Braving Multimodality in the College Composition Classroom:

An Experiment to Get the Process Started

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“I offer a focused definition of new media as texts that juxtapose semiotic modes in new and aesthetically pleasing ways and, in doing so, break away from print traditions so that written text is not the primary rhetorical means.”
Cheryl Ball (2004), “Show, not tell”

It is odd that I find myself writing on multimodality, considering I just completed my first multimodal assignment with my students five months ago. Previously, I had never heard the word “multimodal.” I am one of the older writing instructors at my institution – 51 as of this writing – and I consider myself only semi-computer savvy. But I found myself in a new composition classroom, fully equipped with laptops for student use and thought - - there must be more that we can do with this technology than simple word processing. At about the same time, my son, a high school sophomore, came to me with his English class essay assignment the likes of which I had never seen. I remember thinking that his teacher must be very progressive to assign such an essay. Surely she is fresh out of college and a Google Docs/Flash Player/Photoshop whiz, none of which I can claim. As we sifted through his assignment, I noticed that the essay required components that lay outside of the standard, formal essay that I was accustomed to. It required other forms of media besides printed text; instead, it used various modes to create meaning. The idea both fascinated and perplexed me. Adding pictures and audio and hyperlinks to an essay? How does one go about creating such an essay? Where does the writing occur? And finally, how is his teacher going to grade such a thing?!

I did not realize it then, but what I was seeing for the first time was a multimodal essay assignment, a project that teachers of English and other disciplines have been assigning in their
classrooms for the past two decades. These teachers know that our students were raised in a technological age and do practically everything electronically. They also realize that, if we are to prepare them to become members of the writing public and to negotiate life, and to provide a successful environment for learning and creating meaning, we must provide multimodal assignment opportunities in our classrooms. In her 2004 address at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Kathleen Blake Yancey called for change regarding composing processes in the composition classroom. “Composition in a new key,” she said, requires instructors to consider the question, “What is writing, really?” It obviously includes print, but composing is no longer only about the medium used. It is also about technology.

Many instructors have answered Yancey’s call for change. However, there are those of us who find change difficult. In fact, a change in praxis and pedagogy can be downright unnerving. And it is not just a change in how, why, or what we teach. It is a change in viewing the simple, printed text as a thing of the past; it is the realization that a progressive classroom with a dynamic learning environment requires us to learn new skills to teach what we have always taught; it is a meta-cognitive assignment turned around on us, the instructors, where we now must come to grips with the idea that we do not know all that we thought we knew about teaching composition; and it is the fear of braving a new frontier where we will make mistakes and blunders, perhaps even embarrass ourselves and at worst, do our students harm.

So how do we go about contemporizing our college writing classrooms? How do we hop on the digital media bandwagon that our peers are employing? We know that our students are light years ahead of many of us in the technological arena, so how are we to teach them when we barely understand it ourselves? The first step is to realize the importance of what I mentioned earlier - a progressive classroom with a dynamic learning environment. It requires us to learn
new skills to teach what we have always taught, and currently that is considerably more than reading and writing. Elizabeth Daley, dean of the University of Southern California’s School of Cinematic Arts declares, “No longer can students be considered truly educated by mastering reading and writing alone. The ability to negotiate through life by combining words with pictures, audio, and video to express thoughts, will be the mark of the educated student.” That is our job – to educate our students. We ask them to strive for excellence, to learn new curriculum, to think outside of the box. If we ask that of our students, then we must be willing to do it ourselves. We must not be afraid to experiment.

“The Experiment”

I like to call the assignment that I re-created for my students “The Experiment” because, in essence, it was. It was also fascinating, educational, unnerving, complex – but it was something I never tried before in my classroom. I had several different options for designing it; I had choices to make for implementing and assessing it; I also had no certainty on its results. I knew that it would benefit my students in terms of the options it provided them for creating meaning through various media, and that was good enough for me. I sent an email to my son’s teacher, asking her permission to use the assignment. She whole-heartedly agreed, assuring me that, although she did not know where the assignment originated from, my using it would not infringe on anyone’s copyrights. She also graciously offered her assistance if I needed it.

As I said earlier, like many older college writing instructors, I consider myself only semi-computer savvy. I know my way around Word and Google Docs; I’ve become acquainted with two different university learning platforms; I’ve created PowerPoints (but not Prezis); I now respond electronically to students’ essays, all of my grading is digitized, and for the first time I
am tracking attendance online. Listing what I can do digitally is a much shorter list than naming what I cannot, and yet, I decided to give this multi-genre/multimodal assignment a try.

The following pages describe my assignment - from introducing it to my students to its conclusion and assessment. I provide details, humbly including my successes and stumbles, and ask that you bear in mind that I was unaware of something called “multimodality” when I implemented this assignment. (Now, of course, I am a big fan). Here, I walk through the steps of the assignment, noting those places where I now feel changes could be made for a better multimodal experience for both the instructor and the students. The appendices include one student’s essay to serve as a fine example of the types of multimodal essays my students created, and a list of genres from which my students chose for their Original Works.

