. Genres of film include documentaries, fictional stories, and music videos.

Because multimodal texts are visual, they lend themselves to discussion. They facilitate conversation about the work of the producers who have produced them, as well as audience inquiry into their different reactions to the texts (Freedman, 1997; Hocks, 2003). Similar to video games, they foster interaction between the features of the texts, individuals, and other players or viewers (Hocks, 2003; Roswell & Burke, 2009). Visual literacy scholars understand the interactive nature of digital and multimodal texts as dialogic, ongoing dialogue between the modes and technologies of texts, the kinds of interactions they invite, and their available meanings to individuals within any given context.

Indeed, the interactive nature of multimodal texts is also true for print based texts. Hocks (2003) refers to studies of writing technologies which have demonstrated the "hybrid" nature of print based writing, that it is "at once verbal, spatial, and visual" (p. 644). What she means is that readers of print-based writing, which also has visual properties (e.g. font, layout), use visualization and verbal interaction to perform different ways of interpreting print-based texts within specific social settings. Readers of print-based texts

interact with textual features such as genre, narrative structure, and literary elements to interpret the intended meanings of writers. They use verbal, visual, enacted processes to make sense of the designs of texts, the representations of people within texts, and the impact of texts on them and on others (Hocks, 2003).

Visual Literacy and Adolescent Literacies

Multimodal composition helps us re-conceptualize adolescent reading and writing using visual literacy principles. As Roswell and Burke (2009) illustrated in their study of two different adolescent readers of web-based multimodal sites, when reading multimodal texts, adolescents were reading how the modes came together to convey a message. They were reading to comprehend the design of the text and how to interact with the different modes, features, and technologies available in the text (Jewitt, 2005; Roswell & Burke, 2009). Jewitt (2005), in a study of adolescent attempts to interpret multimodal science texts, found that adolescents were engaging with and constructing the meaning of science experiments through their interactional decisions. They based their decisions on their understandings of textual designs, their familiarity with visual modes, and their personal and cultural knowledge (Jewitt, 2005). They often privileged visual narratives over written narratives, which influenced the accuracy of their textual interpretations.

These studies demonstrate that adolescent reading requires a broad repertoire of literacy practices, “from that ability to interpret visual clues, to mastering the nuances of subtext, to following ideas in a nonlinear fashion, to decoding of simple reading” (Roswell & Burke, 2009, p. 117). Thus, reading is an act of interpreting the form and function of design principles and the narrative structures and

cultural meanings to which each mode and design principle contribute. As multimodal writers, teachers and adolescents are still developing meta-languages for the features and affordances of the different technologies through which they can compose texts (Cloonan et al., 2011; Gilje, 2010; Mills, 2010; Vasudevan et al., 2010). Each technology and arrangement of modes expands their opportunities for composition (Mills, 2010; Vasudevan et al., 2010). For example, Mills (2010) shows how, when storyboarding their multimodal projects, students needed to learn how to use close-up shots to help viewers focus on specific details and how to show animation through still images. They needed to learn where to place the lighting, the distance at which to place the tripod, and more. These were different affordances from print-based and more linear narratives, and they provided students new possibilities for storytelling through different modes.

Furthermore, Gilje (2010) articulates how three urban high school students in a film class learned to transfer their written stories to film. They had to figure out how to convey perspective, connect the visual with speech, engage the challenges of framing their characters and their identities, and compose symbols and sign systems their audiences would recognize (Gilje, 2010). Vasudevan et al. (2010) demonstrate how the opportunity to compose multimodal narratives about their communities enabled fifth graders to add more detail, passion, and purpose to their writing. The opportunity to compose in a variety of modes led students to take more risks and to uncover more layers of their identities as people and writers and members of their communities. In another study, adolescents interconnected reading and writing by transforming their understandings of literature through art-based designs and visual representations of prevalent symbols

in texts (Loretto & Chisholm, 2012). Their “transmediation” processes from the written mode to arts-based modes included expanded insights and new ways of understanding the narrative choices of literary writers (Loretto & Chisholm, 2012).

Similar to New Literacy Study conceptions of literacy, these studies demonstrate that literacy is no longer located only in peoples’ heads or in texts but also in social settings (Duncum, 2004). In each of these studies, with their multimodal literacies, students are engaging in a visual literacy process that “involves the ability to understand, produce, and use culturally significant images, objects, and visible actions” (Felten, 2008, p. 60). In order to be successful, they have to interpret multimodal texts they or others produce within the cultural contexts of both the authors and viewers (Felten, 2008). Thus, literacy is also connected to peoples’ interactions with texts, to what they do with texts through acts of written and spoken communication, within and across cultures. It operates as “one sign system among others” (Duncum, 2004, p. 256). Through their multimodal reading and writing, adolescents are learning how to understand and enter into culturally situated acts of communication.

Visual Literacy and Critical Literacy

In advocating for a “visual culture” notion of art and design, visual literacy scholars are less interested in the art—that is, the multimodal text—itsself (Duncum, 2004). Rather, they are pursuing a meta-language for multimodal composition and interpretation that defines the interaction between texts and people in situated contexts. They are working to reposition readers and writers as producers of meanings. Their goal is for readers to be critically aware of the design features of all texts, especially the connections between these features, larger belief systems, and the impact of texts on peoples’ identities, beliefs, and cultural practices.

Because multimodal composition offers us opportunities to develop language for the design of all texts in terms of the cultural impact of texts, visual literacy intersects with critical literacy. Critical literacy involves the interrogation of the design of texts according to whose interests and beliefs are represented and whose are not (Christensen, 2009). As Hocks (2003) explains, “visual designs can be expressions of and means for reproducing cultural and political structures,” and “such visual orderings are likely to be those that are repeated” (Hocks, 2003, p. 635). Communities often reproduce sign systems that benefit themselves. If a community holds social and political power, its members choose sign systems that sustain that power. Thus, the questions Hocks (2003, p. 635) and other critical literacy scholars are asking is, “What social order is reinforced by designs?” and “What designs give us a chance to reorder?” (Christensen, 2009; Freedman, 1997; Janks, 2010; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). As Hocks (2003) relays, when design based notions of texts are in play, the conversation shifts from a simple critique of a writer’s rhetoric to a critique of “existing forms” and the social rules which determine the designs and the social orders (p. 644). Through design-based notions of texts, teachers position students to critique the sources for and implications of textual designs on social orders. The goal is to reinvent sign systems and to work towards a redesign of social orders (Janks, 2010). Students are invited to connect language, context, and power. They are situated at the crux of the work of any writer: to write with intention and with critical awareness of the possible cultural impacts of any choice of design.

