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Video Composition, Creative Discourse, and Facilitated Freedom: A Teacher's Journey to Reveal Student Potential

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VIDEO COMPOSITION, CREATIVE DISCOURSE, AND FACILITATED

FREEDOM: A TEACHER'S JOURNEY TO REVEAL

STUDENT POTENTIAL

A Masters Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of

Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science in Education, Secondary Education, English

By

Michael Brinkmeyer

May 2018

VIDEO COMPOSITION, CREATIVE DISCOURSE, AND FACILITATED

FREEDOM: A TEACHER'S JOURNEY TO REVEAL STUDENT POTENTIAL

English

Missouri State University, May 2018

Master of Science in Education

Michael Brinkmeyer

ABSTRACT

This research project was conducted in response to students' lack of engagement in traditional modes of instruction and composition in a high school English Language Arts course. In order to better understand students as creative composers of knowledge, this research project asked students to engage in the video production process in collaborative groups. The research was conducted over the course of eight class periods in three different sections of Junior-level English Language Arts courses. Analysis of the data from this study reveals three important findings: 1) students respond well to creative and relevant performance assessments; 2) students' collaborative conversations, or talk, reveal their true potential to compose; and 3) the use of multimodal composing in the high school English classroom offers opportunities for teachers to reposition themselves as facilitators of creative composition, which can invite greater student engagement. These findings have pedagogical implications for educators who wish to increase student engagement through implementation of innovative, creative, multimodal composition assessments in their classrooms.

KEYWORDS: writing process, multimodal composition, creativity, discourse, collaboration

This abstract is approved as to form and content

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Danielle Lillge, PhD: Asst. Professor, English
Chairperson, Advisory Committee
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The more life experience I gain, the more I realize how blessed I am to come from a loving family. My mom and dad have made so many sacrifices for my benefit, and I will never be able to articulate how thankful I am for their unconditional support. I am also grateful for my brothers, as they are my three greatest mentors and best friends.

Most importantly, I am thankful for my wife Katie. She has been a wonderful study partner, patient listener, and encouraging friend throughout this process. I will always love and adore her.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

INTRODUCTION

On the first day of school each year, I briefly explain the major instructional goals and content standards of English Language Arts courses to my students. Then, I summarize this information by expressing that our central goal is to become better readers, writers, thinkers, and speakers. If I can encourage, equip, and provide opportunities for students to read, write, think, and speak proficiently, I feel that I have done my job as an instructor of English Language Arts. While these four skills have been the foundation behind my pedagogical decisions throughout my career, I have embedded these purposes into the classroom through a wide variety of instructional strategies and learning activities. Over the course of my journey to find the most effective approach for improvement of students' reading, writing, thinking, and speaking abilities, my classroom has assumed many identities and produced various experiences. The following snapshots of classroom experiences within the last school year represent two environments that are unified in purpose but polarized in implementation.

The first classroom experience can be categorized as traditional. In this English Language Arts classroom, students learn to write through instruction and independent practice. I implement whole class mini-lessons over various writerly techniques, and students are expected to mimic these moves through writing pieces, or essays, of their own. Students are given topic choices, and they are expected to meet specific content and length requirements. After prewriting and drafting, students trade drafts with classmates to give and receive feedback. Additionally, I conference with each student throughout this process to further discuss their composition decision-making. After a few revisions to

their essays, students submit their pieces of writing to me for assessment. I evaluate their essays through the use of holistic rubrics that are connected to course standards and writing skills. While this traditional classroom experience and its accompanying instructional practices are not inherently negative, they create a stagnant and apathetic learning environment. Many of my students are not school-oriented or driven by academic achievement, so one of their only motivating factors in my classroom is a genuine interest in the content. Unfortunately, a traditional academic writing assignment, even with topic choice, does not excite them. Consequently, students do not see a reason to consistently attend their English class at all. Because of their disinterest, students fail to demonstrate mastery of the intended content standards, and I am left unaware of their composition abilities. For me, this experience leads to frustration and an assumption that my students are not strong writers or thinkers.

The second classroom experience can be categorized as innovative. In this English Language Arts classroom, students learn by exploring problems collectively. I facilitate their learning through thoughtful scaffolding and short-term objectives, and students are the key decision-makers in their intellectual pursuits. Students compose in a medium that interests them—video—and they are given the freedom to choose the topic, purpose, and audience for their video composition. Due to their investment in their video topics, students make connections to mentor texts and previous life experiences without prompting. Students compose their videos collaboratively, and cyclical group conversation is the main vehicle for creativity. Throughout the video production process, students rely on their group members to explore and articulate their collective ideas. They hold each other accountable for coming to school and making contributions to the group.

While the classroom environment is loud, chaotic, and appears off-task, students eagerly make meaningful progress on their collaborative video projects. They frequently make connections to the world beyond the classroom, and they have a genuine interest in creating the best product possible. Instead of being the central audience and assessor of their writing products, my role shifts to facilitator and fellow creator. Students demonstrate mastery of the course standards through their various forms of talk, and I am able to highlight and reinforce the writerly moves they make throughout the creative process. While this classroom experience is not flawless, I am left with more optimism about my students, and, more importantly, they have newfound confidence in their own reading, writing, thinking, and speaking abilities.

This research study was inspired by an urgency to move my classroom beyond the traditional English Language Arts experience. I found that traditional instructional strategies and learning experiences were ineffective at engaging students and improving students' reading, writing, thinking, and speaking abilities. While some students were able to thrive in this environment, the majority of them were left behind. This failure inspired me to rethink what an English Language Arts classroom should look, feel, and sound like. If I wanted students to become better readers, writers, thinkers, and speakers, I had to find more engaging ways to foster and develop these skills. I had to reimagine how I could lead my students to an authentic interest in course content. This journey led me to an interest in new modes of composition, increased collaboration, and performance assessment. In short, I wanted to see if transforming my classroom with the use of digital composition would impact students' abilities to take ownership of their intellectual

decision-making as writers. More specifically, through my research, I sought to explore the following research question:

- How does examining students' talk as they are engaging in the video production process reveal their skills and potential as composers and creators of knowledge?

Below, I will communicate why innovative pedagogical decisions were necessary to engage reluctant student writers, how I studied my classroom as I transformed it into a creative and innovative environment, what I found throughout the process of data collection and analysis, and ideas and recommendations for educators to consider as they embark on their own innovative pedagogical journeys.

Identifying the Problem

As someone born in the early 1990s, I vividly remember life before smartphones, social media, and high speed internet. Even though I am less than a decade older than my students, I continue to notice ways in which their adolescent experiences are vastly different from mine due to the impact of advancing technology. During my study of Neil Postman's prophetic work *Amusing Ourselves to Death* in an undergraduate teacher education course, I was introduced to the argument that the visual mediums modern technology promotes prohibits students from engaging in meaningful discourse and deep learning experiences. Today, I continue to test Postman's hypothesis by wrestling with the pedagogical implications of technology in my own classroom. One observable pattern I have identified is my students' collective lack of ability to engage in decisive, recursive, conscious composition processes during traditional academic writing assignments. In the

4

age of instant gratification, methodically crafting and percolating over a written essay draft is not something that authentically interests 21st century students.

Despite my best attempts to implement engaging process pedagogy that supports student writers in the midst of their drafting, I continue to find that students spend little, if any, time making the thoughtful, recursive decisions necessary to produce their best composition. Instead, students hurriedly draft and submit their writing assignments so they can move to something more entertaining. They do not seem to understand that good writing requires deep work, or "the ability to focus without distraction on a cognitively demanding task" (Newport 3). It is this problem—the apparent lack of students' ability, or interest, to engage in and take ownership of the written composition process—that inspired me to further investigate my students' composition processes in new modes of writing.

As a culturally responsive educator, I expect my students' lack of conscious decision-making in the midst of the writing process is related to their lack of interest in traditional written composition. Because the research and theory behind culturally responsive teaching has primarily focused on "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (Gay 31), implementing culturally responsive pedagogy in the 21st century inevitably includes an awareness of technology and its impact on students' learning. My students are products of their past education and experiences, all of which has taken place in the technologically saturated 21st century. Many of my students see school as a static environment where they are forced to read archaic literature and write boring, academic

essays that have no impact beyond the gradebook. Furthermore, academic achievement is not a key motivating factor for most of my students. When I ask students what their academic goals are at the beginning of the year, the majority of them respond that they just want to pass the course. Rarely do they mention anything about learning new skills, exploring a topic of interest, or even earning a certain grade point average. Many of my students live in poverty and work multiple shifts a week to support themselves and their families, so school is more of a nuisance than an opportunity. They openly communicate their disdain for school, and their lack of engagement in traditional instruction and knowledge acquisition is tangible. While the students in my classes are largely disengaged and rarely make unprompted meaningful connections to school curriculum, I expect that school-oriented students are just as uninterested; however, the extrinsic motivators such as grade point averages, class ranks, and college placement or scholarship opportunities serve as masks that hide their lack of engagement. Even if school-oriented students act engaged, they may not be engaged for the authentic reason of developing themselves as creators of meaning.