The Introduction

When I first introduced the assignment to my students, I prefaced my lecture with a caveat, a warning for which they were already familiar – I am a bit “electronically challenged.” I politely informed them that, although I wanted to try a new assignment idea with them, there was the possibility that I might need their help at some point explaining the technology they used to create parts of the assignment. They agreed without hesitation. Next, I explained to them, with Freire’s idea of critical pedagogy in mind, that I wanted their permission to try a new assignment with them. It was an experiment, so to speak, involving the use of their computers to write an essay, but their essay was going to have more than just prose. It would have several parts - not necessarily several pages but several parts. These parts would include various things like pictures, hyperlinks to videos, audio recordings or soundbites, graphs, maps, letters, posters, and all sorts of different genres that they were going to create in between their written texts to help
create meaning. The assignment required them to be creative and allowed for innumerable topics and storylines.

Then I asked the class if anyone considered themselves to be creative? I asked this because I realize that not all students feel that they are particularly clever or innovative. In a general education course like first-year composition, we get all majors and types of students, not just the creative writers. I did not want to instill panic in those students before I got the assignment off the ground. Thankfully, 17 out of 19 students raised their hands. I asked the two students who did not raise their hands why they felt they were not creative, and their answers were not surprising. They both said they did not “like creative writing.” I assured them that, because they were in control of the storyline and topic of their essays, they would not find the assignment too painful. As members of a community of writers in the classroom, they would have the creative input of the entire class if they got into a bind. That appeased them and so I proceeded to lay the groundwork. Here is the foundation of the assignment that I presented to the class:

**Pretend that you are your current age and gender, but you are living in another historical time period. It can be any place and point in time that you choose, but it must have a critical social issue that you will research, define, explore, and analyze. You can either be a participant in or an observer of this critical issue. You will produce a PowerPoint essay in which you create a fictitious story about yourself: your name, your heritage, your family and friends, your occupation, your hometown, etc., and anything else you choose to write about concerning the place and time in which you live. You will create original documents that may or may not have text like photographs, audio recordings, map, charts, and graphs. You must do some**
research to incorporate factual information about the time period and the critical issue, but the storyline you create about your life will be fiction.

I will be honest and say that there were mixed responses to the assignment. Some faces in the room lit up; I could see the creative juices beginning to flow. Others, however, groaned a bit at the idea of creating something with components and “parts.” One student actually asked, “Can’t we just write a normal paper?” I looked at her with wide eyes and asked, “Seriously? Why on Earth would you want to write a plain old essay when you can create something really cool using all of the technology you have at your fingertips?” She replied, “Because it sounds like a lot of work!” I believe I gave a little lecture about how all writing is work, and that all things worthwhile take effort. This essay was going to change the way they looked at the composing process…..and it did. That student, by the way, turned out to be one of the biggest fans of the assignment. Not that she created the best essay, but the effort she put into it showed her that she had more creativity than she initially thought. That was a great lesson in itself.

It is important to note here that I have always let my students choose the topics on which they write formal essays in my classroom. The assignment may have a general theme, like the historical one I am describing here, with general guidelines and parameters so the students know what is expected of them. However, I give students a lot of room to initiate, experiment, explore, design, and develop their ideas. My belief that students produce their best writing when given the opportunity to choose the topic is steeped in research (Hayes and Flower 1986; Applebee 1982; Britton, et al. 1975; Shaughnessy 1977) as well as my own experiences throughout the years as a student, teacher, and writer. We all write best when we are interested in the topic.

The Multimodal Assignment Components
The multimodal assignment is divided into 6 parts or components – Prospectus, Prologue, Original Works, Repetends, Notes Page, and Works Cited. A seventh component, Research, was included in the original assignment and I incorporated it in my lesson, but I now regret that decision. This is one “stumble” that I would change. A lesson on research should be completed before the students begin this assignment, if they have not already learned about scholarly research. The students will be exploring a particular time period and a relevant critical issue associated within that time period. They must have the ability to locate reliable sources of information before beginning their research.

The Prospectus

A prospectus is a document describing the major features of a proposed literary work. It is the first component of this assignment, and I asked the students to complete it and get my approval before they continue with the assignment. The Prospectus serves two purposes. One, it provides an organizational strategy, an initial framework for the students to begin outlining, creating, and designing their assignment. Two, it allows me to see the students’ plan of action before they get too far into the research and find that their chosen topic or critical issue is not really what they wanted or thought it was going to be, is too broad or too narrow a topic, etc. (Fig. 1).

I initially assigned the Prospectus as the first slides of the PowerPoint, but here, again, I made a stumble. The Prospectus serves as a design element. It should be viewed as such, as a separate part of the assignment rather than a beginning or introduction to the essay. This is where the student describes the essay’s topic and theme, and defines a fictional character, point of view, historic time period, and critical issue. The second component of this assignment, the Prologue, has much of the same information as the Prospectus, but it serves as an introduction. When
coupled together in the PowerPoint, they become redundant sources of information. Therefore, I now think it’s best to assign the Prospectus firstly as a means for students to generate ideas and get their thoughts down and organized; secondly, as a means to check that their design is in line with the objectives and parameters of the assignment. The students can then take the Prospectus and use it as their guiding source of information for writing the Prologue. Also, although I asked students to create this multimodal assignment in PowerPoint, the Prospectus is the only part of the assignment that I would now ask students to write in a standard essay format. I would give it a length requirement, perhaps one page or 200-250 words, and respond to it before the student spends time on research or begins creating their PowerPoint.