Multimodal Meta-language

Teachers need assistance in developing “new instructional strategies, vocabularies, and knowledge” to support these design-based comprehension processes (Serafini,

2011, p. 342; see also Anstey & Bull, 2006; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). Students and teachers need to build their descriptive vocabularies for grammars of design and the impact of texts on them and others within specific cultural contexts (Serafini, 2011). As many have demonstrated, the capacity to read and interpret visual images is not something children, adolescents, or adults do naturally (Prior, Willson, & Martinez, 2012). Drawing upon principles of design, researchers and teachers are searching to develop with adolescents a meta-language for the intersections between the features of texts and various reader interpretations (Cloonan, 2011). Similarly, pre-service teachers need a starting place and an opportunity to co-construct knowledge of design principles in action. They need the opportunity to compose, present, and reflect on their compositional processes and the impact of their texts on others. They need opportunities to consider the connections between multimodal compositions and written compositions. They need room to imagine how their experiences with multimodal composition can translate to the design of writing pedagogy for adolescents.

Pedagogy and Curriculum

The pedagogy I designed was for a course in which undergraduate Junior and Senior pre-service teachers were to learn grammar, the writing process, and how to teach them. The multimodal inquiry studied and addressed in this paper came from the first three weeks of this course. I designed the multimodal project to foster experiences and inquiries into teaching frameworks for literacy, language acquisition, and critical reading and writing.

Alongside readings about literacy, literacy as critical social practice, multimodality, media production, writing, the writing process, grammar, discourses, and adolescent

literacies and identity development, students analyzed the literacy journeys of four adolescents from Young Adult Literature novels and then chose any number of modes to represent these characters' stories. The novels were *Push* (Sapphire, 1997); *The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing* (Andersen, 2008); *The Skin I Am In* (Flake, 2007); *The Book Thief* (Zusak, 2007); and *Sold* (McCormick, 2008). The novels were supported by readings about untold histories, including those from James Loewen's *Lies My Teacher Told Me* (1996/2007) and from *The Skin That We Speak* (Delpit & Dowdy, 2008). After presenting their projects to their peers and to me, the presenters wrote a description of their intentions, and their peers and I described as many details as we could capture, noting the effects of the texts and the details on ourselves and what new insights we were gaining into the lives of these adolescents and the course concepts. Having completed the descriptive review feedback sessions (Himley, 1990), I assigned a second inquiry asking students to draw on course readings to reflect on their writing processes with the multimodal inquiry; their autobiographical experiences with literacy in and out of school; their prior and emerging assumptions about literacy; and their emerging understandings of course concepts such as texts, writing, the writing process, literacy, discourses, and literacy as a critical social practice. There were three main questions I invited students to explore with this multimodal inquiry.

- What is literacy as a critical social practice?
- What do the elements of writing and grammar have to do with literacy as a critical social practice?
- What do the elements of media production have to do with literacy as a critical social practice?

In order to explore these questions, I guided students to come up with a list of questions and choose a primary question the summer

readings were raising for them, find passages that were their favorites or that stood out to them, raise more questions from those passages and formulate a primary research question, use their knowledge of literary devices, diction, registers, history, genre, etc., to describe how each writer designed each passage they had chosen, pull out common themes and a broader story of some kind they wanted to tell about literacy and society, and decide on their own multimodal design for how they would represent their findings.

In these ways, I engaged students as ethnodramatists. Ethnodramatists collect the stories of multiple stakeholders in order to analyze and interpret both the different ways that stakeholders are thinking about significant social issues and the ways that stakeholder language, cultural practices, and beliefs influence the social issue at hand (Goldstein, 2003; Mienczakowski, 1995). The work of ethnodramatists is to grapple with how to situate individual stories within a collective story in the service of illuminating the causes and solutions to social issues.

Methodology

Research Question

The focus of this practitioner inquiry study was the relationship between the multimodal inquiry and student conceptions of writing and writing pedagogy. The research questions for this study were:

- In response to this multimodal inquiry, how were students in this class conceptualizing writing?
- In response to this multimodal inquiry, how were students in this class conceptualizing the teaching of writing?

Students

I had two sections of this class, one with twenty students and one with eleven students. The students came from across

the state of New York, from predominantly rural communities but also from Long Island and New York City. With the exception of one student of mixed race, the students were White and predominantly female; there were three males out of thirty-one students. Most of the students were juniors and one was a senior. All of the students had completed the bulk of their required classes for their English major and were just entering their professional block of courses in education. They would go on to do their student teaching the following Fall or Spring.

Methods of data collection

I approached this study systematically and intentionally (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) by documenting each component of this project. Data sources for this study included my field notes while teaching, my teaching journal following teaching, and my lesson plans for each class. Further data came from students' written inquiries and multimodal presentations, their initial statements on their writing intentions with their multimodal inquiry, and written descriptions and feedback between students. The field notes I completed as students processed one another's projects helped me focus on the sequence of conversations, student and teacher talk, and student learning. I then reflected in detail in my teaching journal on what I was learning about the students and their prior and emerging understandings of writing, literacy, and language. I used these teaching journals to continue to plan for the next classes.

Methods of data analysis

In order to identify the design-based understandings of reading and writing that students were developing in response to this inquiry, I first drew upon visual literacy design-based principles to analyze their multimodal projects. I then used these and other literary principles to code their verbalized and written design-based

understandings. In order to analyze their multimodal projects, I drew upon Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) version of Halliday's (1985) ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) explain the ideational function of texts as the array of compositional choices available to designers for representing objects and their relationships to other objects. They define the interpersonal function of texts as the projected relationship between the producer of an image and the audience of an image via the compositional choices. The textual meta-function is the coherence of compositional choices with each other and with the contexts they represent.