While the majority of my students are not captivated by their typical high school education and experience, they are infatuated with technology, and, more specifically, the visual medium of video. Worldwide, billions of hours are spent on the video platform YouTube daily; during school, students voraciously consume YouTube videos related to a variety of topics, including sports, popular culture, video games, social movements, and humor. Some students even have their own YouTube channels, as they attempt to contribute something meaningful to the platform. In addition to YouTube, students are constantly communicating with their peers throughout the school day via social media

platforms such as Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. These sites allow students to create new identities, dialects, and social norms through a combination of videos, photos, and text. Students perceive the connections and communications these sites provide as genuine and necessary components of their social identities. While I once perceived technology as potentially destructive to the field of education, my experience in the classroom has uncovered the urgency of my responsibility to engage students with culturally responsive pedagogy and prepare students for an increasingly technological society. In fact, ignoring technology altogether could alienate students from valuable opportunities and connections between their academic and personal lives.

The purpose and inquiry of this research was inspired by my desire to leverage students' interest in the digital medium of video for meaningful learning; specifically, I wondered how analyzing students as they engage in the video production process, a form of multimodal composition that has cultural relevance, could reveal students' true potential to compose and create knowledge. While students' cognitive processes during multimodal and digital composition tasks have been explored in higher education, this connection has not been extensively researched at the secondary level. Even though some school districts, such as the school district where I conduced this research study, have implemented professional development initiatives to equip teachers with the theoretical frameworks and instructional strategies necessary to effectively utilize technology in the classroom, these initiatives are typically designed to appeal to teachers in all subject areas; in an attempt to provide globally relevant professional development opportunities, many educational leaders have failed to thoughtfully consider how technology can enhance learning experiences in the specific content areas. This study aims to fill this gap

in the research by exploring how multimodal composition, and specifically video, can be meaningfully implemented in the English Language Arts classroom to engage and support reluctant high school students and their writing abilities.

The Limitations of Process Pedagogy

Instructors in secondary education and higher education have engaged in a cyclical dialogue about how to effectively teach writing since the early stages of composition theory. While composition pedagogy has historically positioned instructors as assessors of finished writing products, the early 1960s marked a shift in the field to a more process-oriented approach to writing instruction. In order to provide educators with a foundation for effectively teaching and assessing student writing in the midst of the composition process, early process theorists Janet Emig, Donald Murray, and Peter Elbow researched and published extensively on the composing processes of students. While Emig's seminal study *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders* was one of the first pieces of writing to describe the writing process as a specific set of stages and steps, the later work of Murray and Elbow, both expressivist instructors and researchers in higher education, provided a more accurate representation of the cyclical and recursive processes that writers engage in throughout composition. In his essay "Teach Writing as a Process, Not Product," Donald Murray urges instructors to take a nonjudgmental stance as students discover their voices throughout the composition process: "We must respect our student for his potential truth and for his potential voice. We are coaches, encouragers, developers, creators of environments in which our students can experience the writing process for themselves" (5). Process pedagogy gives students the agency to

make mistakes and grow in the midst of their writing processes, and it challenges educators to support students throughout their construction of meaning and knowledge. As instructors in secondary and higher education continue to adopt a process-oriented approach to teaching writing, the hope is that students are empowered to find their voices and become lifelong writers.

Despite decades of research and publication on the process-approach to composition instruction, George Hillocks's meta-analysis on composition instruction at the secondary level, *Research on Written Composition*, found that teachers' pedagogical decisions regarding the instruction of writing largely remain focused on the final writing product. Even when teachers understand and support process pedagogy in theory, they struggle to move beyond evaluating students' final products.

Consequently, opponents to process theory claim that a process-approach to writing instruction has had little to no impact on student writing. In their 1999 *English Journal* article "Losing the Product in the Process," Baines, Baines, Stanley, and Kunkel assert that the process approach has actually had a negative impact on student writing because teachers are being too passive in their instruction: "the process has become so ubiquitous as to mean anything, or perhaps more precisely, it has come to mean almost nothing. Tragically, the art and soul of writing have been lost in the process" (72). Post-process composition theorists such as Thomas Kent hold a similar dissatisfaction with the widespread implementation of process pedagogy; post-process theorists argue that reducing the writing process to one singular method is irresponsible and incorrect, as writing is always interpretive and situated in a specific context. Today, many instructors

and researchers in the field of composition continue to wonder how an awareness of the process approach should impact teaching and learning in the writing classroom.

Multimodal Composition: A Potential Solution

It seems that the foundational work of Janet Emig, Donald Murray, and Peter Elbow on the writing process is being lost in translation as educators continue to implement process-centered instructional strategies without considering how new literacies such as video and social media complicate their students' interest in the traditional written composition process. In her article "Multimodal Composition and the Common Core State Standards," Bridget Dalton emphasizes the digital transformation and its impact on composition and communication:

> One of the biggest communication changes happening today is the shift from the printed word on a page to multiple modes of image, sound, movement, and text on a screen. The fixed display of the printed page is being transformed on the screen into an interactive, dynamic experience that can be manipulated across time and space by the reader/viewer and the author. (334)

Composition in the age of technology inherently includes multiple modes of digital communication. Dalton's research demonstrates that 21st century students perceive themselves as digital designers, and teachers need to provide opportunities for students to create in modes beyond traditional written text. Unfortunately, this shift has not drastically transformed instruction and pedagogy in the traditional high school English Language Arts classroom. While a relatively small number of innovative teachers at the secondary level have begun to implement digital composition into their instruction, the field of English Education as a whole is in its infancy in exploring the impact of modern

technology on the teaching of writing. However, research on digital and multimodal composition has been conducted in higher education writing courses.

In their 2015 study "A Bag Full of Snakes: Negotiating the Challenges of Multimodal Composition," DePalma and Alexander studied the multimodal composition processes of undergraduate and graduate students at a private religious university. They found that students were stretched by many obstacles unique to multimodal composition but also faced many rhetorical challenges that are apparent in any traditional writing task. Additionally, DePalma and Alexander emphasized the importance of multimodal and digital media in the 21st century classroom: "As new technologies steadily and incrementally reshape students' notions of rhetorical practice and composing processes, the need to understand writers' experiences in multimodal composition projects is increasingly apparent" (197).

In another study of multimodal composition within higher education, "Messy Problem-Exploring through Video in First-Year Writing: Assessing What Counts," VanKooten and Berkeley implemented and analyzed the impact of a video composing task for students in the first year college writing course. Reflecting on their research, VanKooten and Berkeley realized that the video composition created a rich learning experience for students: "What we found though, after the study was completed, was evidence of very complex processes of learning, evidence of learning that was *messy*. Students were learning to write and to compose in multiple modes, to explore and sometimes to solve compositional problems, and to articulate new knowledge" (152). VanKooten and Berkeley describe the process that students engaged in during multimodal composition as *problem-exploring*. In their article, VanKooten and Berkeley

cite Elizabeth Wardle's 2012 article "Creative Repurposing for Expansive Learning: Considering 'Problem-Exploring' and 'Answer-Getting' Dispositions in Individuals and Fields" when defining problem-exploring:

> What we saw very clearly amid the messiness of the student experiences we observed was that video composition opened up opportunities for problem-exploring, what Wardle (2012) called a disposition toward "curiosity, reflection, consideration of multiple possibilities, a willingness to engage in a recursive process of trial and error, and toward a recognition that more than one solution can 'work.'" (152)

VanKooten and Berkeley as well as Wardle's work supports the use of multimodal composition, and their studies demonstrates the stark contrast between the traditional learning experience of formulaic essay assignments and the creative classroom experience of multimodal composition. Their findings also support a need for students to engage in reflective writing and processing that increases their awareness of their own writerly decision-making; this reflective practice enables students to transfer their learning to other modes and contexts.

Using Talk to Promote and Assess Problem-Exploring

In various studies throughout higher education, the benefits of multimodal composition are well-documented. However, the value of student talk and collaboration as a part of that composing process, while occasionally mentioned, is not emphasized in most studies. In my experiences at the secondary level, talk is at the core of students' composition process; because I am interested in understanding students' ability to compose and create, talk became a priority in my research and instructional methodology. In *Using Discourse Analysis to Improve Classroom Interaction*, Rex and Schiller state, "talk is a learning technology more integral to teaching and more essential than paper and

pencil or electronics. Talk is key to classroom learning" (ix). Even though learning is

social, the traditional classroom prioritizes teacher talk over student discourse. Social

construction and collaborative learning are crucial elements to an innovative classroom

that promotes multimodal and collective composition. The authors of *Inspiring Dialogue*

argue that "talking to learn—and specifically how to talk to learn in and about the

English Language Arts—must be learned" (Juzwik et al. 13). Even if developing the

ability to engage in meaningful, constructive discourse seems like a natural process that

occurs over time, teachers need to equip students with the time, space, and tools

necessary to practice social construction through talk. When given the opportunity,

students use talk to "collectively make sense of course content as they contribute

meaningfully and substantially to the learning goals at hand" (Juzwik et al. 4). They also

construct knowledge, identity, and community through discourse. Because students make

meaning and collectively compose through talk, opportunities for talk should be

thoughtfully implemented, and student dialogue should be analyzed. Without careful

consideration of students' talk, much of their ability to compose and create will go

unnoticed.