**The Prologue**

A Prologue is an introductory speech or scene that describes the theme of or precedes the first act of a play. The information provided here “tells” the student’s story that the PowerPoint “shows” through various modes and genres. Here is where the student’s story begins. The Prologue describes the fictional main character of the story; family and friends; occupation; the place and time in which he/she lives; the historical significance of that time and place; and the critical issue that is occurring. The student has already generated these ideas in the Prospectus, but will take those ideas and create a storyline. The Prologue will have multiple slides, perhaps with background scenes, wallpaper, moving objects, or animation. (Fig. 2).

The Prologue begins the PowerPoint presentation. I asked the students to write their stories in prose because the rest of the PowerPoint is a multitude of genres that they have either created (Original Works) or copied from published sources (Repetends). Most are not in prose format; in fact, they may or may not have text at all. Depending on the story that the student creates, there may be love letters, recipes, wanted posters, a fairy tale, greeting cards, comic
book pages, restaurant menus, eulogies, photographs, western scenes, scrapbook pages, etc. (Fig. 6). If one were to look at a student’s series of Original Works and Repetends without first reading the Prologue, one may not comprehend the story that the author is intending to show. The Prologue, then, acts as the device to “tell” the story while the remainder of the slides “shows” the story.

**Original Works**

The most creative part of this assignment is the Original Works. Here the students are given the opportunity to create designs they should already be familiar with such as a restaurant menu, newspaper article, or comic strip. I spent a whole class period going over the list of genres the students could use for their Original Works just to be sure they knew what each genre consisted of (Fig. 6). My students were familiar with the majority of them; some questioned what a Western and a “Choose Your Own Adventure” should look like. I explained, simply, that the design elements were their choice. They could choose what the designs looked like depending on the meaning that they were trying to convey through them. In *Designerly ≠ Readerly: Re-Assessing Multimodal and New Media Rubrics for Use in Writing Studies* (2006), Cheryl Ball brought up the notion that “design laid the foundation on which a pedagogy of multiliteracies could be enacted. That is, teachers could (and should) incorporate the analysis and production of multimodal texts into their curricula” (394-5). She further develops the idea of designing as a cyclical process, one that involves three steps that she relates to the process of revision in writing: (a) understanding available designs, (b) designing the text, and (c) presenting the redesigned product (395).

As the facilitator of this assignment, I wanted to be sure that my students understood the genre designs available for the Original Works, but that they were ultimately responsible for the
analysis and production of the design. I did not want to put constraints on their designs, but I wanted them to recreate texts from known designs like a wanted poster, top ten list, or radio broadcast. Ball further explains that “designing...happens when a designer transforms one (or more) of those known, available designs into something new. That new design results in the redesigned text, the third part of the process (385). “So, similar to Bolter and Grusin’s (2000) discussion of how new media remediates old media and the old is remediated because of the new, the process of designing a multimodal text based on available designs to produce a redesigned text – and the accompanying weaving back-and-forth, in-and-out, between these revision processes – shows the process through which a multimodal text is created” (395). It also simulates the designing and redesigning (think writing and revision) of a standard written text essay.

Repetends

Not only are the students asked to design and create Original Works in which they “weave back-and-forth, in-and-out through the revision process,” they are also asked to find Repetends, published artifacts that thematically connect the Original Works. These are items they find published on the internet, not items they create. Repetends might be quotes, pictures, graphs, diagrams, song lyrics, interesting facts, video, sound bites, or any medium that ties the Original Works together. For example, Repetends in an essay on World War II might be quotes from Franklin D. Roosevelt since he was President at the time.

Some students asked if they could create Repetends for their essays rather than using published items. I had to think about that one for a bit. I looked at it from the students’ point of view. On the one hand, I imagined that creating a particular statement or phrase to tie my Original Works together might be beneficial. I created the story; I knew best what I wanted
to say transitionally between my Original Works to create cohesion. What if I had a particular design idea in mind that I couldn’t find published on the internet? On the other hand, I considered that locating appropriate Repetends, such as relevant quotes or pictures, gave me the opportunity to contextually analyze the relevance of a published item without the inconvenience of having to create one. Plus, taking the time to create Repetends might be a concern. Ultimately, I decided to discourage students from creating them. Rather than another stumble, I think this choice was a success.

It turns out that the best Repetends were thematically related quotes that students found on the internet. For example, one student wrote her essay on the earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan in March of 2011. She began her essay with a flashback, an Original Work she created dating back one year before the disasters happened. It showed the previously blissful life of the townspeople – the innocence of children, the simple pleasures of fishing and visiting with neighbors, the friendships she enjoyed. The Repetend that followed was an ancient Chinese proverb: “To build it took one hundred years; to destroy it one day.” The Original Work following this Repetend was an illustration she drew of her town being hit by the tsunami and her best friend being swept away by a tidal wave. Rhetorically and thematically connected, the proverb demonstrates the idea the student shows in her flashback – a beautiful town, cultivated and loved by many families for many generations – along with the catastrophe that wiped out her town in one day.

The other four Repetends in her essay are uplifting quotes from previous emperors and prime ministers whose messages are about hope and resilience. They are woven between four Original Works whose themes involve rebuilding the town and the townspeople’s lives, and the resiliency of man. This student certainly could have created her
own Repetends, but the ones that she found lend both authenticity and pathos to her essay. She probably would have struggled unnecessarily to create them on her own. Teaching students to discern the rhetorical borders between each discourse is a challenge. While I can see value in allowing students to create their own Repetends, I also think there is value in requiring them to search for the perfect transitional piece, to contextually analyze the item, and to determine its relevancy to their project, its theme, and the meaning they wish to convey.