Serafini's (2011) adaptation of Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) grammars of visual design were particularly helpful in illuminating the ideational, interpersonal, and textual meta-function of their texts. These include "composition," "perspective," and "visual symbols" (Serafini, 2011, p. 346). Composition aligns with the ideational and involves the organization, arrangement, and interaction of objects in an image (Serafini, 2011). To track composition, I also looked at the "size of objects," the "color and contrast," and the "foregrounding and focus" (Serafini, 2011, p. 346). Additional elements included the arrangement of people, objects, and colors within each frame. Also factored into the composition were the movement of the camera within a frame and the rhythm of the storytelling, the music, the camera movement, and the shifts from frame to frame (Roswell & Descote, 2011).

Perspective aligns with the interpersonal function (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). Serafini (2011) describes perspective as "how close or far away the viewer is positioned relative to the objects and participants in an image" (p. 346). I examined the camera angle in regard to my viewing position. I inferred

the interpersonal and social distance from a viewer as established by the gaze of the image participants. I explored the size of the participants and the kind of "demand" or "offer" they extended to me (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). Finally, the textual meta-function aligns with the "visual symbols" (Serafini, 2011, p. 346). In order to identify the "visual symbols," I deconstructed textual features such as the narrative structure and the sequencing of images. I found other symbols by analyzing the interconnections among linguistic, visual, and auditory modes. I inferred recurring patterns in these sign systems and their connections to particular themes (Serafini, 2011).

In my analysis of student multimodal writing, I also drew upon O'Neil's (2011) descriptions of images that "reinforce" written expression with more detail and description. Other concepts from O'Neil (2011) that were helpful were "reciprocity," in which visuals are integral and "take on more weight in the telling of the story through enhancement or counterpoint," and "establishing," in which pictures carry a parallel or divergent, contradictory story (p. 216).

In my examinations of student dialogue following the presentations and written reflections, I also paid particular attention to student interpretations of the power of multimodal compositional writing for reinforcing, reciprocating, and establishing the meanings of the adolescents' stories (O'Neil, 2011). By noting how students constructed understandings of these particular design-based relationships among modes, I was also able to interpret what these combinations of modes illuminated for them about one another's textual designs. Finally, in order to analyze the impact of these design-based notions of reading and writing on students' emerging understandings of

critical writing pedagogical design, I coded how students articulated the teaching of writing in their written inquiries.

Case Study: Example and Analysis of One Group's Multimodal Text

Each group drew upon a range of formats and genres, from improvised news broadcasts to documentary-style interplays of music, quotes, words, and images. I focus on one group's presentation in this paper, both because their faces are not present, and also because they were favored by their peers for their particularly moving presentation. Furthermore, the presenting members, Megan Faughnan, Victoria Heney, Antoinette Bessemer, and Allison Borcuch were delighted to share their work publicly. All other student names are pseudonyms. It would help to view their presentation before reading my analysis of the design-based features of their text.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m-wlMMKWYIf0&feature=youtu.be>

The young women composed a text with a clearly demarcated beginning, middle, and end. They began and ended their iMovie with a framing of the connection between words, ideas, and power and the story of John Brown, taken from *Lies My Teacher Told Me* (Loewen, 1996/2007). They began and ended with the story of his revolutions against slavery, which had been silenced in history texts. They began with this historical text followed by a passage from the language text *The Skin We Speak* (Delpit & Dowdy, 2008). At the end, they came full circle with this language text preceding the historical text. In between, they juxtaposed passages from each of the young adult novels. For each text, they read one passage, which explained the nature of the youth's slavery and then another passage, most often in

the voice of the teen, describing his or her inner freedom through learning to read and write. Their compositional, perspectival, and symbolic choices helped provide a steady contrast between the physical imprisonment of the youth and his or her spiritual and intellectual pursuits through writing.

Lies My Teacher Told Me, James Loewen

Each of the images and words they chose to frame the passages from the texts either reinforced the meanings of the passages, took on more symbolic weight than the speaker's words, or created divergent, even contradictory meanings (O'Neil, 2011). Combined with the panning movements of the camera and the at times oblique camera angles, a consistent sense of upward movement and a sense of rising above one's circumstances prevailed.

For example, they began their video with the compositional choices of somber music and a steady drumbeat as the camera slowly panned from top to bottom across a page from a book. They then framed their whole text and the first book, *Lies My Teacher Told Me* (Loewen, 1996/2007) with the word "POWER," written in white capital letters against a black background. The camera then slowly panned across a page depicting a map of the American South, taken from Loewen's text. While the camera panned from the bottom to the top of this page, Megan read a passage from his book in a deep, rich voice. The movement of the camera up and across miles on maps emphasized their spoken passage's hopeful words that ideas have power and that John Brown's ideas and actions have lived on beyond his life despite being silenced by historical writers for years. John Brown was a Northern abolitionist who attempted to incite a violent slave revolt in Kansas. The passage ended with the assertion that "American text books give us no way to understand the role of ideas in our past."

With these choices, the students positioned viewers to directly and seriously engage with the words in the texts, the word “POWER” bright white against a black backdrop, and the missing ideas of John Brown.

With *The Skin That We Speak* (2008), Megan read a passage about a Caribbean British actress exploring her languages through theater. As Megan read the words “gave me a new lease on life,” the word “life” appeared in white against a black background.

The written word “life” emphasized the spoken theme. Then the chain appeared again, reinforcing the actress’s choice of words. Megan read: “The chains fell from around my tongue, and my brain began to feel as if it were oiled and moving along without hiccups.” As Megan spoke the words “moving along without hiccups,” the camera panned from top to bottom, and the chain appeared to move up the screen. The symbolism of a light in the dark, the close-up of a breaking chain, and the movement of the chain up towards the top of the screen captured the new ease with which the actress spoke. The freedom to explore her own languages helped her break free from her internal prison.