Ultimately, what students say throughout the various contexts of the creative

process provides more accurate indicators of student potential to compose than only

assessing finished writing products. Ford-Connors, Robertson, and Paratore's 2016 article

"Classroom Talk as (In)Formative Assessment" argues that an observational teacher can

use dialogue to monitor and stretch student understanding:

> The knowledge gained through students' participation in dialogic exchanges with
> their teachers provides a view of students' evolving understandings and
> acquisition of content, which, in turn, influences teachers' instructional decisions
> and next steps. Assessment becomes 'in-formative' when the teacher turns the

observations and insights gathered during these interactions into more focused teaching actions and responses that address students' immediate learning needs. (56)

By providing space for student-to-student and student-to-teacher conversations in the classroom, teachers can promote collective creativity while simultaneously monitoring student growth and understanding of course content. If secondary teachers only consider students' final composition products during assessment, then they will miss the important meaning making—and mastery of course standards—that students demonstrate through talk.

Equipping Students for Today and the Future

After reflecting upon the culmination of my classroom experiences and review of previous literature, I anticipated that engagement in a collaborative video production process would genuinely captivate students to a greater extent than traditional written composition tasks. In this study, I attempted to leverage the power of the medium of video to develop students' abilities to read, write, think, and speak.

METHOD

In order to gain an authentic understanding of students' abilities to compose and create multimodally, I decided to conduct a qualitative research study in my own classroom that analyzed student talk in the midst of the video production process. This study emerged and evolved across time and in response to what I was seeing in my classroom and studying in my graduate coursework.

Over the summer months of 2017, I researched and explored my interest in video and its role in the classroom through the Ozarks Writing Project Summer Institute. Then, I further narrowed my focus in the fall when I took a graduate course specifically designed to assist teachers in action research. My original research question sought to explore how engaging in the video production process could impact student ownership of the writing process. However, my research focus ultimately shifted toward a specific analysis of the value of student talk during the video production process and its utility in revealing students' ability to compose and create knowledge.

Because this research study involved human subjects and was conducted in conjunction with Missouri State University, I submitted a research proposal and received approval from the Missouri State University Institutional Review Board (October 25, 2017; IRB-FY2018-296). I also gained approval to conduct this research study from my school district and building principal. All research was conducted in accordance with these agreements, including the collection of consent and assent letters from research participants and their guardians.

The video production task that students were asked to complete during this research study was aligned with our whole class reading of Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild*. In the book, the protagonist questions the necessity of human relationships and societal structure, and he eventually decides to live in solitude in the Alaskan wilderness. Because of this central theme in the novel, students' videos were required to explore some topic related to people and their relationships with others in their communities. This video production task, which I referred to as "The People Project," was completed collaboratively in small groups. To create the groups, I asked students for lists of classmates they would enjoy working with; using these requests, I put each student in a small group. Most groups consisted of three or four students. A handful of students made special requests to work alone on the project, and I allowed them to do so; however, I still assigned them to a small group, where they were able to discuss their ideas and receive feedback from their peers.

Ultimately, this research study took a total of eight class periods to complete. The first day of the research study was October 27, 2017, and the last day of the research study was November 21, 2017. On average, students were given between 30 and 45 minutes per class period to work on their video projects.

Research Site and Participants

I conducted this research study in my own classroom at an urban high school in Springfield, Missouri. According to 2017 data from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the school had 1,026 students and a free or reduced lunch rate of 62.3% at the time of the study. Additionally, the school's student

population was 80% Caucasian, 12% black, and 8% other; the rate of students in poverty and students of color that participated in this research study was slightly higher than these school averages.

The research participants in this study came from my three sections of Junior-level English Language Arts courses. In accordance with the high school block schedule, these sections met on alternating school days. Collectively, 39 students from these three sections participated in the research study. Two of the sections were regular English III classes, and one section was English IIIC. English IIIC is an English Language Arts course that focuses on career readiness and communication skills; typically, the students in this course have not had previous success in English Language Arts courses or are not planning on attending a four-year university after graduation. Given the nature of my Junior-level classes, participants in this research study had varied interest and ability in skills related to English Language Arts.

Generally, the students who participated in this study are not motivated by academic success or achievement; as a teacher, this makes focus and motivation in the classroom a significant challenge. While the majority of my students are not motivated by traditional academic rigor, they do have unique interests, passions, and needs. Many of them are actively involved in athletics, music, drama, and other extracurricular activities. If students are not involved in activities, they typically work jobs at local fast food restaurants, clothing stores, call centers, and warehouses to help sustain themselves or support their families. Sadly, many of my students are also impacted by drug and alcohol abuse, mental health illnesses, and social issues such as racism, bullying, abuse, and harassment. All of these factors compromise their ability to focus on their academic and

cognitive development. Consequently, students perceive their time at school as disconnected and secondary to their other interests and needs. While it is difficult for me to remain hopeful and positive in the midst of my students' seemingly blatant lack of engagement or interest, gaining an awareness of my students' realities outside of the classroom helps me empathize with them and understand their actions inside the classroom.

Data Collection Procedures

In order to adequately analyze how student talk throughout the video production process can reveal students' potential to compose and create knowledge, I had to capture student talk in a variety of modes. Specifically, I collected data through audio recordings of group talk, daily video process logs, three phases of process reflection prompts, field notes, and student artifacts. Each of these data sources represent a different way in which student talk was collected throughout this process.

Because I was interested in understanding students' authentic abilities to compose and create, capturing students' in-the-moment decision-making and processing was crucial to this study. Consequently, I audio recorded in-class group conversations as frequently as possible. When students began discussing their video projects, I placed audio recording devices in the middle of each table. Collecting students' authentic conversations was key to this study, as it allowed me to truly understand their creative potential across time. Through the audio recording of language-in-use, I wanted to gain a "more complex perspective for understanding whether and how students are learning" (Rex and Schiller xii). Compared to all other methods for data collection, recording the

audio of student conversations, both while I was involved in the dialogue and when I was not, was the closest I could get to capturing their authentic cognitive processes and creative potential.

At the end of each class period during the research study, students were asked to record and reflect upon their work through the completion of video process logs. On the video process logs, students responded to the following series of questions:

1. What did you work on today? What decisions did you and your group make? How do you feel about this work?

2. What were some challenges that you faced today? How did you overcome these challenges?

3. What are your plans for next time? What will you do to ensure the success of this work?

The process logs were designed to capture the abstract thoughts and decisions of students as they engaged in the video production process; therefore, the process logs provided students with a place to reflect upon the challenges they faced, the decisions they made, and their plans for future class periods. Similar to a writer's notebook, the video process logs also allowed me to track the progression of student ideas, decisions, and actions taken toward accomplishing the goal of producing a video.

To capture students' perspectives toward their written and video composition processes, I collected their reflections through a series of prompts over three phases. The first phase of the process reflective prompts asked students to reflect on their composition processes during a previous writing assignment from this school year. The second phase of the process reflection asked students to reflect on the video composition process they engaged in during this research study. In the third phase of process reflection, students were asked four questions that challenged them to reflect upon their video production

experience and make connections between the video production process and the writing process. Because the three phases of process reflection prompts were originally intended to compare students' decision-making and writerly engagement during traditional writing tasks and video composition, this data source became less useful as the focus of the study shifted toward an analysis of student talk; however, the three phases of process reflections provided valuable information about how students perceive themselves as composers of meaning through writing and video.

During each day of the research study, I closely observed my classroom and made note of student activity and engagement in my field notes. Specifically, I sought to capture student comments, actions, and levels of engagement during their video production processes. By observing my students and collecting field notes throughout the process of data collection, I was able to consistently maintain a dual identity as a teacher and a researcher—an insider and an outsider—in the classroom (Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein 52). Through the collection of field notes, this perspective allowed me to capture important observations about teaching and learning throughout this study.

Throughout their video production processes, students created a variety of artifacts that provided additional data for my research inquiry. Specifically, I invited students to use a video proposal form and video storyboard (Appendix) to help them with the preproduction phase of video composition. In addition to these artifacts, I also collected the video clips and final video products that students created by the end of the research study. These artifacts were crucial in providing additional information about students' ability and potential to compose and create throughout the video production process.

Because I performed this research in the context of my own classroom and student attendance was inconsistent, the amount of data I collected using these methods varied each day. In the tables below, I have articulated how many individual pieces of data I collected throughout the research study. I collected a specific quantifiable amount of the audio recordings and video process logs each day (Table 1). Because the three phases of process reflections, student artifacts such as the video proposal form and video storyboard, and field notes were gathered at various points throughout the study, I have only included the quantity of data collected for each source (Table 2).