**Notes Page**

In this section, students were asked to create one “Note” per slide where they explained their inspiration for each Original Work they created. I asked them to explain why they created the piece, what they were trying to show, and the significance of its placement in the essay. I asked the students to document specifics from their research and to explain what was factual in their Original Works versus what they assumed, inferred, or fictionalized. My students needed constant reminders to keep sufficient notes for this part of the assignment while they completed their research. Sometimes, when I asked students to provide me with citation information or to return to a certain website where they found the information, they were unable to do so.

I gave them four 50-minute class periods to work on their essays. On these days, I circled the classroom talking with them as they created their Original Works, listening as they earnestly described their storylines and what they were trying to create, watching as they searched the internet for appropriate Repetends or researched the historical time periods. Students collaborated with each other, sharing ideas for making their projects better, chatting with one another about technological issues with their computers and
composing processes, and helping each other make rhetorical decisions about artifacts’ placement and design. They really seemed to enjoy the process. On these days I had the sense, more than ever before, that I had opened the door to a community of writers.

Each day I reminded them to create a Works Cited page or an Easy Bib so they didn’t lose track of their citations. I suppose I was not speaking loud enough because only a handful of students listened. Many students griped towards the end of the assignment as they tried to go back and find the sources of their information. I do not know what to suggest here, or how I can fix this problem the next time I assign this essay. I guess I is like the old cliché – you can lead a horse to water but you can’t make him drink. Perhaps this is a difficult lesson that some students just need to learn: If they do not keep track of their citations while researching, then they will suffer time constraints and aggravation while locating the items afterwards.

Works Cited

I learned a great deal about the purpose and wisdom of a Works Cited page while my students created these essays. Previously, I thought I knew all of the ins-and-outs of citing researched information. I was never overly critical of what my students provided as long as I could find the item listed if I needed to. While it never occurred to me that a student might need to cite someone’s photograph of the Statue of Liberty or a YouTube recording, I came across a relevant story that I would like to share.

A student once created a multimodal assignment where she used many images that she found on the internet. She was so proud of her creation that she decided to post it online. Someone, whose copyrighted work was included in her essay, was angry that she did not properly give credit where credit was due. He brought a lawsuit against the student, her
instructor, and the school. I have tried desperately to find the outcome of the lawsuit to no avail.

I have begun to think that this story is an urban myth, but the important idea to take away is simply this – know that there are items on the internet that have copyrights – tradmarked images, music and song lyrics, poetry and literature, architecture, and software. It is important for students to know that they must cite many of the items that they find on the internet, especially if they choose to post their work online. Even with the flexible rules provided to students and educators by the Fair Use doctrine of the Copyright Act, unless the copyrighted work is being used for educational purposes – to comment on, criticize, or parody – copyright infringement is no joke. The trouble is that most of the laws and rules that cover fair use and education were written well before the invention of the web. So, caveat emptor, or check out the Fair Use FAQs for Educators from the excellent resource site, TeachingCopyright.org.

Assessment

One of the most difficult tasks for educators who assign multimodal essays is assessment. If you recall, one of the first questions I asked myself when I saw this assignment for the first time is - how does one grade such a thing? I have graded text essays for a number of years, and I feel confident in my abilities to critique and respond to student writing. However, a multimodal essay that includes not only written text but a variety of modes and genres can be initially intimidating to assess. Yancey noted that, even when we are comfortable with “intertextual composing [in which print and digital literacies overlap],” we may still be “decidedly discomforted when it comes time to assess such processes and products” (2004). Not yet comfortable with “intertextual composing,” I certainly was not
comfortable with assessing it. I considered it was not fair to assign such an essay and then grade only the written text components, but how could I reasonably and responsibly assess components like Repetends, or place a quantitative value on students’ Original Works like timelines, radio broadcasts, or recipes? “Yancey warned against using the ‘frameworks and processes of one medium to assign value and to interpret work in a different medium’ (90) because by doing so we lose the chance to see new values emerging in the new medium” (Sorapure). These essays posed a new challenge which required a new praxis for assessment. And the students needed to know what was expected of them. Delagrange, McCorkle, and Braun posited similar queries when they asked, “How can we evaluate the transformative nature of a remixed project in light of the already contentious disciplinary conversations about originality, authorship, and intellectual property? How can we adequately discern intent, gauge sophistication, appraise complexity, assess argument? How do we evaluate student work that often challenges our sense of the way texts ‘ought’ to behave?” (Stirred, Not Shaken). I understood the challenge; I just did not know where to start. I decidedly could not use the same strategies and criteria I had formerly used on written text essays to assess my students’ new digital creations. I needed to create a rubric that allowed for a more holistic assessment of originality, intent, and sophistication, as well as continuity and coherence, but one that also allowed for assessment of old school mechanics like sentence-level error. Madeleine Sorapure echoes my dilemma when she asks, “How do we evaluate the coherence of a hypertextual essay, for example, or the clarity of a visual argument? Or do familiar assessment criteria such as coherence and clarity need to be substantially revised or even rejected when we are evaluating work in new media? (2006). I had to come to some concrete decisions in terms of criteria, and I had to do it fast.
Thanks to Yancey’s call for change in 2004, it turns out there is now quite a bit of recent scholarship published on the topic of assessing multimodal designs: Diane Penrod (2005), Cheryl Ball (2006, 2012), Madeleine Sorapure (2006), Sonya Borton and Brian Huot (2007), Jody Shipka (2009), Susan Katz and Lee Odell (2012), Virginia Kuhn, DJ Johnson, and Dave Lopez (2012), Crystal Van Kooten (2013), Mya Poe (2014), and others. I read most of these authors’ works, all of which provided me with an even deeper understanding of multimodal composition - and how difficult it is to assess an intertextual essay. As I poured over these articles and book chapters, I began to see one common, recurrent thread. As teachers, we all love discussing the multimodal assignments our students are creating, myself included, but when it comes to the discussion of assessment, no one really has a concrete answer. There is no one right answer; there is no one, common rubric to share. Charles Moran and Anne Herrington define the dilemma, “The development of emerging technologies has so increased the apparent difficulty and complexity of assessing student composing that as teachers we are glad to describe student adventures in multimodal composing, but when it comes to laying out our assessment procedures or criteria, we are most often silent,” (2013). It appeared that I was not the only one having difficulties or lamenting over exactly what it was that I wanted my students to learn, to achieve, and to demonstrate. I had to go back to the basics, to the foundational core of teaching I learned in my Education classes many, many years ago. Rather than looking to the works of other compositionists, I decided to look to Educational theorists, specifically those at the National Writing Project.