With *The Book Thief* (2007), the women contrasted images with the spoken words. They included a picture of lots of people out on a sunny day. Written across the picture in dripping, white-painted, capital letters were the words of the narrator, Death: “I AM HAUNTED BY HUMANS.” Toni continued to read:

Without them, there wouldn’t be any of this. Without words, the Furor was nothing. There would be no limping prisoners, no need for consolation, no wordly tricks to make us feel better. What good were the words?

Next appeared a picture on a yellowed,

ancient-looking page of a little girl with a braid and a polka dotted dress, dancing with a skeleton dressed in a black hood. Toni continued reading: “I have hated them [the words], and I have loved them. And I hope I have made them right.”

The first contrast was between the dripping white words—“I am haunted by humans”—and the sunny image of people of all races outdoors in a park. They were at varying distances from the camera, and it was hard to determine their expressions. The camera panned back, positioning the viewer to gather more and more detail, heightening the intrigue into the specific details and meaning in that contrast. The third contrast was between the image of a little girl dancing with death and the words spoken by Leisel, the main character, about wanting to get the words “right.” The image reinforced both the life-giving power and the deadly power in words as described earlier in the passage they read about Hitler (O’Neil, 2011).

With *Sold* (2008), the picture shifted again to a window, barred from the inside, the camera angle slanting upwards from inside a room, looking up and out to a backyard made of green grass. Toni read a passage in which the character Lakshmi was writing in her journal, and a fellow slave warned her to hide her notebook or the slave-holding mother would force her to return to a locked room. Instantly, the picture shifted to the outside, and again, the camera was slanted at an angle, as it fixed this time on a white house and slowly scrolled upward towards the roof. As the camera panned, a small patch of blue sky appeared. Toni read, “I love the way these words feel on my mouth, even if they are not true.” The upward angle tilt in both frames provided a feeling of reaching beyond one’s circumstances.

The picture shifted again, this time to a set

of bright yellow and sharpened pencils. Toni continued to read about how a young boy hands Lakshmi a pencil that “smells of lead and rubber and of possibility.” As she read, “I have been beaten here, locked away,” a picture of women dressed in bright colored Indian garb appeared, the picture blurred, such that their faces could not be identified. The camera panned back to a wider image of these women. Toni read, “violated a hundred times. I have been starved and cheated, tricked and disgraced.” The words “starved” and “cheated” flashed briefly in white against a black background, and then a closer view of the women returned. Toni’s voice returned: “How odd is it, that I am undone by the simple kindness of a small boy with a yellow pencil.” As Toni read the word “undone,” it flashed in white across a black background.

As these words flashed across a black screen, they reinforced the meanings of the visual images and featured the specific concepts the young women wanted to emphasize in Lakshmi’s words (O’Neil, 2011). The effect was an increase in pace and intensity, a sense of rising action. Further adding to the intensified pace was the quick movement back and forth between the contrasting realities of the physical abuses captured in Lakshmi’s words and the simple acts of kindness such as the gift of a pencil that preserved her capacity both to write and to feel. The blurring of the women’s faces created a social distance between viewers and the women and emphasized the reality of their social exclusion, shame, and embarrassment.

Push, Sapphire

As the passage finished, the picture shifted to that of a run-down, tall, brick, factory-looking building. Megan began to read in a softer voice, her intonation rising slightly. “I can see. I can read. No one can see me now,

but I might be a rapper, a poet. I got water colors.” These were the words of Precious from *Push*, by Sapphire. Precious is a young Black woman working through the physical and sexual abuse she suffered at her parents’ hands and the neglect she experienced in school. As Megan said the words “water colors,” a parallel but contrasting picture of a city and a row of buildings appeared in pink, blue, purple, orange, and yellow pastels. The camera panned to a wider image of this picture before shifting to a full body shot of Precious walking down city stairs, hands in her pockets, gazing back behind her towards the stares of two young men. While her gaze functioned as an “offer” and was towards viewers inside the frame and not towards audiences outside the picture, the camera angle looked up slightly at Precious, positioning her in power. As the camera zoomed in closer, the young men no longer occupied space in her frame.

Megan read, “‘Play the hand you got,’ house mother say, ‘Hold fast to your dreams,’ Langston say.” A large painted picture of Langston Hughes appeared. He was seated, wearing a suit, his chin in his hand, and his elbow on his leg. The camera panned in closer, climbing up to his face, never fully revealed. “‘Get up off of your knees,’ Farrakan say.” A picture appeared of Farrakan pointing vehemently into the air, dressed in a pinstriped suit, standing in front of a microphone. “‘Change,’ Alice Walker say.” The picture shifted to an image of Alice Walker, a smile on her face, hands clapping together. “Rain fall down, wheels all around, walk on. Go into the poem, the heart of it.” As Megan read “the heart of it,” the picture became a panoramic view again of a city, and the camera zoomed in at a solid pace. Megan finished reading; “Beating like a clock, a virus. Tick, tock.”

The contrast between Precious’s choice of

words about going into the heart of the poem and the panning camera heading straight into the heart of a city offered a new establishing frame for Precious's story (O'Neil, 2011). In her first-person poem, Precious situated herself securely within a sense of self-worth and agency, above the projected identities of others. The recurring upward movement of the panning camera in previous frames and stories, coupled with Precious's sense of personal mobility despite constant social and institutional obstacles, highlighted the overarching theme of the entire multimodal text.

With the story of Precious centered securely in the middle of the text, the young women created visual symbols through which they reframed the character as rising above abuse and stereotype and looking with panoramic compassion on cities and the people living there. The switching back and forth between city images in the form of a city building, a water colored set of buildings, an image of Precious on city stairs, and a panoramic view of a city continued to intensify the movement and the need for action on behalf of people like her. Indeed, Megan slowed down her voice to allow her words to linger with each image.

Together, the intentional slowing down to linger upon the visual symbols marked a climax in the story the women were telling. The symbols they chose for Precious reverberated across the stories of the youths from the other novels we studied, revealing the students' representation of the potential power in the pathways the other youth were also pursuing through writing. The recurring motifs established through the panning of the camera from the bottom to the top of images and vice versa, from inside to outside, and from below to above gained articulation with their multimodal choices for Precious. The previously oblique angles became direct

"demands" for engagement from viewers in the form of large close-ups of the inspirational authors in Precious's life. With the telling of Precious's story, there was a movement away from the tensions of enslavement and spiritual freedom towards self-awareness and action on behalf of self and others.