Table 1. Data Collection: Audio Recordings and Video Process Logs

	Data Source and Amount Collected	
Day	Audio Recordings	Video Process Logs
1	9	35
2	5	30
3	8	33
4	3	36
5	1	29
6	0	29
7	1	32
8	1	32

Table 2. Data Collection: Process Reflections, Field Notes, and Student Artifacts

Data Source	Amount Collected
Process Reflections: Phase One	37
Process Reflections: Phase Two	27
Process Reflections: Phase Three	35
Field Notes	65
Student Artifacts: Video Proposal Forms	13
Student Artifacts: Video Storyboards	13
Student Artifacts: Final Video Products	10

Data Analysis Procedures

During and after the research study, I analyzed the various sources of data to develop a grounded theory about how student talk during the multimodal composing process is a critical indicator of student potential to create. Grounded theory is "a research method in which the theory is developed from the data" (Shagoury and Power 143). In contrast with research that responds to a predetermined hypothesis, my data analysis sought to identify and theorize what was occurring in the classroom through a careful analysis of the data itself. In other words, my theories and findings surfaced from the data collected during the research study.

To effectively develop my grounded theory, I had to account for patterns and themes across all of my data sources; I captured these emerging themes through open coding (Shagoury and Power 145). As patterns in my data emerged, I labeled, categorized, and grouped them using codes. These frameworks for data analysis allowed me the flexibility and openness to identify and track common trends, including confirming and disconfirming evidence, within each of my data sources. For example, I

listened to each audio recording and open coded the progression of students' discussions by noting consistent uses for talk. Of all my data sources, the audio recordings of group talk are the most genuine representation of students' cognitive processes and creative potential; while students were aware of the audio recording devices, they did not seem to filter their conversations. This data is raw, and many interesting, and unexpected, themes emerged after open coding the groups' conversations. If I had listened to these conversations with closed codes that were looking for specific confirming evidence, I would have likely been frustrated by the seemingly unpredictable nature of their group talk. Remaining open to all data and evidence through coding was crucial to this study, as I did not know what I would observe in my classroom until after data collection and analysis had begun.

My findings also emerged with the benefit of my ability to triangulate emerging themes across data sources. Triangulation is "the use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, or theories (at least three) to confirm findings" (Shagoury and Power 144). Because my data sources included various forms, themes gained further support and credibility if they appeared in multiple data sources.

Instead of waiting until after the data collection phase of the research study was over to begin analysis, I made a focused effort to analyze data as it was collected. This allowed me to adjust my data collection as necessary. To assist in this effort, I wrote weekly one-page memos to myself during the research study. Memo writing provided a space for me to capture my initial responses to data, focus my research inquiry, and practice articulating my early findings (Shagoury and Power 150). In addition to memo writing, I also simultaneously collected and open coded data from all of my data sources.

For example, I began using my field notes to capture moments that related to consistent themes as they were unfolding in the classroom. After I initially observed and captured these moments, I returned to my field notes later in the day to analyze these recordings and identify their relation to other patterns and themes in the data. Through the data analysis frameworks and tools of grounded theory, open coding, triangulation, and memo writing, I was able to identify common themes across all of data sources.

FINDINGS

My analysis of student talk led to three main findings: the video composition task was relevant, provided choice, and promoted creativity; student collaboration was genuine and driven by cyclical, creative conversations; and my role as teacher facilitator and fellow problem-explorer was crucial for student success.

Relevant Tasks Provide Choice and Promote Creative Composition

Over the course of this research study, representative cases from every data source revealed the importance of an authentic task that is relevant, provides choices, and allows for genuine creativity. In the traditional English Language Arts classroom, "teachers are the holders of knowledge, and it is their job to transmit this knowledge to students, who are expected to sit still, not talk unless called on, and concentrate on instruction that many find boring and frustrating" (Strickland 7). These classrooms are defined by composition assignments that require students to respond to given prompts with predetermined, formulaic essays. Their success is measured solely by their finished product; in other words, did they meet the specific essay requirements set by the instructor? These tasks, while potentially helpful in teaching specific essay structures and grammatical conventions, rarely engage students in an authentic creative process. Formulaic writing assignments are especially detrimental to students who are not school-oriented or motivated by gaining teacher approval, improving writing ability, or earning high grades. If reluctant writers respond to these essay prompts at all, they typically type

out a single draft and submit it with little interest in exploring previous research, artfully crafting their ideas, or rereading for revision and editing.

Unfortunately, I have many students who have an apathetic perception of English Language Arts. In fact, student responses to the first phase of reflective prompts during this research study, which asked about their processes for composing their most recent piece of writing, demonstrate a widespread lack of engagement in actions crucial to a successful composition process:

"I spent 5 minutes of research that meant nothing to my writing."

"I didn't prewrite."

"I just started writing."

"I didn't go back to rewrite."

"I did absolutely nothing after I finished writing."

Despite my best attempts to encourage student engagement in thoughtful composition processes that produce quality pieces of writing, these responses clearly reveal that students did not internalized my prior instruction. Even if students received my message that good writing requires a continuous cycle of thinking, planning, drafting, revising, and editing, their actions do not reflect this understanding. Instead, their actions and responses reflect an unfortunate truth: students do not believe that the writing they construct in my English Language Arts classroom is important enough for their consistent and undivided attention. When students are questioning the value and importance of their education, repeatedly asking them to complete writing assignments that have no direct impact on their interests and perspectives of the world could cause more harm than good. These assignments reinforce their belief that school is abstract, boring, and irrelevant.

Because of their repeated exposure to assignments that have little direct impact on their lives, students have underdeveloped abilities to use writing as a way to explore problems and engage in a creative process. On the daily video process logs from this research study, students consistently mentioned the value of work ethic, focus, and staying on task when attempting to overcome the challenges they face. While these truisms are not inherently negative responses, they demonstrate that students have internalized the previous coaching from teachers during tasks that have little authentic interest to the students.

Sadly, I have implemented numerous written assignments over the course of my own teaching practice that did not authentically interest students. In my first year of teaching, I asked students to write a handful of literary analysis essays over novels and short stories. Even though these assignments were aligned with course standards, they had little practical application to students' lives. Compounding the challenge of engaging students through literature, my unimaginative academic essay assignments led to a classroom void of passion and interest. Is it possible, I wondered, to create situations in the classroom where students are so intrigued by exploring a problem and accurately articulating their ideas that working hard and staying on task is a natural result of their creative decision-making process?

The Relevant Task. During the multimodal composing task in this research study, I asked students to create a video that explores the relationship between people and their communities. Students' videos explored, among other topics, the impact of familial relationships, drug abuse, racial discrimination, mental health, positive friendships, bullying, homelessness, kindness, character, and school community. One group decided

to make a video about bullying solely because they each had direct experiences with the topic. Students were given ultimate freedom to choose the genre, topic, audience, purpose, and form of their video, as long as it explored some idea under the umbrella of people.

Since every person has experienced the positive and negative impacts of living within a local, regional, national, and international community, this performance assessment was relevant to most students. Additionally, the task provided students with the opportunity to investigate areas of humanity that were specifically interesting to them. Students' interest in their topics and engagement in the video production process was largely due to my use of purposeful task analysis and backward design when planning the project. Instead of preparing a series of instructional activities for students to complete, I challenged students with the performance assessment of video composition (Wiggins and McTighe 17). The challenge of video production inspired students to take ownership of their own learning processes, and the freedom of topic choice for this performance assessment multiplied students' interest in the project. In response to a prompt on the third phase of process reflection, one student said she enjoyed creating the video because her group "actually got to make decisions and had more freedom on what goes in our video." In response to the same prompt, another student said, "we got to decide what we wanted and how we wanted it to look." These two statements are representative of my students' collective desire to have freedom in their topic choice; students responded to this choice with authentic engagement in the video task.

An Environment of Creative Problem-Exploring. Due to the collective interest in the various video topics and the emphasis on the culminating performance assessment,

the video task created a classroom environment that promoted genuine problem-exploring (Wardle). The evidence that most clearly displays this problem-exploring environment is found in the audio recordings of group talk. During the creative conversations with their peers, students demonstrated an intrinsic interest in brainstorming and exploring ideas, synthesizing knowledge, considering bias and audience, and investigating the impact of specific video composition decisions on achieving their desired purpose. These creative decisions happened cyclically, as students explored the various considerations necessary during video composition.

In contrast with the learning environment that is created by the formulaic essay assignment, the video production task provided clear indicators of student ability and potential to compose knowledge. In fact, students were so eager to engage in the video production process during this research study that they begged me to give them more time for the work. On their daily video process logs, students consistently reported positive responses to the video production task. On the final phase of process reflection prompts, 94% of students said that they would rather engage in a video composition assignment than a written assignment. Some of their reasons for preferring the video task over a traditional written assignment include:

"It didn't keep us in a room the whole time, we got to move around."