In 2011, the NWP aimed to identify more specific criteria for assessing digital writing by creating a Multimodal Assessment Project Committee (MAP). The committee
developed an assessment framework that pinpoints some of the composing skills and habits of mind in five domains for assessing multimodal texts. Though quoted here in short from Moran and Herrington, the full framework and descriptions can be found here:

http://digitalis.nwp.org/resource/2751:

- Context: decisions about genre; “about where and how the communication enters the world;” also, “Authors-designers-writers consider the constraints, affordances, and opportunities, given purpose, audience, composing environment, and delivery mode.”
- Artifact: includes appropriate use of structure, medium, and technique.
- Substance: “overall quality and significance of the ideas developed.”
- Process management and technical skills, including collaboration.
- Habits of mind: “creativity, persistence, risk-taking, mindfulness, and engagement.”

This framework helped me begin to think about exactly what it was that I was expecting from my students both in terms of creation, engagement, process, and collaboration. I saw that this list had both holistic and substantive values for assessment, and that is what I desired. Once I finally figured out what I wanted them to achieve through this assignment, I was able to share it with them. I printed the full list from the NWP website, and went over the “terms and conditions” for assessment with them. I showed them four examples of multimodal texts, student samples my son’s teacher shared with me. Guided by the framework from the NWP, we discussed at length the qualities and shortcomings of those samples. I felt that my students grasped what was expected of them, what was required in the assignment, and what I hoped they would learn from creating their multimodal texts.
To say that I was pleased with the final projects is an understatement. The creativity, ingenuity, and complexity displayed in the students’ texts still excite me. The best projects were not the most colorful or ornate designs, nor the ones with animation and sound. They were the ones whose content showed thoughtfulness in choosing the perfect genre for the purpose; whose artifacts were not outlandish but rhetorically connected to the theme; whose substance showed insightfulness and engagement with the topic; and whose transition from an Original Work to a Repetend had clarity and cohesiveness. Some students struggled with topics too broadly defined, while other projects showed lack of purpose and structure. Like any other essay assignment, it was apparent who spent more time writing than others. No students remarked that they had problems creating the PowerPoint, although some were upset by the constraints of the slide format for writing text. For example, some students chose to write letters, speeches, and dialogues for Original Works which require an ample amount of space. This required several slides in the PowerPoint, and it frustrated them. The majority of the students, however, admitted in a culminating reflective letter to being proud of the essays they created.

The following multimodal essay was created by Emily Dugan, a traditional freshman in my College Writing I class. The historical time period she chose to write about was the late 20th century high school shooting at Columbine. A fictional first-person character in attendance there, she also had a sibling in the fated library at the time the shootings occurred. While there were several excellent essays to choose from, I chose Emily’s because it demonstrates what a student who is fully engaged in the project can create. She used several modes, including hyperlinks, and created excellent work both textually and visually. She painted a picture, wrote a poem, and penned a long diary entry full of emotion and
sincerity. Interwoven between each Original Work, her Repetends are both rhetorically and thematically connected showing mindfulness and clarity of purpose. Overall, Emily’s multimodal essay is an excellent example for this assignment.

After feedback, revisions, presentations, and assessment, I look back on my “experiment” with fondness and pride. Even with the stumbles, I am proud of myself for tackling a scary new arena and even prouder of my students for rising to the challenge. The majority of students were just as perplexed at the beginning of the assignment as me, yet they wrangled their way through designing meaningful texts and, most importantly, creating meaning. I highly recommend those new to multimodality to give this assignment a try. Perhaps you can devise a way to incorporate it into your curriculum Brave a new frontier. You’ll be glad you did.
Appendix

Fig. 1 Prospectus

Student Work: Emily Dugan

Prospectus

April 20, 1999 is a day in history that will always be remembered. It is a day that triggered a national debate on gun control, and has begun the world-wide trend of school shootings as well. The Columbine shooting left the world in complete shock. The shooting was done by two high school boys who attended Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. The traumatic event left 13 killed and 20 injured. Two more deaths were declared as the gunmen turned the guns on themselves. The shooting has changed school systems in an enormous way and has left us with very important lessons for the future.