The motif of spiritually rising above one's circumstances continued with *The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing* (2008) as Allison read a passage where Octavian was tortured for having entered a room full of books. The books documented every scientific experiment his captors had conducted on him over his life. His torture was to stand for twenty minutes, arms outstretched, holding the heavy volumes, in which were recorded every aspect of his bodily and mental functions. Allison finished with "I marked that as I dropped my empty arms, they rose again as of their own accord. They drifted upwards."

Returning to *The Skin We Speak* (2008), the presenters again leaned on contrasts, this time in the form of viewer positioning vis-a-vis people in images in order to paint a picture of the imprisonment of some Black people in a White world. In the first image of a Black woman, her gaze was turned away, her head lifted, an intense expression of deep contemplation, pride, and determination on her face. The viewer was positioned close because the image was large, but the viewer was not given intimate access to her. With the second image of a Black woman, while the camera was close to her face, again the viewer had access to one only of her eyes and to her tears. In the same way that the woman was shut out by White people and their language, so too was the viewer exposed to the Black woman's grief without fully seeing her. Similar juxtapositions occurred between images of a group of smiling Black people enjoying time together outdoors and an image of black silhouettes at a cocktail party

against a white backdrop. They presented a contrast between a relaxed and casual group of Black people and a formal setting of people at a cocktail party, also silhouetted in black, their features hidden, situated within a dominating white background. The contrast of formal and informal and black against a white background further captured the foreign nature of the formal settings, a concept emphasized by the word “foreign” against a black backdrop.

As Megan finished the presentation where they began, with John Brown’s story, the camera began to scroll down a picture of the white text reading, in capital letters, “THE POWER OF ONE.” The last word, “ONE,” was in red. Megan read from Loewen, who writes,

Our textbooks handicap Brown by not letting him speak for himself. Even his jailor let Brown put pen to paper. Twelve of the eighteen textbooks I studied do not even provide a phrase he spoke or wrote. Brown’s words, which moved a nation, therefore cannot move most students today.

An ominous loud drum sounded as the word “POWER,” written in white against a black background, once again appeared and the music faded, bringing the film to a close.

Student Design-Based Understandings of Reading and Writing

In describing and responding to this multimodal project, the other students in the class engaged in a process of describing the combinations of modes, collecting the symbols they had noticed in the text, and interconnecting the symbols with the narrative structure and overarching meaning. As they shared what they had written, they co-constructed design-based understandings of this multimodal text.

The design elements that stood out to them began with the music and the tone of voices. Matt noted, “music is dramatic and somber” and “video is powerful, voice-overs serious.” Elaine connected “the tone of their voices with the powerful images and music” as “effective in evoking strong emotions.” Krystal observed “the music crescendoing and decrescendoing” and “the seriousness of their voices.” Here, the students most immediately attended to the modes that drew them into an emotional connection with the text. Stacy best summarized this reaction by explaining that the text, with its combined modes, “lights your senses on fire, puts you in a zone” (Fieldnotes, 9/21/11). The compositional choices of somber music and a somber tone reinforced for the student audience the gravity of the circumstances of the adolescents (O’Neil, 2011).

Other design elements they attended to were the combinations of pictures, words, and passages. Krystal noted in her written feedback what was also reflected in other students’ observations: that the “images correspond[ed] to the words (text) being spoken in the background.” Kristen wrote, “Every word seemed weighted by meaning, more than the meaning I found while reading the same words.” Ashley wrote “certain words have significant meaning, flash up-white against black background is very contrasting.” In their observations of the impact of pictures on words, they were beginning to articulate the ways the women had used images as parallel or reinforcing (O’Neil, 2011) entities and written words as contrasting or divergent entities.

Students also began to collect and interpret the symbols that stood out to them. Ann wrote, “I like how books were used, these images were powerful,” and “[I] like the image of girl with death,” and “the bars on window show how trapped you are.” In our conversation post-writing, Ashley

shared with us that “the faces with the words showed that these people exist—it was a very strong message” (Fieldnotes, 9/21/11). Stacy recorded as many symbols as she could locate, from the breaking chains, to the books between the barriers of the radiator, to the image of the girl dancing with death, to the person “locked behind a window, emerging after words are in her mouth.” Kristen also began to process the function of words, writing, “words are power, they are an outlet for emotions. Give them to students and they are freed, they have power.” By collecting and interconnecting the pictures and the words with symbolic meaning, students were able to identify themes such as the entrapment of the youth and the power of words to liberate.

Tim explicitly named how the combinations of modes had aided his understandings of themes in the passages, writing that the “Flashing of words and the rhythm drew my attention to a central theme or ideas of a given passage” (Fieldnotes 9/21/11). Similarly, Esther observed how the film’s creators put an image of a city together with the original quote about moving into the heart of a poem. She “liked the finding the heart of a poem quote, like the heart of a city when you put it with the images of the buildings. It seemed to emphasize people in the city, the need to move the hearts of big cities” (Fieldnotes, 9/21/11). She was locating the establishing (O’Neil, 2011) nature of contrasting a word with an image. The mismatch helped her situate the significance of Precious’s poem within a new context and a different set of meanings. Kristen echoed Esther’s observation, as she continued to reflect on the fluid meanings of words. She had come to realize that “those pictures were not taken for this purpose. They were taken out of context and now they mean something different. The words have new meaning” (Fieldnotes, 9/21/11). For her, the images imparted different kinds of meanings in the context of Precious’s words than in their original context. She applied the same

analysis to Precious’s words. The meaning of Precious’s words also changed when juxtaposed with an image of a city. The students further used their description and analysis of the combination of modes in order to articulate the significance of the narrative structure. George had challenged himself to interconnect the components of this narrative structure with the overarching message. He began by writing each word or image that had flashed across the screen. Indented under that main word or picture, he either listed corresponding words or a description of the images that followed. For instance, under “White language world,” he wrote “acceptable,” “translate,” and under that, “loss of passion.” Following the presentation, when sharing, he articulated the main story: “Everything came full circle—John Brown to John Brown and power to power and in the middle of that circle were death images, graves, dancing with death” (Fieldnotes, 9/21/11). George was also able to use the words, images, or passages to begin to piece together the causes and effects of the language circumstances of the adolescents. Like Matt, who summarized the story he could discern with two written phrases: “story-literacy and power, words and power,” the combination of words and images enabled George and other students to follow the main themes and the narrative arc.