"Video is a more creative form of art."

"It was active and fun."

"Creating the video was more fun and hands on."

"It was a valuable lesson and I hope to do it again."

"It gave us a chance to be more creative while getting our point across."

"I enjoyed doing something new."

"The work didn't seem so boring and I was able to move around and collaborate." Clearly, students responded well to a task that was relevant in mode and topic, provided them with creative choices, and ignited genuine problem-exploring. The various forms of talk they developed throughout this process provided authentic spaces for me to identify and assess their skills and potential as composers of knowledge. Their talk, a component of the creative process that was largely underutilized in my previous attempts to engage students in the composition process, truly became the key to classroom learning and engagement (Rex and Schiller). In this chapter, various examples of talk throughout the creative video composition process will reveal that students were authentically engaged in creating a video that effectively communicated their ideas to their chosen audience.

Making Connections Beyond the Classroom. Due to their sincere interest in their topics and the form of composition required for this task, students consistently considered and discussed the broad impact and connection their video could have to the world beyond the classroom. Specifically, students were eager to include people outside of our English Language Arts class in their video production process. Over the course of this research study, multiple students mentioned asking fellow students, teachers, parents, siblings, and community members if they had anything to contribute toward their video. Students would naturally consider if people in their life had experience, knowledge, or expertise to offer about the topic of their video; then, many student groups invited these people to answer questions about the topic on camera. A few student groups mentioned the importance of gathering input from people they are not direct acquaintances with to avoid bias. Students also demonstrated an audience awareness during this task that is not

30

typically present in traditional written assignments. As students recorded and edited their videos, they frequently mentioned sharing their videos with specific people outside of our classroom.

This task, which encouraged students to bridge the gap between the classroom and the world, proved to be a more motivating learning experience than a traditional, formulaic writing assignment that rarely reaches an audience beyond the teacher. While students organically made connections to their broader communities, the task could have been even more successful if students were given a truly authentic audience. For this video, I asked students to choose their own audience; how would the authenticity and engagement during this learning opportunity be impacted if students were crafting videos for a more specific purpose and audience such as an advertisement for business or organization, a PSA for the school community, or an informational program for children? While providing students with an authentic, specific audience might have limited student choice, students may have more closely considered their creative decisions when crafting videos to meet the demands of their specific audience.

Revealing the Potential to Compose. In addition to being relevant and encouraging real-world connections, the video task students engaged in during this research study clearly revealed students' ability to make the creative decisions necessary during composition. By demonstrating these writerly moves during their video production processes, students displayed mastery of course standards and provided a framework for future growth and mini-lessons on specific skills within composition. The most common writerly move observed during this research study was students embracing and taking ownership of a cyclical, recursive creative process. Throughout the video

production process, students made a variety of important considerations regarding the specific elements of video composition.

For example, many student groups spent additional time brainstorming and conducting research before they began producing their own video. During his research exploration of the impact community has on mental health, one student said that the resource he was currently reading "just adds to what the other sites were saying." In other words, this student captured the larger narrative of his topic through a review of previous literature. Other students engaged in voluntary freewriting to gather their thoughts and ideas about their video.

Another group demonstrated their ability to consider how their plans for revision and editing might impact the amount of interviews they need to record for their video:

Student 1: I mean I guess we can ask the twelve and then like…

Student 2: …Like figure out which ones we actually want to put in there.

Student 3: Yeah.

Student 1: Yeah.

Students 2: Because we can always like cut them out if we want. That's what editing is for.

After filming throughout the school, many student groups would return to class and watch their videos; if the audio or lighting was not up to their creative standards, they would rerecord the video clips. This revealed a natural ability to revise and rewrite for improvement in the midst of composition. In addition to revealing student potential to create, engaging in this process also improved student understanding of the cyclical writing process. The following response was given during phase three of the process reflection, which asked students to discuss how engaging in video production helped

them as writers: "This helped me understand that I don't have to get my writing right on the first try. I can always edit and add more insight." Through the cyclical, creative process that is video production, students also demonstrated an ability to solve problems. While not every group was able to overcome their challenges, many groups diagnosed and fixed technological issues with their video enabled smartphones and the editing software on their laptops. Students also faced and overcame creative problems such as writer's block. All of these skills, which are also present in successful writers, reveal an authentic ability to engage in a cyclical, creative composition process.

Another writerly move that was promoted through this task, and not by my mandate or prompting, was students' use of mentor texts. Students frequently explored videos on YouTube and other media outlets to inspire their own video compositions. By borrowing from other videos, or mentor texts, students considered how their videos contribute to a larger, ongoing narrative. For example, one group discussed borrowing video styles from a variety of genres during an early creative discussion:

> Student 1: I said we could do like a voice over, so kinda like that last video we watched.
>
> Student 2: Yeah.
>
> Student 1: Or we could maybe do like a news report, have someone stand in front of like a green screen. Or I said we could, like, make fun of a 1980s PSA.
>
> Student 2: Oh like a parody…
>
> Student 1: Or we could do a cartoon. I think it would be funny to do like a spoof of an old 1980s cartoon.
>
> Student 2: Yeah I feel like that would be great because we kind of like parodied a little bit, like made a little bit fun of it, but at the same time we did something kinda similar where we were, you know, talking about community and people getting together, but do it in the style of how they did, like, 40 years ago.

The same group eventually discussed and implemented a post-credit scene that was inspired by the popular Marvel movies. When discussing his video with me, another student mentioned borrowing directly from a popular video form that thousands of people have composed and uploaded to YouTube:

> Student 1: I could do what other people on YouTube do, uh, they do notecards. Instead of talking, they show the notecards that have the story written on them.
>
> Teacher: Oh, really? Yeah. I don't really know what you're talking about, but yeah.
>
> Student 1: Here, I'll show ya... they are called notecard confessions.
>
> Teacher: Oh okay, yeah, that's cool!
>
> Student 1: Yeah, I wouldn't even have to have noise in it unless I could put, like, music in the background.

An effective English Language Arts assignment should be relevant, provide choice, and inspire creativity. Unfortunately, tasks that meet these criteria are not the foundation of most English Language Arts curricula. In the video composition task during this research study, students demonstrated an authentic interest in their topics, naturally explored problems and ideas, and made organic connections to the world beyond the classroom. Because of their sincere interest in their videos, students' ability to compose and create was revealed through authentic creative processing. For students that are not school-oriented or motivated by traditional learning opportunities, these outcomes alone demonstrate the value of relevant tasks that provide choice and promote genuine creativity.

Collaboration Grounded in Creative Discourse

As students engaged in the video production process during this research study, it became clear that their group talk was the main vehicle for creative exploring and decision-making. The social, collective, creative process that occurred during this video composition task provided a stark contrast to the quiet, individualized writing process that typically occurs in an English Language Arts classroom. Even when small writing groups and peer revision strategies are enacted during written assignments, the collaboration can be disingenuous. During this study, students were eager to discuss their options and use discourse to engage in the video production process. This group talk was only made possible through organic collaboration and an awareness that every student had something to contribute to his or her group. By analyzing this talk, I was able to better understand students' abilities to compose and create knowledge.

The Versatility of Talk. Early on in the video production process, students used talk to brainstorm ideas, assign group roles, and consider the implications of their creative choices. It was consistently evident that students perceived the talk itself as a tool for creative problem-exploring. In a handful of audio recordings, the students begin the class period with a few vague ideas about their video composition and finish the class period with concrete plans and ideas to pursue further. The audio recordings capture genuine collective composition, as students questioned, challenged, and extended their fellow group members' ideas. Their discussions authentically demonstrated the recursive and cyclical nature of the creative process. As students navigated the decisions necessary to create their video, they frequently shifted from one purpose to another. Because multiple students were working together to create one video, they each contributed their

own unique thoughts and perspectives. This variability promoted a chaotic but rich video production process for each group.

Students also recognized the importance of this early group talk. For example, one student articulated, through his daily video process log, how his group was able to work together to overcome a challenge: "Finding ideas was a little difficult. We talked it over as a group to overcome them." Another student mentioned that his group "talked in depth" in order to figure out the specifics of their video topic. A student's reflection from the third phase of reflective prompting also demonstrates the value of group talk: "We got to work in groups and it made thinking of ideas and actually executing those ideas easier." These are just a few examples of students identifying the crucial role that their group's conversation played in the success of their video project.

In addition to an awareness of the importance of group talk, students also immediately embraced the authentic collaboration that would be required for this video. Despite the fact that the video process logs were completed individually at the end of each class period and included prompts directed toward the singular "you," students consistently responded in writing using the plural pronoun "we." This demonstrates that students understood and embraced the true collaborative nature of their work.