Since Columbine, there have been an increase in school shootings. These shootings are not only at K-12 schools but college campuses as well. There have been 59 non-fatal or fatal assaults with six of them having a completed or attempted suicide. Another 10 shootings were strictly attempted or completed suicide, six accidental shootings, and 13 gun firings with no one injured. Our nation has learned valuable lessons from these shootings and have greatly increased school security in a number of ways. Schools now provide more hands on security, a zero-tolerance policy, stricter rules, more secure systems to let inside guests in, and lastly ALICE training. Although it has not been possible to put a complete stop to school shootings, our country has most definitely taken appropriate precautions in a very serious matter.
Prospectus...

This topic leaves me in a numb mind state. It gives me chills and makes me feel weak inside just thinking about it. School shootings are happening every single day and there seems to be no real stop to this horrid trend. I find it so intriguing to learn and talk about, because if the information is hidden and never spoken of, then how will we ever put an end to it? The problem is very extreme, very real, and sadly it is extremely common. In High School, I did an informative speech on the Columbine shootings. I watched footage, read in great detail, and watched interviews of surviving students who have been wounded from the shooting. Discovering all the little details drove my heart into a complete wreck. I want this trend in America, and worldwide, to have an end.

The purpose of my research is to make more students aware of the emotionally disturbing event. I want to show people how it has affected individuals, families, America, and the world we live in today. I want people to walk away from hearing this research and to feel the way I did. I want my research to provide a greater awareness to the problem and to make a change in the way we view this sort of tragedy. The resources I plan to use are video footage, credible articles of the shooting, newspapers of the days following, interviews of students who were there, interviews of family members affected by the shooting, and lastly a video of the two men who made the Columbine Shooting so real to everyone.

Prospectus...

I will be writing from the point of view of a senior high school student who is at the Columbine shooting. I will be a student who faces the trembling pain of knowing her younger sister is face to face with the shooters. I will discuss my feelings, thoughts, and hardships. Her name is Sarah and she is 18-years-old. Her younger sister, Mia, is a freshman student at Columbine as well. Sarah lives only ten minutes from her school with her mom, dad, and sister. Her house is in a good neighborhood where everyone knows each other's names. Sarah is an ordinary girl in her rather large high school. She wears what is in style, but never bothers for brand name items. She has the latest haircut but never seems to care much if it is brushed or not. She has distinctive features to make her unique but she keeps to herself and never bothers anyone. She has a great ability in artwork. She uses a variation of words and art to find her personality and seek out her feelings. She plans to attend college entering with a major in Art Rehabilitation. My audience will be my peers as well as my professor. However, I never want to keep this information bottled up and I would like to spread the word to more than just the classroom I present this in.

Fig. 2 Prologue
Prologue

My multiple genre essay is written from the point of view of an 18-year-old high school student at Columbine High School named Sarah. She lives 10 minutes from school with her family who is very close. Her mom, dad and sister Mia never miss out on Sunday game night. Her sister, who is a freshman, is beginning to grow weary of her sister’s next chapter in life. The two of them have always been each other’s best friend and it is hard for Mia to understand that it is time for Sarah to grow up and move onto new things. Sarah is very optimistic to leave however. She is simply obsessed with the idea of graduating and starting her journey on her own.

Sarah is a natural, beautiful girl. She never tries to out do herself and she simply does not care for the obsession of looks. She is the most down to earth person and very easy to get along with...if anyone could get her to actively talk. Mia would know more than anyone that Sarah likes to keep to herself. All through life, Mia has harassed Sarah about never having lots of friends or ever having a boyfriend. Lately, Mia has admired that about her sister because she acknowledges the fact that the only person Sarah truly has opened up to is her.

Sarah’s one way of communicating with the world is through her diary. She writes her opinions, her beliefs, thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Basically everything someone does out loud, Sarah does on paper. Her favorite kind of writing is poetry. She finds it more soothing than writing. She loves the fact that she does not need all of the detail to express her words. She claims that the rhythm of the poem is what drives the emotions. Ever since Sarah was a little girl she has had an artistic hand. Her artwork which consists mainly of paintings is her only kind of work that she makes public.

The Columbine shootings shook Sarah. The devastation she had to face of wondering if her younger sister was okay destroyed her. The aftermath left her in distress. Even though Mia survived the tragedy, Sarah understands that her younger sister will forever be affected by it. That night after the shootings was very hard for Sarah. She struggled to sleep, eat, talk, or move for that matter. She thought about never leaving for college because there was no way she could possibly leave her sister alone. That night, she had no choice but to do what she did best. She stayed up all hours of the night writing a diary entry, writing poems and even bringing out the paint to make an artwork that has now become very popular. Her painting is an expression of her mind and thoughts. She collaborated a mixture of very bright colors followed by the darkness of the shooters. This represents the happy thoughts she hoped her sister was focusing on while the thought of the shooters was only a blended piece to the picture. Sarah worries if her family can ever overcome this, and most of all if Columbine could ever be a place of peace as it once was.
Timeline