Others expanded on the overarching message in our group conversation. Casey began to connect learning and knowledge to power, writing, “Knowledge is power.” Both Angel and Ashley connected the just or unjust use of literacy, knowledge, and power, with Angel saying, “They are using literacy to become more powerful,” and Ashley writing, “Literacy can give or take away power.” Suzy told us that she “got that power isn’t always good. Hitler used words in a bad way” (Fieldnotes, 9/21/11). Elise shared that “ideas have power and words have the ability to give power and to take it away” (Fieldnotes,

9/21/11). She went on to say that “literacy feeds ideas” (Fieldnotes, 9/21/11). The clearly organized textual structure and sequencing of modes fostered student connections between how people used literacy, the knowledge they were acquiring, and the kind of power they were exercising.

In the process of collectively interpreting the larger significance of the combinations of modes, students articulated a few design-based understandings of reading and writing. In alignment with visual literacy conceptions of the cultural knowledges that shape different readers’ interpretations of texts, Kristen wrote, “There are signs everywhere that aid in our understanding of things. These projects really open my eyes to the many interpretations of the same texts/same assignment.” Kristen, like other students, was coming to understand the relationships between the sign systems created by authors and the variety of interpretations available to different writers and viewers because of their own cultural knowledges. Furthermore, Angel began to realize that the multiple modes enabled them to grapple with the meanings of the words of the characters in the service of advocating for the characters in the texts. She wrote “I think it gives the characters a voice when we use tools. It gives a chance to interpret and explore the meaning they were trying to convey.” She realized that the opportunity to use modes to tell the stories of these adolescents made their plights more visible.

Without any knowledge of multimodal and visual literacy composition theory, through an ethnodramatic framing and the opportunity to re-present the stories of adolescents, my students began to research the relationship between a set of primary texts and the range of interpretations available for those texts. They began to consider the range of signs available to them as writers and interpreters of literature and the ways these sign systems

influenced their understandings of the potential meanings of a set of texts. They were, in essence, positioned to study the meaning-making processes of both writers and readers like themselves.

The students were willing and excited to grapple with the multimodal language choices of the presenters because they wanted to understand how the text was moving them. They began to grapple with language that would characterize the relationships between writers and readers and that would capture the relationships between the design of texts, the representations of people and contexts, and the interpretations of viewers. Such knowledge construction stands in contrast to Cloonan’s (2011) study of teachers’ and students’ application of specific design-based concepts for interpreting multimodal texts. There, teachers and students drew upon a series of critical media questions to illuminate the contributions of various modes (auditory, visual, tactile, etc.) to the representational, social, organizational, contextual and ideological meanings of texts. Such specific design-based frameworks helped them situate texts within deeper understandings of production, images, and viewers (Rose, 2001).

Such specific frameworks clearly were useful and accessible for teachers and students. However, because I had no knowledge of these frameworks at the time I was teaching this class, the pre-service students and I had to work towards our own critical meta-language. The result was a genuine experience of inquiry, of learning together, and of drawing upon each person’s expertise in the service of designing frameworks for teaching writing. Furthermore, as the presenters demonstrated in the written inquiries that followed their presentation, a written critical analysis of their textual design and its impact was integral to furthering their design-based understandings of composition. Moreover, the ethnodramatic framing for the design of this project proved integral to positioning students as critical

researchers of their analysis and writing processes.

Group Presenters' Interpretations of Writing

In their written reflections, each student positioned herself as an intentional writer and designer. They provided a similar and detailed analysis of how they had arrived at their thesis, how they had used their thesis to choose and interpret passages, and how they had integrated music, pictures, and words to feature their specific thesis. By piecing together their initial intentions with the specific feedback they had received from their classmates and me, they came to articulate their own meta-language for the design-based principles that guided their writing processes and pursuits as writers. Their reflections demonstrate their awareness of the relationships between their textual designs and their audience's capacity to connect with the adolescents. They also revealed the role the multiple modes had played in helping them fine tune and connect their analyses to their peer audience. Integral to their writing was their desire to position their audience to recognize the lens through which they themselves were interpreting the literacy stories of the adolescents.

The presenters named their thesis as "words are power" (Inquiry 2). Allison emphasized that in order to develop this understanding of words, they had searched for the "most dramatic images, the most moving music, and the best way to sequence the images to draw out an emotional reaction" (Inquiry 2). She articulated their writing agenda as wanting audiences "to feel and empathize with each of the characters" (Inquiry 2). Toni also wrote in her pre-presentation writing about what she hoped to accomplish. "I want to bring my audience into the language/grammar/writing so they might be able to feel as though they are there, inside the novel, on the pages, inside the words" (Inquiry 2). In line

with ethnodramatic principles for honoring study participant stories (Hobson, 2012), as collaborative writers, the women thought first and foremost about how to use their writing choices to position their audience to feel the stories of the adolescents.

Megan also demonstrated her desire to consider audience needs as she explained how they translated their working knowledge of plot structure to their textual design. She demonstrated an awareness of narrative or argumentative structures and the kinds of emphasis certain stories or arguments could receive based on their placement in relation to the other texts and examples.

We picked out passages that fit our thesis, "Words have power," and then arranged the texts around the two books that we wanted to begin and end the movie with. Once again, we were using trial and error to shape our literacy. Based on our knowledge of plot structure, we put the books we felt strongest about in the middle, as a way to capture our audience and truly send our point home. We used our understanding of "power," positive or negative, to shape which passages we felt best executed our thesis. (Inquiry 2)

Her explanation of intentionally beginning and ending with the same two books and placing their strongest book choices in the middle confirms my analysis of their overarching textual structure. It also begins to confirm the shift in pace, intensity, and emphasis and the rising action and climax created with *Sold* (2008) and *Push* (1997). Although the concept of "transparency," or choosing textual designs with which audiences can identify (Hocks, 2003) was not available to Megan, she demonstrated her knowledge of basic plot structures that her peer audience would recognize.

Megan spoke to their peer audience as a similar motivating factor behind their

attention to and pride in every detail they chose and interconnected in a logical order. She explained that their desire to provide a clear and an integrated message at every point of their presentation had led the women to vigorously research the texts.

A challenge for us with our main point of the project was making sure the examples from the text really showed our thesis deeply. We didn't want to use a quote that may have been powerful in the context of the story, we wanted passages that could stand on their own and still show that power. Some passage finding took longer than others, but in the end, that time was well spent. This project was important to us as it was our debut to the class. Working hard to ensure that we impressed our classmates was a huge motivator in our presentation development. (Inquiry 2)

For many students, rigorous research derives from a strong work ethic, a genuine intellectual curiosity, an extremely motivating writing purpose, and/or an authentic audience. When these factors are not present students often struggle to research texts to this extent. In this case the students had an engaging intellectual challenge, a creative and collaborative venue for realizing it, literature they cared about, and an audience they wanted to impress. The result was internal motivation to do their best work and a strong sense of intentionality. They designed for their audience to connect powerfully with each chosen passage and framing of that passage.

The framework they had constructed in order to interpret the text further guided their design choices and their explorations of themes in the texts. Having decided upon a thesis, Toni explained that she read "in terms of the thesis that we had created" (Inquiry 2). She further explained, "As I analyzed the text I found myself making connections in a way that I hoped would be obvious to the audience

as they watched our presentation" (Inquiry 2). Not only was Toni using their thesis statement to guide her selection of textual details, but she was also reflecting on the connections she was making with an eye towards what would help her audience understand the connections she was making. Such intentional meta-awareness of her research processes holds many learning possibilities. Her ability to consider her interpretational processes in light of their impact on audiences is an integral aspect of critical literacy. The more that researchers understand the implications of their analyses for study participants (or literary characters) and for audiences, the more awareness they have of the kinds of messages they are composing in response to their analytical choices. Furthermore, their thesis statement itself, "words are power" was open enough for the women to continue to discover what it meant. Toni articulated the freedom that lens plus the modes provided.

The main thing I focused on was the symbolism aspect of the project. I found myself spouting ideas about how we could make a connection to the novel and our thesis by using 'X' for a symbol (Inquiry 2).

The range of symbols available to the students in the form of multiple modes provided them numerous opportunities to discover new dimensions of their thesis statement. Each sign system they chose illuminated another set of understandings about words and power in these texts.

The range of available modes also contributed to the presenters' capacity to envision and realize their agenda. Victoria confirmed that, "the premise to our success lay upon our quotes because they were followed by the images, the music and the voices reading them" (Inquiry 2). However, she also directly addressed the full range of multimodal resources they had available to them that

enabled them to showcase particular aspects of those passages and draw audience attention to the specific aspects of the passages they wanted to highlight. As Allison also reflected in her second inquiry, “We intentionally contrasted a single word next to a powerful image to emphasize our message and make sure that our audience was aware of our main points” (Inquiry 2). The range of modes available within an iMovie platform provided the women opportunities to invent new ways of featuring their message. As Victoria further illuminated,

The Internet provided us with immense opportunities to use what we already had understood from our texts and build upon them with media, creating a life-like phenomenon of our summer readings. (Inquiry 2)

The multiple media forms permitted them to invent new ways of interpreting the passages, to draw on sign systems they knew, to layer in more dimensions to their prior understandings, and to situate the texts within many immediate contexts. In these ways, the multiple media also contributed to their intentionality as writers. Such awareness of multiple possibilities for interpreting and re-presenting the stories of the adolescents in these texts is another precursor to critical literacy. As students become more aware of the many different interpretations available through combinations of modes, they establish a broader range of possibilities for framing their analyses and for impacting audiences. In ethnodramatic terms, they can use peer feedback to critically assess possible audience reactions (Mienzakowski, 1995).

The multiple modes also encouraged the students to think in terms of the kinds of interactions they could construct between audiences and the modes they chose. In particular, Toni spent time in her second inquiry fleshing out the interactive nature

of modes, noting that despite the writer’s intentions, audiences interact differently with each mode based on their cultural background. In the descriptive review component of another group’s presentation, Toni had initiated her discovery that multiple modes encouraged different kinds of interaction with texts. As she described in her inquiry, “Music choice is the most interactive, especially if you choose something that is culturally relevant because each individual will interact with that song differently based on [his/her] previous association with it” (Inquiry 2). Her experience of the range of interpretations of her peers to the primary and multimodal texts may have influenced her understanding that her classmates would have different reactions to similar images. Toni further explicated in her inquiry how

Each audience member will interpret the image differently calling upon their funds of knowledge and what that image reminds them of. However, if you frame your pictures correctly, with the right context, you can guide your audience members so that the picture means something different to everyone but the meanings are still within the main idea of your presentation. The text that flashes across the screen can be a framing device before the pictures appear so that the audience knows what you intended to do with the picture following the text. (Inquiry 2)

Somewhere in the experience of collaborative writing and reflection on one another’s projects, she had gained critical awareness that while they could not control the range of reactions their peers would have, they could guide them to read with certain frames in mind. She understood that situating the texts in the context of specific orders of modes would influence the kinds of understandings their classmates would acquire. Toni was again positioning herself as an intentional

writer with pedagogical intent. Such critical awareness that she could use different modes to frame the interpretational processes of viewers helped her design her own meta-language for the work of writers, a meta-language very similar to visual literacy principles for “transparency” or alignment of textual designs with reader aesthetic knowledge (Hocks, 2003). Such designing could also translate nicely to the work of teachers.