Similarly, students noted, through their group talk and video process logs, the difficulties that absenteeism contributed to their groups' progress. Over the course of this study, student absences were caused by field trips, illness, school discipline, and truancy. While this complicated the video production process of all groups, it motivated students to attend class consistently. When one student realized that there was an upcoming field trip, he said, "I hope that isn't the day we show the videos to the class. I don't want to

miss it." When students were gone, their group members frequently contacted them via text message or social media to investigate their whereabouts and gather their input on the project. Chronic absenteeism significantly impacts the teaching and learning at high schools in urban and impoverished areas, and this video composition task was not immune to these impacts; however, this research study demonstrated how a collaborative, engaging task could be a motivating factor for students to attend school consistently.

The Impact of Scaffolding. Another theme that emerged through analysis and open coding of student group talk involved the content of students' collaborative conversations; student discussion was consistently grounded in the scaffolding of short-term goals and objectives. These short-term objectives came in the form of two preproduction tasks: the video proposal form and the video storyboard. To demonstrate their preparedness, students were required to gain my approval on both of these documents before they could move forward with filming and producing their video. Consequently, students used these documents to propel their early conversations and collective decision-making.

The video proposal form asked students to describe the topic, audience, and purpose of their video, discuss the production details, and communicate any questions they had for me about the project. After students completed the video proposal form, they were given a storyboard. The storyboard served as a place for students to plan and draw each scene of their video; students were also asked to include specific description and dialogue on their storyboard. While a small number of groups perceived these documents as relatively unimportant, the majority of groups took ownership of these early objectives. The video proposal form served many functions, and one of them was to

encourage deep, meaningful conversation about the big ideas behind their videos at the beginning of the production process. Many group conversations on the first few days of the video composition task solely involved the consideration of topic, purpose, and audience. Through these lenses, students were able to make decisions about the foundational elements of their video before venturing into specifics about video craft. Another function of the video proposal form was to provide students with a way to capture and catalogue their previous progress and conversations. For example, one student group began the third day of work with this exchange:

> Student 1: So what are we gonna do first?
>
> Student 2: I forgot what we decided to do.
>
> Student 3: Look at the sheet.
>
> Student 2: Oh yeah. We were gonna interview people.
>
> Student 3: Yeah about who your best friend is and if you got that one person you can talk to. Basically friends because throughout life you are going to need a friend.

Ultimately, the video proposal form gave students an opportunity to collectively reflect and rehearse their decisions before moving on to the storyboard. Because the completion of the video proposal form was the direct outcome of students' initial collective conversations, this scaffold taught students the value of pausing long enough to engage in meaningful talk before taking action.

The video storyboard motivated student conversation of specific video composition decisions. Through the completion of the storyboard, students collectively discussed where they would film, how they would film, who they would film, and what they would do during postproduction and editing regarding title slides, transitions, and

music. By asking students to make these decisions on the storyboard before they began filming, student conversations were rich with dialogue about specific video composition decisions. Students took ownership of the storyboard, and perceived it as a helpful resource for their production process. For example, student 3 in this group emphasized the fact that the storyboard was a resource for their group, not an assignment that needed to be aligned with the teacher's standards or expectations:

Student 1: So what should I draw?

Student 2: Draw whoever is going to do the speech and the other person.

Student 3: Just do it. Dude it doesn't matter how it looks. This is for us.

Student 1: Should I draw like four people and then a person recording?

Student 3: Yeah. Yeah.

The following group had mixed perceptions of the value of the storyboard, but student 2 eventually convinced student 1 of the importance of discussing and confirming their video composition decisions before they were actually recording video:

Student 1: It doesn't matter. We'll figure it out when we actually start doing stuff.

Student 2: We have to figure it out now so we have this down.

Completing the storyboard also challenged groups to discuss specific editing decisions early in the video production process. The following group realized that they needed to decide how they were going to shoot and edit their video before they began filming. This transcription demonstrates the deep, complex, cyclical, and collective thinking that occurred during work on the video storyboard:

Student 1: And we could also have music in our video.

Student 2: Yeah.

Student 1: Like find a song.

Student 2: We could do like a really sad song for people.

Student 3: (singing) In the arms of an angel… (laughter)

Student 1: And then have it like slowly progress in... We could have it like be slow and sad and then it can progress to, like, happy since they have been through it midway through it.

Student 3: Okay, so, I think it should be like the title and then have question one on it. Like, have you ever experienced or witnessed bullying?

Student 1: Yeah and then the next one can be the film of them saying that.

Student 3: Yeah.

Student 1: Or I feel like… how… cause if we do just like question one and then have them answer question one and then stop it there…

Student 3: It's gonna be really short.

Student 1: Yeah. And then question two and that's gonna be more extra work for us to do…

Student 3: To like go through and edit it.

Student 1: Yeah and like cut it at the certain spots where we think they ended that, you know?

Student 2: Wait, are you meaning like we ask one question and then have footage of every single person answering it and then we go to question two and then they all answer it?

Student 3: Yeah.

Student 1: Yeah.

Student 2: Okay. That makes sense.

Student 3: It's gonna be kinda hard to edit…

Student 1: That's a lot.

Student 2: Yeah, that's what I was thinking.

Student 1: And like, if we mess up, what are we gonna do? Like, I don't know how to come back from that. I mean I have only edited stuff a couple of times. I'm not like a pro…

Student 2: Yeah. Yeah.

In addition to a demonstration of genuine social construction and collaboration, this short exchange reveals students in deep consideration of how their early filming decisions could impact their ability to edit and finish the video. Their discussion begins with a request about the presence of a specific genre of music and quickly transitions to a period of questioning, considering, and exploring how to best film and group the various interviews they will conduct. Their video storyboard provided a place for them to rehearse these early decisions collectively, and each student openly contributed their ideas to the discussion. As their conversation continued, the students were able to come to a conclusion about how they wanted to move forward:

Student 3: I guess we could split them up into, like, different groups or whatever, like we had two groups of people that we asked if they had ever experienced or witnessed, and these are the people that had experienced…

Student 1: Assuming that we'll have two separate groups.

Student 3: Yeah. These people are the ones that have experienced it and these are the people that have witnessed it and then we could contrast them, like compare them, sorry, like compare the difference like how they…

Student 1: Yeah.

Student 3: I don't know how to do that though.

Student 1: You could just be like... like, question, answer, you know, like a short clip of them answering that question. Or, we could just do, put the main questions on one slide, and then slowly go through them throughout the video. And then we'll say when the next question is coming up, or like put it as a little caption at one of the slides on the previous slide saying that question two will be coming up for either side of the story.

Student 3: Yeah, so when we're recording it we can say "okay, so next question" like that and then it'll cut it off at that part and then go to the next question and then have the people answer it.

(Teacher approaches and sits at table. Student 1 directs talk toward teacher.)

Student 1: We don't know how to write this down. We know how to say it out loud, but we don't know how to write it down.

Teacher: Okay, so say it out loud to me and maybe I can try to help.

Over the course of this conversation, the students in this group demonstrated many of the types of talk that, according to the authors of *Inspiring Dialogue*, are crucial to constructive discourse in the English Language Arts classroom: students used talk to speculate, imagine, hypothesize, narrate, argue, reason, justify, explain, ask questions, and analyze and solve problems (Juswik et al. 14). Additionally, students actively listened to and considered the viewpoints of their classmates. When I approached the table at the end of their discussion, student 1 mentioned how difficult it is to articulate their collective conversation and decision-making on the storyboard. Regardless of what plans or decisions were ultimately composed on the video storyboards, this short-term objective served its function as a motivator of deep, specific, and crucial conversation. In other words, the storyboard became a vehicle and scaffold for the student conversations that prepared them for the filming and editing of their videos.

The Presence of Social Talk. While the collaborative group talk was primarily focused on the video task, student's collective discourse occasionally wandered to topics unrelated to their work. By nature, high school students are social. This truth was prevalent in my field notes and the audio recordings of group talk. Students' conversations frequently cycled between on task and off task banter. At first, I perceived the emergence of this trend as disconfirming evidence. Many traditional indicators of

quality teaching emphasize the percentage of students engaged and on task, so student conversation entirely unrelated to course content would not be encouraged by administrators and other educational professionals. If teacher evaluators were to have entered my classroom and observed groups of students discussing matters unrelated to the video project, they would have categorized this dialogue as an unproductive use of classroom time. However, this dialogic cycle did not hinder the success of the student groups. As if their informal discussions served as a sort of writing journal, students used these conversations to relax and approach the video task with new perspectives. By analyzing these off topic conversations in the context of the video project as a whole, it is clear that students relied on these cyclical conversations to establish emotional and intellectual comfort and freedom within their groups.

The audio recordings of group talk revealed much about the creative abilities of students, but they ultimately demonstrated genuine student engagement in the video task. Students repeatedly discussed their interest in creating the best video possible, and there was an observable level of effort and engagement in this creative process. While this effort and engagement might not have transferred to quality finished products for all groups, it did demonstrate students' capabilities in exploring a problem, thinking critically and creatively, and collaborating with their peers to accomplish a collective goal.