- Jan 1998: Klebold & Harris arrested for stealing
- March 1998: Parents of Columbine students report death threats from Harris on internet
- Nov 1999: Mark Manes is sentenced to 16 years in prison for selling weapon to the minors
- April 1999: Klebold and Harris open fire at Columbine killing 13
- April 2001: Victims' families settle suits with parents of shooters ($2.5 million)
- Feb 2004: Authorities release lots of physical evidence
- Oct 2003: Home video of shooters is released by authorities. Made 6 weeks previous of shootings.
- Sept 2007: The Columbine Memorial is dedicated and opened up to the public
- 2015: School Shooting in America

News Paper articles following days after the Shootings...
ARTWORK
Collaborated by Sarah...
Diary Entry

April 20, 1999

Today I woke up as if it was a normal day. I did my morning routine of struggling to find something to wear, styling my mane of curly hair, having a yogurt for breakfast, brushing my teeth and heading off. School was getting to be harder the closer it came to graduation. Mia, my younger sister was a host this morning. She is definitely the family comedian but this morning she was being extra goofy. Asher and I got into the car I complained that I was ready to be done and graduate already. Her response tugged at my heart. She said "I hope this time goes by slow. We will never get these days back. The days we wake up at 5:30 in the morning and the first person we always talk to is each other. I’m going to miss the drive to school with you and passing you in the hall. I know you’re excited, but I’m really going to miss you." Mia was right. I needed to look at these moments and appreciate them more. I know I will miss her so much when I go away for school next fall.

We arrived to school and headed in as usual. Mia went to her locker and I went to mine. The day went on as it always does, slow. But to my shock today would actually be the slowest day of my life.

When the initial shots began I did not think it was because school was under attack. It was one of those things; where there was a loud sound, our class looked to the direction of where it came, then we went on with what we were doing. It wasn’t until a classmate of mine peeked out the window to notice two young men pointing a gun at a teacher and student and shooting. He shrieked. My stomach dropped to the floor because I realized that we were in trouble. Within seconds there was absolute panic. Cries were everywhere, there was screaming in the halls, and all I could pay attention to was the fact that the boys with the gun were heading inside the building. Our teacher told us to get to the corner of the room and stay down.
Alarms began to go off. Alarms as well as gun shots. I could not think straight at all. I had no idea if Mia was safe and she had no idea if I was safe. My mom and dad probably had no idea what was going on and that scared me even more. I kept thinking that we were alone in this tragedy. That no one would help us until it was too late. I knew that Mia was in the library this period for her study hall. I also knew that the library does not have any type of security lock and that she had no where to go and no where to hide. An overwhelming feeling dawned upon me and my chest felt so tight that I could not breathe. One, two, three more gun shots. The two shooters were coming closer. My classroom began wondering who it might be. Who is crazy enough to shoot at a school, to take innocent lives. The voices of the shooters were only feet away from my classroom door. They were swearing, screaming and acting as if they were on top of the world.

At this point it had been 20 minutes since the initial first shot. The shouting of the shooters were gone and our class was instructed to evacuate through the nearest exit door. We were told to be quiet, still, and to not panic. The hallway had glass shattered on the floor and blood upon the beige lockers. I prayed to God Mia was okay. I could not take my mind off of what she said to me this morning. She told me to enjoy the moments with her before it was too late. I couldn’t help but to think the worse. My classroom soon was standing outside of the building. I realized that we were not alone in this situation. There were flashing lights every where. Cops of the highest rank, the SWAT team, firetrucks, ambulances, and many frantic parents. I wanted to run so fast to find my parents. To tell them that I love them. To ask them if Mia was okay even though I knew they didn’t have the answer. My mind became obsessed with wanting answers. I wanted answers so badly that I thought about running back into the building, running into the library and finding Mia. I just wanted to hold her and tell her that everything would be okay.
I overheard teachers discussing how bad this is. I saw tears flooding from their eyes just as tears came from students eyes. We all had the same numbing feeling. None of it felt real. A sudden change of sound occurred when everyone started rushing towards the other side of the building. The library was located at that side of the library. Which meant Mia was located there, and the shooters were located there. I fell to my knees. I truly could not breath this time. I could not bare the fact that Mia was alone and encountering this. She was face to face with these horrible people. She was scared, and I could not be there for her. I told myself that if Mia made it out of this that I would never leave her again. I would embrace every single moment I had with her. We were soon instructed to leave the premises of the school. I was reluctant to find my mom and dad. I fell over in weakness before reaching them. They ran to me in a smile. They had no idea if I was alive or not. I could not speak and they tried soothing me with words of “Everything will be okay.” I knew they had no clue that Mia was in the same place as the shooters and I could not break their hearts to tell them. My body felt weaker and weaker.

I woke up later back home. I was confused and instantly started screaming. My sister rushed to me. She laid on top of me curled in a ball and just began to cry. I cried with her too, harder than I had previously today. She told me that mom & dad rushed me to the hospital because I fainted. I did not even want to ask Mia questions. I just knew that we were still a family and my sister was okay. Mom and dad rushed to us. We all held each other in complete silence, finally ending the longest day of my life.
The Fallen
By Christine Deaton
A Tribute to Columbine High School

They have fallen without permission, their final journey not their say. Their gruesome end without compassion, no one should die that way.

Most go to school to learn and listen, but some just don’t hear the words. They feel self pity and oppression, they live by rules of the absurd.

A ticking bomb inside their minds, a fuse lit by nothing, to self fulfill a fantasy easing rage and hollow trusting’s.

But innocents have fallen never knowing why, who can ease the pain of those left behind watching a senseless, violent game.

And before this madness ever ends, how many will there be. Who’ll taste the target of other’s self righteous anarchy.

A troubled mind we cannot see, sometimes we can only guess, but those who are close should undoubtedly see some signs of their unrest.

Poem to Mom & Dad

Dear Mom & Dad...
I know you see this on the news.
I know you’re very scared.
I know your hearts are trembling.
I know you’re in despair.

I feel very anxious.
I feel very numb.
I feel very worried.
I feel like going home.

I pray Mia’s okay.
I pray we make it through.
I pray God finds a way.
I pray I pray I pray.

A child is a child, they come with unsteady minds and there are some that consistently walk a fine, unstable line.

They need the balance they’ve never had, but whose job is it anyway? In a throwaway society, who has the final say?

The truth is that the Fallen are not just those who’ve died, but those who are the perpetrators and those who never tried.

The Fallen are a melting pot of hopelessness and despair and there may not be an end in sight unless we all become aware.

Our children are our future, but what will our future say, if we allow this destruction to carry on this way.

Don’t turn away from the desperation in the calling. There are enough casualties. The casualties of the Fallen.
Patti Wilson’s 911 Call From the Library

- [Link](http://i.cnn.net/cnn/SPECIALS/2000/columbine.cdo/videos/PATTI.mpg)

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**Pro vs con**

**Pro’s**
- Brought attention to lax parenting and lax gun laws
- Created awareness for the weak school security
- Strengthened school systems
  - Better hands on security
  - Zero-tolerance policy
  - Stricter Rules
- Discovered more effective drills such as A.L.I.C.E. training

**Con’s**
- 13 deaths of innocent students and one brave teacher
- Began the trend of school shootings
  - More than 70 since Columbine
  - Large percentage of shootings are fatal
- Two suicides
  - There have been 16 school shootings with attempted or completed suicide since Columbine.
- Marked as the worst mass shooting in U.S. history
- Innocent lives taken. A tragedy that has affected the world we live in today.
"So this is the most famous high school in all of America for the wrong reasons." — Craig Scott
My first original work was a timeline of events leading up to the Columbine shootings. The timeline also involves events after the shootings such as the releasing of evidence. The timeline was inspired to be made to show background information to my audience. A clear view of what went on before, during, and after the shooting will help provide some knowledge towards the rest of the presentation. The dots on the timeline are pin points for all the major school shootings after Columbine. My hope is that the dots will grasp my audience's attention to understand the true trend and effect the Columbine shootings had on our Country. Each point on the timeline is factual information that occurred.
NOTES PAGE

My second original piece is an art piece created by my character. It is inspired in order to show the talent of my character and to show how she expresses herself. This is a real painting that I have given credit to. This painting was inspired to show my audience more about the character of Sarah. She truly is talented not only in writing but in artwork. She expresses herself in a beautiful way. The painting is meant to be something that Sarah created in distraction of the long sleepless night she had on April 20th. She describes it to be the mind of her younger sister as she battled thoughts during the time of the shootings. Sarah could only hope that the shooters were only a blended piece to the beautiful thoughts that Mia had.

NOTES PAGE

My third original work is a diary entry written by the young girl whose life I made real. In this I discussed my thoughts and feelings as they went on that day. I am writing in the past tense as if I was making this diary entry the night after the tragedy. This diary entry provides thoughts, feelings, pain, agony, and hurt that I am inferring from what I have learned about the Columbine shooting. I did the best I could to imagine the thoughts trembling through my character’s mind as she was helpless to her younger sister.
My fourth original work is a poem written by my character. It is a poem written to her mom and dad. The thoughts laid out and lines written are inferred feelings, emotion, and thoughts. The poem is meant to put my audience in a realization of the numbness state that my character was in. I want to show my sense of helplessness and disparity. My poem is short but to the point. My intentions on making it short was to show how the pain was real and inexpressible. No matter how many lines in the poem, it could never express the actual emotion going through my characters head. The lines in the poem are swift. They state exactly what she knows, wants, and feels. There's no need for more detail because the detail to her does not matter.

My fifth and final original piece is a pro vs con list. I used this last to show what has come out of the Columbine Shootings. I wanted to give my audience a view of how this event has even changed their lives. The point of this work is to provide an overview of how this one event has changed our country and also brought up many arguable conversations. With the positives that did come from this event, I wanted to provide a con list so no one ever forgets the innocent lives taken. This slide will greatly grab my audiences attention to show how a tragedy and loss of lives have provided them with greater security and an around safer environment. The information provided from both lists are factual information.
Fig. 5 Works Cited

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Fig. 6 Choice of Genres for Original Works and Repetends

- letter
- restaurant menu
- obituary
- phone conversation
- fairy tale
- postcard
- pro/con list
- ransom note
- recipe
- song
- poem
- fantasy
- science fiction
- greeting card
- advertisement
- scrapbook page
- resume
- job application
- newspaper article
- magazine article
- memo
- outline
- illustration
- comic strip
- eavesdropping/
- overheard
- conversation
- meeting minutes
- software
- change
- log/development log
- flash forward
- timeline
- flashback
- top ten list
- collage
- book review
- western
- business card
- choose your own
- adventure
- dialogue
- editorial
- eulogy
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- wanted poster
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- text message
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