Within a context of using multiple modes to honor other peoples’ stories, when given the opportunity to reflect on their writing processes and intentions, the students together demonstrated a working knowledge of the production, textual design, and reception of texts (Rose, 2001). Within the context of this ethnodramatic and multimodal project, they not only understood modes as reciprocating, reinforcing or establishing the meanings of other modes (O’Neil, 2011), but also as framing and guiding reader interpretations. They could articulate their compositional or narrative structures, the frameworks they were constructing through their thesis statement and writing choices, and their need for rigorous research in order to crystalize their thesis statement and to capture ideas that could stand on their own. Within an ethnodramatic and multimodal context, they understood the broad range of available representational choices for writers. They demonstrated knowledge of the wide range of interpretations available to audiences because of their different cultural backgrounds. They were critically aware that the features of multimodal texts were meant to inspire interaction, interaction guided by the modes they chose and their framing choices. These sophisticated articulations of their own critical research and writing processes derived from their in depth efforts to help their peers connect powerfully with the individual and collective significance of the adolescents’ stories.

Group Presenters’ Interpretations of Writing

As a result of this project, the presenters articulated the teaching of writing as drawing upon critical frameworks. They were readily aware of the affordances of multimodal writing for aligning with adolescent literacies and for fostering critical literacy. A theme in each of their reflections regarding multimodal writing and adolescent literacies was “creative analysis.” They wrote about the possibilities for interrogating textual designs through multimodal creative analysis. In Allison’s words, “media production entails the creator to a new level of creative freedom that the text lacks” (Inquiry 2). In Toni’s words,

A project like this would offer adolescents the opportunity to be creative in their analysis of the texts that they are reading. It would also be helpful because it would force them to think critically and connect more than one novel to each other based on a common theme. (Inquiry 2)

In Allison’s words again: “It allows students to go above and beyond English in the traditional sense, and gives them the freedom to analyze, formulate their own individual ideas, and create their own interpretation” (Inquiry 2). The women recognized that they had engaged in a creative analysis of literature that facilitated innovation, agency, choice, and ownership of their perspectives. Victoria added that when “Allowing students to create and design a movie or multimodal presentation, they are given the opportunity to deliver a framework that comprises their own lives” (Inquiry 2). She further articulated

I now know that literacy can be enhanced through media and multimodal presentations because students can be exposed to different

forms of language. In effect, students will gain new insights, ways to express, interpret and comprehend the old, mainstream classical novels. (Inquiry 2)

For these women, multimodal writing provided for creative analyses of texts and new forms of language and expression, which opened new opportunities for situating any text within the contexts of other texts and of adolescents' lives. The multiple modes also provided access to interpreting patterns in themes across texts.

In response to the ethnodramatic framing and the opportunity to deconstruct the literacy stories of adolescents, to reconstruct these stories with multiple modes, and to reflect on their design choices, the students were formulating conceptions of the teaching of writing as interconnected with creative analyses of texts. As Victoria framed the reading and writing connection, "By being critical and analytical one can better understand his or her own writing. Proficiently re-reading can enhance writing" (Inquiry 2). Indeed, throughout the multimodal project, students had needed to re-read each text in light of another text and each representational choice in light of their emerging intentions. Their emerging intentions were the result of their constant attention to the range of interpretations available to them and to their audiences with any combination of modes they explored. Each multimodal option illuminated another aspect of the power in each adolescent's choice of words.

Implications for Writing Pedagogies

This ethnodramatic multimodal inquiry provided opportunities for creative critical analysis and re-presentation of the individual and collective stories of several Young Adult Literary adolescents. In the context of this

ethnodramatic pedagogical design, the multiple modes provided a fuller range of resources for telling the adolescents' stories and for interrogating the impact of student re-presentational choices on an audience. In order to better understand how they were impacting their audience, students reached for a meta-language to articulate how they had contextualized each youth's story within specific multimodal compositional choices. In the process, students discovered how their different cultural backgrounds and knowledge of signs and symbols shaped their perspectives.

In order to honor the stories of the adolescents, the four presenters chose to interrogate the primary texts by situating the words of the writers within the context of a variety of combinations of modes. As they created new contexts, they found themselves critically examining their storytelling options in light of the possible affects of their choices on different audiences. Their teacher and peer audience also provided them opportunities to consider the stories of the youth from multiple perspectives. The broad range of available modes and perspectives helped them read these texts from more angles and situate them within the context of their lives, the lives of the youth, and the lives of their peers and teacher.

The act of re-presenting these stories for a real audience using multiple modes catalyzed my students' compassion for these youth, spurred them to advocacy, and ignited critical analysis of their own research choices. The multiple opportunities to reflect on their research and writing processes resulted in students co-authoring a design-based meta-language for textual interpretation and composition (Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006). In the process, they also gained a meta-awareness of the immediate cultural significance of their research and re-presentational processes and

choices within this class. Such awareness could be further developed to encourage critical reflection on the impact of their own biases on their analyses and re-presentational choices for a range of audiences.

The inquiry-based approach to these projects positioned students to work together to create their own resources and to learn from one another's literacies and cultural knowledge. Such an experience of critical collaborative inquiry was a disruption to teacher-centered instruction most had previously encountered. In the process of creating and reflecting upon their own analytical and representational decisions, the pre-service teachers worked together with one another and with me to design their own frameworks for literacy, language, and writing. They encountered an opportunity to co-construct knowledge about adolescents, about textual design, about critical reading and writing, and about literacy instruction that builds bridges between adolescents and teachers and between multimodal composition and print based writing. The necessity of locating their own resources in the texts and in one another's expertise offered an initial experience of teaching as a collaborative endeavor. The consistent invitation to reflect in depth on their individual and collaborative research offered an experience of reflective practice and a steady articulation of their emerging theories of practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001).

Because of their prior formulaic and teacher and text-centered experiences with analysis and writing, at times this process of invention made students uncomfortable. However, the collaborative and creative component anchored them in establishing their own analytical, re-presentational, and pedagogical resources for connecting powerfully with the primary texts and with one another. The layered learning opportunities through such inquiry-based instruction could continue to be adapted to honor future teachers and

adolescents as creative intellectuals and critically conscious consumers and producers of texts and pedagogies. It would be useful to continue to consider what role student reading of literature on design-based principles might play in such a pedagogical design.

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