Teacher as Facilitator and Fellow Problem-Explorer

During this research study, my role shifted away from a traditional lecturer and essay assessor and toward a creative facilitator and fellow problem-explorer. For me, the

most fascinating theme that emerged from the audio recordings was the impact that my conferences with student groups had students' creative decision-making processes. As students worked, I joined in on their conversations through brief conferences with each group. Typically, my first question asked students to provide an update of where they were in their creative processing and thinking. By simply asking students for an update, each group was provided with an opportunity to synthesize the collective decisions that their group had made over the course of their conversations. Many times, students would decide on something just before I sat down with them, and our conference gave them a fresh audience to listen and respond to their ideas. Then, I would ask questions that caused them to rethink, extend, or consider other options, and students naturally defended their creative decisions together. For example, the following group conversation took place after students had spent over ten minutes discussing potential topics for their video:

Student 1: I really feel like it should just be about friendship. That's what it really should be.

Student 2: Okay. So what are you thinking in terms of that?

Student 3: How… let's see... how they…

Student 1: Like you always have that one friend you can go to no matter what.

Student 2: Yeah. Even after you don't talk to them for like a year they're still there.

Student 1: They're still there for you to talk to you no matter what.

Student 2: Okay, so…

(Teacher sits down at table and joins conversation)

Teacher: So what are we thinking?

Student 1: Friendship.

Teacher: Okay. What specifically are we thinking?

Student 2: Like that one go-to friend.

Teacher: Okay…

At this point in my conference with this group, I had asked the students for an update on their video concept and they provided one. However, their vision lacked specificity and direction. As I continued to ask questions and challenge the group, Student 2, an outspoken leader in the class, simultaneously clarified the groups' ideas and challenged her fellow students to consider their video from multiple angles:

Student 2: Yeah. So like that friend who you've been through nothing together or you've been through everything together. You can not talk for a year, but the moment you text them they're there... like... right? Isn't that what we are thinking?

Student 1: Yeah.

Student 3: Yeah.

Teacher: Okay. So what is the video going to look like?

Student 1: Just have like multiple recordings of different people talking about their friendships and like if they always have that one...

Student 2: Are we going to do like an interview or like a skit?

Student 1: I feel like we should just have like an interview. It would probably be easier on us too. Like a skit you've got to get all of these ideas together and make sure you have all the stuff you need for it.

Student 2: Okay. Okay.

Teacher: So, it is going to focus on interviews. What questions might you ask people?

Student 1: Like one of them could be like do you always have that one friend you can go to no matter what it's about…

Student 2: Do you know who your go-to friend is? I don't know, we need to write those questions down.

45

Teacher: Yeah. Yeah. But that's something to think about. So it's gonna be mostly interviews of people and about their friends.

Student 2: Are we all gonna like be interviewed? Like are we all gonna be in the video or do we all wanna be behind the scenes and interview other people?

Student 3: Yeah, we should interview other people.

Teacher: Alright, well keep thinking about this. I think you all have a good start.

These group conferences consistently mimicked conversations that might occur in a creative workplace between a supervisor and a group of employees. The creative recall and response provided students with an opportunity to synthesize and get feedback on their ideas. Instead of students nervously trying to meet my expectations for the video, I demonstrated my sincere interest in listening to students as they explored their ideas and made creative decisions. In addition to creative conferences, I facilitated student reflection through the daily video process logs and other short-term objectives. These opportunities for prompted reflection provided a place for students to continuously synthesize and collect their ideas, and they promoted various forms of meaningful talk toward the video composition task. Ultimately, these group conferences and reflections were effective in supporting students because I was not the intended audience of their videos. Instead of entering into their creative spaces with the authority of assessment, I served as an interlocutor that promoted creative freedom and discussion. This clear repositioning made students more comfortable to engage in creative conversations with everyone involved in the process, including myself.

Modeling Creative Discourse. As the research project progressed, I noticed students taking more ownership of the creative conversations within their group. Students became comfortable with the process of problem-exploring, and they consistently

questioned, challenged, and extended the ideas that were posed by other members of the group. While some of this growth in ability to consider and explore ideas through collective conversation likely came naturally over time, I noticed students making dialectical moves that were similar to the ones I had made during my conferences with student groups. As students witnessed me think out loud during conferences, they internalized some of my creative processing ability and language. An example of this internalization is present in the transcription of my conference with the student group above. Within the same conversation that I asked the group clarifying questions, Student 2 asked her fellow group members two questions about their video plans. Both questions immediately followed a question or comment that I had made. As if my verbal considerations provided a model for their group members to question, challenge, and extend each other's thinking, this group was able to continue their creative conversation without my continuous presence.

If I were not focused on student talk throughout this process, I would have completely missed the opportunity to consider the impact of my voice on the creative composition processes of student groups. While teacher talk is typically used for the transmission of procedures, directions, readings, and lectures (Juzwik et al. 22), my voice during this research study was used most often for deliberation and dialogue with students. During my dialogic exchanges with groups of students, I was able to ask thought-provoking questions, use student responses to build and connect ideas, and encourage students to collaborate and socially construct meaning together. Through these conversations, students were given a model for engagement in productive, creative, cyclical dialogue. Joining student conversations, and analyzing audio recordings of

teacher-to-student and student-to-student talk throughout this process, repeatedly demonstrated the value of authentic dialogical modeling and instruction.

Responding to Emerging Challenges. Throughout the first few class periods of the video production process, I facilitated thinking and group conversation through conferences and the short-term objectives of the video proposal form and the video storyboard. These conversations and resources provided the scaffolding necessary for students to have success with the early phases of the video composition process. Unfortunately, significant hindrances in the creative process began to arise when students ventured into the more technical aspects of video production and postproduction. Students reported these emerging challenges on their daily video process logs. The table below displays how many students responded that they did not experience any challenges during every class period of the research study (Table 3). Because inconsistent attendance varied the number of process logs collected each day, I have also included the how many students reported facing challenges during their work.

Table 3. Emerging Challenges Throughout Video Composition

| | Student Responses | |
Day	No Challenges	Challenges
1	9	26
2	5	20
3	8	25
4	3	33
5	1	28
6	0	29
7	1	31
8	1	31

According to this data, students experienced more difficulties, obstacles, and challenges in the latter stages of the video production process than in the early stages. While this trend could be linked to a number of factors, including students' lack of proficiency during the latter phases of traditional written assignments, it is clear that I did not adequately respond to students as they faced these emerging challenges during video composition. Sadly, these challenges caused some student groups to feel discouraged, and a few groups did not successfully complete a final video product.

As a facilitator of creative problem-exploring, how could I have better responded to the emerging challenges that students faced during this process? One response could be to create additional short-term objectives, similar to the video proposal form and video storyboard, that guide students through the messiness of production and postproduction. Rather than focusing in on the details of the finished product, short-term objectives and scaffolding would have continued the collaborative problem-exploring environment that was established early on in the study. There was notably less collaborative conversation and problem-exploring during the editing phase of the video production process, and encouraging this conversation through short-term objectives could have helped student groups overcome their emerging challenges. Another response could be to identify student needs and embed mini-lessons that are responsive to these needs. Since some groups lacked the specific abilities and cognitive tools necessary to successfully carry out the filming, editing, and publishing of their video, students would have responded well to additional mini-lessons over these topics; they would have perceived direct instruction on specific skills as necessary steps to accomplishing their goals. This shift in the timing of instruction directly contrasts with the traditional front loading of mini-lessons on the

assumption that students will need those skills to accomplish the learning goal. Ideally, students would eventually become familiar with the process of recognizing their gaps in ability and asking for assistance in the midst of their creative processes. If students demonstrate and identify an area of need on their own terms, then the instruction that the teacher provides is inherently meaningful to students.

Regardless of what the final outcomes of the video production process were, engaging students in this work and exploring alongside them undeniably transformed my role in the classroom. Traditionally, teachers elevate themselves as experts of content and evaluators of student performance. By analyzing the audio recordings during this research study, it is clear that my role in the classroom was dramatically different than it is during traditional writing assignments. In the creative environment that was created during this video production task, I became a fellow problem-explorer who listened to students synthesize and share their ideas, modeled creative conversation, offered genuine feedback and guidance.

IMPLICATIONS

The implications of this study mostly impact pedagogical decisions that educators make when attempting to create an environment where students reveal their potential to compose and create. In order to create a problem-exploring environment in which students reveal their skills and potential to compose and create, educators must provide students with relevant and creative composition choices, promote student collaboration through a balance of structure and freedom, and join students in the process of composition through facilitation and modeling throughout the process.

Provide Relevant and Creative Composition Choices

The findings from this research study demonstrate the importance of a relevant and creative task that provides choices for students. In this study, relevance and choice were integral to student engagement and ownership of the composition process. Because of students' interest in their chosen topics and the mode of video, students were eager to make creative decisions throughout composition. Students also made organic connections to their worlds outside of the classroom because of their interest in this task. Throughout their creative processes, students authentically demonstrated their skills and potential to compose and create. The choice and freedom that students were allowed while completing the task during this research study gave them a genuine space to exhibit their writerly ability.

Moving forward, my research suggests that educators should continue to provide choices that are relevant and construct a space for students to demonstrate their creative

ability. In this task, I challenged students to create a video that had some connection to the topic of people and community. I chose the mode of video because my research and experience in the classroom demonstrated that this mode is overwhelmingly popular amongst students today. While video is currently one of the most important and commonly consumed modes of composition, this will inevitably change as society continues to evolve through the age of technology. Consequently, educators should be culturally responsive practitioners who are aware of the various dimensions of students' lives, including the way students use and perceive technology; inevitably, the definition of composition, to adolescents and society as a whole, will continue to change as technology provides new and different modes for communication. If educators continue to discover and implement new and different modes for composition, then students will demonstrate authentic engagement in the composition process.

In addition to choice in the mode of composition, educators need to provide choice in the topic of composition. For this task, I provided students with an overarching topic that related to a novel we were reading as a class. This freedom promoted creativity, as many student groups spent the first couple of class periods in rich discussion around their video's topic, purpose, and audience. Due to this freedom, most students chose topics and purposes that had a direct connection to their interests and experiences; students' topic choices were also dependent upon their abilities to make connections with individuals outside of the classroom who are experts on the topic. Because of this freedom in topic choice, students were committed to their ideas. This commitment led to authentic engagement and demonstration of writerly potential.

Moving forward, educators should continue to provide students with choices in composition topics and purposes. While course standards and curriculum typically identify a few genres of writing that need to be covered (i.e. narrative, expository, and argument), students should have input in when and how they demonstrate their abilities to compose within these genres. In this research study, I chose to provide students with an overarching theme; while this practice was effective in narrowing the focus of topic choices for students, providing even more freedom could be beneficial. Perhaps educators can simply provide students with options for a specific audience and task, and students are able to choose the topic, purpose, and mode of writing that best suits the audience and task. In addition to providing students with choice, challenging students to compose for a specific audience would ground their creativity and better mimic the composition they might be asked to create after high school.

Promote Student Collaboration Through a Balance of Structure and Freedom

Another key finding that emerged through analysis of the data from this study was the use of group talk as a vehicle for supporting genuine learning experiences. During the video production task, students were put into groups based upon their own recommendations. Then, students were asked to collectively engage in the video production process. This process consisted of planning out a concept and storyboard during preproduction, carrying out this plan through video filming in production, and making the necessary edits and revisions during postproduction. Throughout this process, students relied on discourse to explore and articulate their ideas; students demonstrated their abilities to compose and create knowledge through this group talk. While I provided

some structure for group conversation through the short-term goals and objectives, most of the discourse that students engaged in was a result of their own interest in completing the task effectively and together. Group roles and norms formed naturally over the course of the project, and most students responded positively to the contributions of their fellow group members. At times, this discourse was unrelated to the video task itself; however, student groups demonstrated a genuine and authentic interest in engaging in a collective, cyclical, and creative process to achieve a common goal.

While the decision to have students engage in video composition collaboratively was largely motivated by the logistical benefits of having multiple people to plan, shoot, produce, and edit a video, the authentically collaborative nature of this process contributed to many positive outcomes for students. In addition to all of the social and emotional benefits of collaboration, educators must consider how collaboration can be used as a tool for authentic assessment. Even though I did not record students' conversations for assessment purposes, these conversations certainly revealed the creative potential of my students. Because this talk is a true representation of students' thoughts in the midst of composition, I learned more about their creative abilities than I would have by only assessing their final products. Educators need to seek meaningful ways to promote these creative conversations in their classrooms, as they provide an authentic space for formative assessment.

In addition to the implementation of collaborative conversations aligned with learning goals, it is important that educators provide students with the freedom and space to discuss topics that are not directly related to course content. Students in this research study benefited from off topic discussion in two ways. First, it provided them with the

creative space necessary to explore their ideas cyclically. Second, it gave them an opportunity to forge relationships with students in their group. As a professional, I consistently find myself engaging in conversations that might not be directly connected to my duties as an educator. However, these conversations are integral to my professional relationships and emotional comfort in the workplace. If educators are committed to giving students choice, promoting creativity, and encouraging collaboration, then they must also provide students with the time and space to process and connect with their peers through occasional discussion of matters unrelated to course standards.

Join Students in the Process of Composition

The creative and collaborative video composition process that my students engaged in during this research study contributed to a transformation of my own role in the classroom. Traditionally, teachers are lecturers and assessors of knowledge. Conversely, my role in this project was facilitator and fellow composer. I facilitated discussion and progress toward the goal through the short-term objectives of the video proposal form and storyboard. These objectives acted as vehicles for student discussion and decision-making grounded in the purpose and audience of the video task. I also joined in on students' collective conversations and positioned myself as a simultaneous insider and outsider in each group; my new role invited relaxed and explorative teacher-to-student dialogue that could not have been possible if I assumed a different position, such as supreme assessor, in the classroom. Because they chose broader audiences for their videos, students welcomed me into their creative process without fear of judgment or formal assessment. This led to a freely creative environment, and I was able to embed

instruction through my conferences with each group. Even though students benefitted

from our conversations, additional scaffolding and modeling during the latter stages of

the video production process would have better assisted students in overcoming the

emerging challenges they faced and reaching their collective goals.

Moving forward, educators should continue to reposition themselves as

facilitators of learning and problem-exploring. Instead of lecturing curricular information,

teachers should facilitate student exploration of course content and standards. This

facilitation is best accomplished by challenging students to respond to a driving question

or challenging task. Then, teachers should scaffold instruction by supporting students

along their own explorative learning processes. While I accomplished this facilitation

through short-term objective in the beginning of this research study, I was unable to meet

the varied instructional needs of my students toward the end of the video task. In the

future, I will put more of a focus on modeling throughout the facilitation process. If I had

engaged in my own video production process alongside students, I could have naturally

shown them how I overcame the challenges I faced. An increased focus on modeling

would have also helped me better prepare for these emergent challenges. Ultimately,

teachers should reconsider when and how they deliver instruction. Instead of front-

loading whole class instruction that students will need to accomplish a task, teachers

should identify and address students' needs in the midst of their creative processes. If

students are facing difficulties on a task they are motivated to complete, they will be

more likely to listen and trust the individualized instruction of their teachers.

Making the transition from the center of authority, instruction, and assessment to

a facilitator of student exploration comes with immense challenges for educators. This

shift requires a transformation in mindset about the way educators were taught, the way educators were taught how to teach, and the way educators have been teaching. Even though this transition can be messy and difficult for a variety of reasons, the process is worth it. In addition to motivating my students, this transformation has sustained and refreshed me; my students' eagerness to participate in a unique and creative process gave me a vision for what is possible in the English Language Arts classroom.

Final Thoughts

This journey started because I recognized my students' lack of interest and engagement in traditional written composition. After reflecting on this research study, I am confident in my pedagogical decision to support choice, creativity, and collaboration through a collective video composition task. Compared to the traditional English Language Arts experience that relies on formulaic essay assignments, the innovative classroom experience is much more effective in promoting student growth in reading, writing, thinking, and speaking. While future research on how to best implement multimodal, collaborative composition in the high school classroom needs to be conducted, I am confident that this work is redefining what English Language Arts looks, sounds, and feels like to students and teachers everywhere.
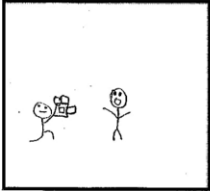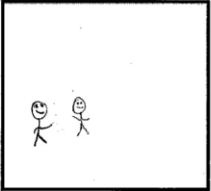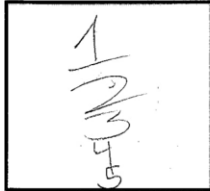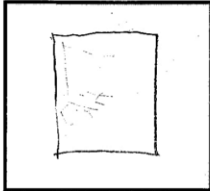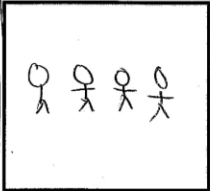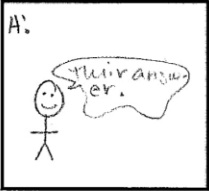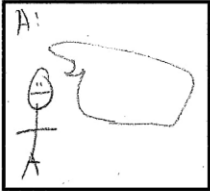
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APPENDIX

Below is an example of a completed video storyboard.

This is the second step of the pre-production stage. Use the space below to prepare for the production of your video. Please be as detailed as possible.

1
Description: In the Student Center we will interview a random Person.

2
Description: Then, We will interview more people at different locations.

3
Description: We will ask about 5 questions.

4
Description: We will interview in the student center, hallways.

5
Description: Stand together + say what we're doing.

6
Q: Do you have someone you can go and talk to?

7
A: their answer.

8
Q: How often do you speak with this person and How do you communicate.

9
A:

10
Q: Do you consider this person your best friend?

Description: Description: Description: Description: Description: