

Searching for Street’s “Mix” of Literacies through Composing Video: Conceptions of Literacy and Moments of Transfer in *Basic Writing*

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On a Tuesday afternoon in March, students in Elizabeth’s *Basic Writing* course gathered around computer screens to workshop each other’s videos. They were a diverse group that included students from China, Mexico, and the Middle East; African Americans; and White Americans. Many spoke English as a second language. In small groups, they had conducted research and drafted short videos about different on-campus resources. On this day, each group played their video draft for another group and received verbal feedback based on criteria written on the board. The literacy practices involved in this work were multiple: conducting primary research; writing collaboratively; giving, receiving, and applying feedback from audiences; and representing ideas multimodally.

Two groups rolled their chairs over to student Gerry’s laptop to view the video he had composed with D’mitria.¹ Gerry sat in front of the laptop, working the keyboard. D’mitria sat next to him, ready to take notes in a notebook. The other group scooted close as Gerry pressed play. The video included footage of Gerry and D’mitria’s interview with a First-Year Advising Center employee, layered with loud, upbeat music. “What do you think?” Gerry asked. “Pretty cool,” one classmate replied. “Just turn the music way down because I didn’t hear anything you said.” “I totally forgot about that!” Gerry responded, and D’mitria made a note. Another student suggested transcribing the interview with subtitles. Gerry and D’mitria listened, responded, and listed changes they wanted to make, and the conversation continued. Later, Sam, the Embedded Writing Specialist (EWS) working in the class, circulated throughout the room, offering additional suggestions as the groups revised.

In this article, we examine scenes and moments like these in student video composition experiences where conceptions of literacy interacted with transfer across media. The video assignment was designed to provide opportunities for multimodal composition, and we theorized that the rhetorical knowledge students would build through video might be applied to and recontextualized in their written compositions. We also hoped that video composition might encourage students to

develop definitions of literacy that Brian V. Street would call *ideological*, as opposed to *autonomous* (e.g., *Literacy in Theory; Social Literacies*). Through analysis of the data about students' experiences, we conclude that, for some, collaborative composition through video facilitated movement toward a conception of literacy as ideological, and that these ideological conceptions widened pathways for transfer. For others, internal and external forces reinforced a conception of literacy as autonomous and thus inhibited opportunities for transfer.

The Research Context and Methods

The scene above from Gerry and D'mitria's video composing process is part of a larger qualitative study that investigates how students learn through video composition in writing courses.² The study was conducted at Oakland University (OU), a public university in the Midwest. OU's first-year writing program includes three courses: Basic Writing, Composition I, and Composition II. Students are placed according to their scores on national standardized tests, or, for some transfer students, by a portfolio or placement essay. Before taking Basic Writing, international students whose first language is not English typically complete OU's English as a Second Language (ESL) program. OU's Basic Writing course is not "remedial," nor does it focus on grammatical correctness or the mechanics of Standard/Edited American English. Elizabeth co-authored an article with Lori Ostergaard that traces the history of basic writing instruction at OU and the development of our innovative Basic Writing curriculum, featuring in-class writing support from an EWS, an advanced student like Sam. The course emphasizes "instruction in rhetoric, research, revision, and reflection and is intended to support students' development of the habits of mind of effective college writers outlined in the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*" (Ostergaard and Allan 30).

Elizabeth directs the EWS Program and was the instructor for the Basic Writing class we focus on in this article. Crystal was the principal researcher, joining the class to recruit students, offer guest instruction, and collect data. Alan, D'mitria, Gerry, and several other students agreed to be classroom participants, giving Crystal permission to observe and record their actions in class and to collect their assignments. Alan, Gerry, Sam, and Elizabeth also completed recorded interviews with Crystal outside of class time.

Elizabeth designed the collaborative video assignment as part of Project 2, titled "Guide to Student Services—Primary Research Paper." Each student group conducted primary research about an on-campus student resource such as the First-Year Advising Center or the Student Technology Center. First, each group gathered information about their assigned resource from the OU website and through in-person observations and interviews with OU personnel. Then each group composed a 1-3 minute video in order to present their preliminary findings. Finally, each student individually wrote a paper that synthesized and analyzed the information gathered during the group's collaborative primary research.

Elizabeth's assignment instructions defined the target audience for Project 2 as the students' peers: students new to OU who would benefit from knowing more about the specific campus resource that each group had investigated in depth. Elizabeth also articulated several purposes for this project:

(1) to conduct primary research; (2) to summarize and synthesize information from multiple sources of data; (3) to analyze the information and explain what it means for the target audience of new college students; and (4) to persuade their peers that the campus resource their group investigated is important for improving students' success in college.

The sequence of scaffolded assignments in Project 2 was crafted to “develop students’ help-seeking behaviors by asking them to conduct primary research into student support services on campus,” and the project included low-stakes “reflective writing assignments that encourage the transfer of learning from basic writing to other classes” (Ostergaard and Allan 39), such as written reflections and discussion board posts. At Elizabeth’s request, Crystal served as a guest instructor during the video portion of the project, giving mini-lectures and leading class activities to introduce the students to video composition. The Basic Writing class met in a PC computer classroom, and students were given class workshop time to complete video work together. Students recorded primary research data using cell phones and video cameras. Some groups used Windows Movie Maker on the classroom computers to edit, while others used their own laptops and software, such as Apple’s iMovie. Elizabeth’s pedagogical choice to create this collaborative video assignment embedded in the development of the larger primary research paper supported a key learning objective for the Basic Writing course: “synthesiz[ing] information/ideas in and between various texts—written, spoken, and visual” (Ostergaard and Allan 40).

Crystal took an ethnographic approach in this research study, observing participants’ actions and interactions in class, analyzing students’ coursework and instructional materials, seeking out participants’ perspectives through individual interviews, and foregrounding participants’ voices (including Elizabeth’s as a co-author) in writing up the findings. When data collection and analysis were completed, Crystal gave all participants an opportunity to member check materials and review representations of their experiences. Street points out that, in the disciplinary context of education, the term *ethnography* “refer[s] to close, detailed accounts of classroom interactions” (*Social Literacies* 51). Following Street’s definition and Wendy Bishop’s writing studies research methodology of “microethnographies”—which “report on the culture of the single classroom, the single learner, and even the single learning event” (13)—we present this study as a microethnography of the multiple literacies evident in Elizabeth’s ethnically, linguistically, and culturally diverse Basic Writing class.

Transfer Across Media, Video, and Street’s Ideological Model of Literacy

This research and the video portion of Project 2 are informed by three lines of scholarship: work on the transfer of writing knowledge (e.g., Nowacek; Wardle) and transfer and digital media (e.g., Baepler and Reynolds; DePalma), work that investigates the role of video in rhetoric and composition and writing courses (e.g., Halbritter; VanKooten “Video,” *Transfer*), and Street’s work on literacy. The research study from which we take data for this article was designed to look and listen first for observable evidence of what we are calling *transfer across media* as students composed written essays and videos. We define transfer across media as a process of considering, (re)using,

choosing not to use, applying, and adapting compositional knowledge as students move from task to task (VanKooten, *Transfer*). A transfer across media process includes both what Rebecca Nowacek labels *transfer as application*, where a learner brings “knowledge or skills from an earlier context into contact with a later context, the earlier context shedding light on and changing the perception of the later,” and the more complex *transfer as reconstruction*, where “both the old and new contexts—as well as what is being transferred—may be understood differently as a result” (25). We anticipated that the assignment sequence for Project 2, which embedded collaborative primary research and multimodal composition into the center of the alphabetic writing process, would facilitate students’ ability to transfer knowledge of writing processes and rhetorical strategies through both application and reconstruction.

Writing transfer literature makes clear that there are multiple pathways toward transfer and various reasons that students do or do not transfer knowledge, some that are obvious to us as instructors and some that are less obvious (Moore; Nowacek; Wardle). Elizabeth Wardle calls Nowacek’s reconstructive transfer “creative repurposing,” arguing that repurposing often occurs as a result of particular dispositions held by individuals, fields, and educational systems. These dispositions are particularly important, as we will see and hear from the participants in our study. Instruction is another of the many factors that influence transfer that we explore here, and our data also indicates that students’ conceptions of literacy affect whether and how writing knowledge might transfer.

These influencing factors for transfer are all at work when students write with words *and* when they compose digital products such as videos. Not only is video recognized in rhetoric and composition as a site for diversity, interdependence, and participatory compositional practices (see Arroyo; Carter and Arroyo; Hidalgo), but there is empirical evidence that video is a useful site for transfer across media in writing classes. Bump Halbritter, for example, argues that movie making in writing classrooms is a productive way of “invoking the habits and awareness of writers” (199). Michael-John DePalma’s case study research demonstrates that through conscious reflection and what he calls *tracing*, students can develop meta-awareness as they remediate essays into videos. Paul Baepler and Thomas Reynolds show how composition through video and traditional alphabetic writing can inform one another when used in conjunction, concluding that students build confidence and flexibility as writers when composing with video. Crystal’s own work with first-year writers indicates that video provides opportunities for the development of meta-awareness about composition and for transfer across media (VanKooten, “Video”; *Transfer*). All of this evidence pointed us toward the inclusion of video composition within Project 2, even as we had questions about the many factors that influence and inhibit transfer through digital composition, especially for students in basic writing courses.

Finally, we came to this study as teachers and scholars who have read, taught, and written about Street’s work on literacy. Nowacek opens her book on transfer by stating that “the field of rhetoric and composition long ago rejected the myth of autonomous literacy,” but has “largely maintained its faith in the transfer of learning” (1). We felt a similar tension between literacy and transfer theory as we analyzed our study data. By promoting the idea that our students would be successful in college

and beyond if they transferred the literacies they learned in Basic Writing, were we, in fact, enacting and encouraging an autonomous view of literacy? Reconstructive transfer across media seems to be supported, instead, by Street's description of ideological literacy in *Literacy in Theory and Practice*: "The reality of social uses of varying modes of communication is that oral and literate modes are 'mixed' in each society. [. . .] Oral conventions often continue to apply to literate forms and literate conventions may be applied to oral forms" (4). In this article, we search for this "mix" of modes and literacies that can be considered, (re)used, applied, and adapted across media.

As composition instructors, rhetoricians, and researchers who study literacy in its multiple forms, we resist treating literacy as an autonomous, skill-based commodity "that is the same everywhere and simply needs transplanting to new environments" (Street, "Implications" 49). For example, Amy Shuman notes that, in academic contexts, literacy is often "presented as an open channel of communication, a neutral ground accessible to all, and the only barrier is acquisition of skills" (265). Yet Street himself insists that the ideological model "does not attempt to deny technical skill or the cognitive aspects of reading and writing, but rather understands them as they are encapsulated within cultural wholes and within structures of power. In that sense the 'ideological' model subsumes rather than excludes the work undertaken within the 'autonomous' model" (*Social Literacies* 267). The autonomous versus ideological construct, then, is a false binary: "The 'autonomous' model is, in fact, always 'ideological' in both its view of what literacy counts and its view of how literacy should be acquired" (Street, "Futures" 418).

The New Literacy Studies (NLS) movement, which Street promotes, views approaches to student writing and literacy in academic contexts [. . .] through three overlapping perspectives or models: (1) a study skills model, (2) an academic socialization model, and (3) an "academic literacies model" that "pay[s] particular attention to the relationships of power and authority to meaning-making and identity that are implicit in the use of literacy practices within specific institutional settings." (Heath and Street 105-106)

As we consider our students' academic literacy practices in light of Street's theories, then, we realize that we need to be mindful of the ways that our unexamined assumptions about ideological literacies might lure us into an overly simplistic, anti-autonomous, anti-skills-based stance. A close reading of Street's arguments as they develop over time points, instead, to the development of literacy skills and the socialization process of acquiring specific literacies as nested processes, enmeshed and intertwined with ideological and cultural values.

In "New Literacies, New Times," Street explicitly calls for an "ideological model of multimodality" (13). Evaluating students' multimodal assignments entails subjecting those texts to criteria that we, as writing instructors, consider appropriate for an academic context. Thus, multimodal literacies are now regulated just as reading and writing literacy has historically been held to a "standard," that appears to be "naturally the one we should all be acquiring" (Street, *Social Literacies* 135). Street contends that *dominant* is a more useful term than *standard* because the "uses and meanings of literacy entail struggles over particular identities" (*Social Literacies* 135). As writing instructors, we acknowledge our part in creating these struggles, even as we actively work against a long-standing tradition that devalues students' "non-standard" literacies.

We take seriously Street's admonition that "a statement about cognitive difference based on assessment of the nature of literacy is as socially-embedded and open to challenge as are statements about cognitive differences based on race, ethnicity and class" (*Literacy in Theory* 29). Mary R. Lea and Street maintain that "problems" in the writing produced by marginalized students "tend to be explained mainly with respect to the students themselves or seen as a consequence of the mass introduction of 'nontraditional' students." To counteract such limited readings, we emphasize the ways that literacy practices are multiple and always socially embedded (Street, "Introduction" 2). Below, we highlight the in-class social interactions and other cultural influences at play as students collaboratively composed their videos, examining student conceptions of literacy and whether and how these values facilitated or inhibited transfer across media.

Literacy And Transfer in Students' Collaborative Multimodal Composing Processes

We focus here on the composing experiences of three students: Gerry, D'mitria, and Alan. We selected these students because we were able to gather the most detailed data about their composing experiences; therefore, we have a richer and more nuanced understanding of the "social and cultural contexts" (Street, "Recent Applications" 417) that influenced their literacy practices related to the video assignment. Gerry was a 19-year-old Latino freshman student who had recently moved to the US from Chihuahua, Mexico. D'mitria was a 19-year-old African American sophomore from Detroit, MI. Alan was a 35-year-old White and American Indian Marine Corps veteran who was attending school while he worked full time at a nearby corporation. Compared to the other groups in the class, Gerry and D'mitria's group and Alan's group also emerged as limit cases representing distinct approaches to collaborative composing, as well as contrasting views of literacy and different levels of transfer across media.

Gerry and D'mitria were partners for the primary research and video portion of Project 2. They worked together to collect data about the First-Year Advising Center (FYAC) on campus, video recording an interview with an employee, as well as examining the website and visiting the FYAC in person. Using this information, they composed a video about the benefits of using FYAC resources and presented their work to the target audience of their peers in the class. Of all the groups, Gerry and D'mitria had a working relationship that stood out as being the most collaborative. During class workshops, Gerry and D'mitria would scrunch together to work on one laptop, and they discussed their video editing choices at length, going back and forth many times.

Gerry described D'mitria as "completely opposite to me," as coming from a very different point-of-view. He described how their differences played out when they made decisions for their video:

If I like green, she would say, no, I don't like green, I like black. And I was like, I don't like black. I want blue. And she was like, I don't want blue. Ok, so, we had these big, little fights about, the more unnecessary and little and ridiculous things. They weren't even important, but they were actually important for us . . .

We observed Gerry and D'mitria interacting in the ways that Gerry describes as they worked on

their video during class. They constantly discussed small and large decisions such as what kind of transition to select or what kind of song to use.

Where other groups worked quietly, Gerry and D'mitria were talking, discussing, clicking the mouse, arguing, looking, listening, and slowly making progress together. Please view the following video in which Gerry and D'mitria discuss the use of an image to get a glimpse into their collaborative process:

Video One: <https://vimeo.com/492268279>.

Descriptive Transcript of Video One: [Here](#).

This back and forth process of composition is part of what Street might call the social functions and practices of literacy. Gerry and D'mitria experimented with a variety of video techniques, but their final choices were often grounded in their understanding of their audience of first-year students, as represented by each other and their diverse classmates.

In Street's edited collection of ethnographic literacy research, Shuman notes, "Collaboration provides an alternative to the situation in which a single author takes responsibility for the creation of a text" (260). Elizabeth built collaborative composing into the course assignments to model the social aspect of writing and to reinforce the first-year writing program's emphasis on academic writing as participation in scholarly conversations. Gerry saw the value of these social practices, even when he acquiesced to D'mitria's choices. As he stated during an interview, the squabbles they had were about "unnecessary," "little," and "ridiculous" things, "but they were actually important for us"—important in that these discussions taught Gerry and D'mitria to look at an issue or a question from another's view, and often, from an outside audience's view. Gerry related that "the video is all her, actually. I did what she told me to do, because I couldn't win a fight with D'mitria. But I did learn a lot from that."

From Elizabeth's perspective as the instructor, Gerry does not give himself enough credit when he reflects on his contributions to the video. By requiring D'mitria to defend the rhetorical choices she wanted to make, Gerry pushed her to examine her preferences and make her implicit knowledge of rhetoric explicit. After the course was over, Elizabeth reflected in her interview with Crystal that Gerry's partnership with D'mitria had a lasting effect on D'mitria's participation in the class:

Up until that point, D'mitria had been really quiet and shy. [. . .] She was nervous about doing that group project. She didn't know him. She didn't know if this was gonna work out right. [. . .] After [the video], I felt like D'mitria was much more engaged in the class as a whole. Even when she was no longer working directly with him, she was more open with me. She was better able to work with [other people] in peer review.

Gerry's interactions with D'mitria also gave him many opportunities to articulate an opposing viewpoint. He related,

I've never been in this kind of a situation, where I'm with an opposite person as me. And this being the first time, it was like, wow, it's actually not that bad. You can actually get to an agreement with someone, it doesn't matter, she's like super, super different to you. It's all

about communication, and about just giving your point of views [sic], and learning about other point of views.

In her reflective essay at the end of the course, D'mitria also commented on the importance of getting multiple perspectives on her writing. She stated that "gaining other people's input in peer revision, or going to the writing center are ways to improve the creativity within your paper. It helps to be open to others idea [sic] to improve your paper, that is why I like peer review so much now."

From our perspective, D'mitria's and Gerry's comments demonstrate that composing collaboratively on video required these students to seek input from diverse sources and people, consider an audience other than self, and learn the value of composing with others. Research suggests that film- and video-making present unique opportunities for collaboration, participation, and new kinds of interaction and response (Hidalgo; Arroyo). We see these opportunities as part of the socialization process of acquiring literacies within Street's ideological model.

Gerry and D'mitria's close collaboration leads us to intuit that, for them, literacy was indeed social and ideological; there was not one "right" answer to their questions about their video, and their choices were based on the cultural values within the rhetorical situation. They read, listened, looked, and discussed until they came up with an answer that was acceptable to them for that particular communicative moment. Then they got feedback—from Sam, from classmates, from us—and they revised their choices yet again. The social interactions with peers and facilitators in the classroom promoted a sense of audience: the "imagined others" whose perspectives contributed to the "continually negotiated process of meaning making as well as taking" (Street, "Implications" 51). Because each group included diverse representatives of the first-year student population and no two groups researched the same campus resource, presenting their preliminary findings videos to their classmates and receiving feedback was an important step in understanding the target audience for the persuasive paper that would be the culmination of Project 2. These developing understandings of literacy as ideological—as cultural and contextual—then widened pathways for transfer across media as the students were asked to consider how what they learned through the video portion of Project 2 might be applied to the written portion and beyond.

In contrast to Gerry and D'mitria's highly collaborative and contextual literacy practices within the video assignment, Alan and his group members took a "divide and conquer" approach to their video work. Alan's group members chose not to participate in our research study, so we share information about their collaboration with Alan here without providing their names or showing recognizable images of them. Alan, who described himself as "the leader of the group" or the "team lead," told Crystal, "I initially assigned pieces of it to everybody." Each person was responsible for completing several tasks. Alan compiled the others' work and wrote and recorded an opening voiceover, the second group member conducted the interview, and the third member edited the video. Shuman found that "[c]ollaboration can involve a variety of possibilities for alignment and misalignment between participants" (266) and that "multiple authorship does not in itself provide any guarantees of a change in the configuration of power relationships" (260). In Alan's group, the power relationships and hierarchical structure were clearly defined: Alan was in charge.

All three students in Alan's group were also absent several times across the three weeks of

the video assignment. In fact, they were not all together in class to work on the video until final presentation day, so they did not participate in group work as we had intended. To Alan, though, the absences weren't a problem. He stated, "Fortunately, we had mapped out everything that we were going to do and what everybody was going to do, so in the absence of everyone, we each just operated independently to see it through." While Gerry and D'mitria discussed every composing decision in class, Alan and his group members made independent decisions as they composed their work outside of class and away from one another.

In his interviews with Crystal, Alan used both military and sports metaphors to describe this style of independent working, likening group members to comrades or teammates with a shared objective of winning a battle or winning a game. Essential to this approach was "the plan." In Alan's words, "having a solid plan is like 90 percent of it in my opinion. As long as everybody understands the plan, then it can be adapted accordingly and everybody can adjust fire as needed as long as we keep the main objective in mind." This objective-centered style of group work was a top-down approach to working together—Alan (with input from the group) made the plan, and group members were to stick to the plan, just as they would follow orders from a commander or a coach. Even when some were absent, the others stepped in and followed the plan: "It just came back to having the solid game plan. Everybody knew how we needed to run the ball to score a touchdown, and the players that were there that day, they scored a touchdown [*chuckles*]."

From our vantage point, it appears that Alan imported hierarchical military and corporate literacy practices to the collaborative video composition process. Adhering to the plan is viewed, at least by Alan, as a guarantee for success. In his introduction to *Literacy and Development*, Street describes a shift in both business and education from "hierarchical forms of organisation that simply pass orders down a chain of command" to "the new project-focused work order" based in pseudo-teamwork (4). This authoritarian style of working together indicates a tacit autonomous view of literacy. Alan's plan to produce one right "winning" outcome seems to be based on pseudo-collaboration, whereas we intended the group project to facilitate a democratic, social process of multimodal composition.

Other factors at play within Alan's group dynamics were Alan's history with and disposition toward writing. Alan insisted that he did not need to take Basic Writing because he had completed more difficult writing courses prior to coming to OU with credits that did not transfer. His interactions with his classmates—particularly the ESL students—and with Elizabeth suggest that he considered his own academic literacy to be at a much higher level than the typical basic writing student. Ironically, like the ESL students, he tended to focus on grammar and punctuation as the only areas that he needed to improve, despite Elizabeth's emphasis on rhetorical concepts such as purpose and audience. When asked to reflect on his learning in the course in his final portfolio, he chose to highlight the following: "I met with Sam on three occasions to adjust the grammatical discrepancies within my projects as well as establishing a more precise understanding of MLA procedures and rules." In this way, we see Alan leaning on an autonomous literacy model to support his reflective argument, a model where literacy is procedural and objectively right or wrong. His attitude is consistent with those in power who "try to define what literacy is, not just what it does, in order to be able to then say what are the benefits of having it" (Street, "Literacy Inequalities" 581).

Alan believed that following the rules was sufficient evidence that he had achieved the objectives of the course, whereas the reflective essay assignment called for metacognitive self-evaluation of his learning and writing processes.

During group work time in the class period before final videos were presented, Alan and a partner did demonstrate some moments of getting feedback from others, negotiating ideas, and revising their product together when deemed necessary. Watch below as Alan talks his group member through adjusting a moment in their video where two pieces of audio needed to be faded out and in to create a smoother transition:

Video Two: <https://vimeo.com/492260175>.

Descriptive Transcript of Video Two: [Here](#).

Some aspects of this compositional moment point toward an ideological model of literacy: the two classmates work side by side to make changes after receiving feedback from another group. They smooth out an audio transition that might have been distracting to the audience. Even so, as they collaborate, Alan tells his partner what to do most of the time, and his partner follows Alan's suggestions and speaks very little, at least in this exchange. Halbritter identifies "volume agreement errors" (60) like the one Alan and his partner work to remedy here as one of the common "grammatical errors of audio-visual texts" (60). Halbritter demonstrates that instruction about audio-visual grammatical errors should mirror instruction about mechanical errors in alphabetic writing: attention to surface errors is sometimes important, but it should come last (58-60). Thus, we interpret Alan's work on the audio transition as akin to fixing surface-level errors in a written essay, especially in light of the fact that Alan's group received feedback earlier in the class period regarding the odd fit of their music. Fixing an audio transition is not a global concern. Spending time editing sound transitions while other more important issues remain unaddressed suggests that Alan and his partners were applying an autonomous conception of literacy, where "good" videos must be error-free. Halbritter reminds us that, in both written and audio-visual compositions, "mechanical errors are low-hanging fruit," and "among the easiest things for students to identify" (58). Thus, Alan's group—and the other groups—may have benefitted from more explicit instructional direction away from easier corrective tasks that reinforce a model of literacy as autonomous and toward more difficult, situated rhetorical problems.

Finally, Alan's attitude toward his classmates contributed to his group's working style. Alan, a Marine Corps veteran who fought overseas, was uncomfortable at first when he was assigned to work with students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. He explained, "Having to be placed into that group was a stretch for myself, but over time, I'd say like the third class [. . .], I became more comfortable, and my guard went down." How Alan interacted and composed with classmates who were culturally different from him was influenced by his identity and prior experiences in the military. Street argues, "[T]he ways in which people address reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity, being" ("Introduction" 7). At first, Alan was wary of his peers' identities (and their literacies), but as he worked with them and got to know them, he relaxed. Clearly, Alan's conception of identities played a significant role in how he negotiated composing tasks

and how he was (or was not) able to leverage opportunities to shift his conceptions of literacy or to transfer knowledge.

Literacy in Students' Music Selection

The ways that Gerry and D'mitria's group and Alan's group approached the use of music in their videos exemplifies the give-and-take versus top-down approaches the students took as they authored their projects. It also reveals how the video was shaping or reinforcing conceptions of literacy and opening or inhibiting opportunities for transfer. In class, for example, Gerry and D'mitria spent the better part of an hour discussing the kind of music they wanted in their FYAC video. The following video illustrates how they tried to figure out what music to use:

Video Three: <https://vimeo.com/492266921>.

Descriptive Transcript of Video Three: [Here](#).

As you can see and hear, Gerry and D'mitria found a musical option, listened to it, discussed it, tried it out in their video, and debated its effectiveness.

These collaborative literacy practices were tied to their conceptions of purpose and audience. In this interview exchange with Crystal, Gerry articulates the rationale behind the final choice to use what he described as “jazzy” music:

Gerry: D'mitria wanted this beat boxing music. I was like, no, this should be proper music for a proper video. I think that was the only fight I won with her. We actually went for the jazzy music instead of the beat box music. [. . .]

Crystal: So why do you think the jazzy music was a better choice?

Gerry: Because you're making a video about the First-Year Advising Center. You're talking about school, you're talking about freshmen people, you're talking about something that's important to people. [. . .] I mean, it would be funnier with a beat box, you know, but we wanted to make a proper, like a serious video about what the First-Year Advising Center was.

Gerry and D'mitria's ultimate selection of the jazzy music illustrates their collaborative, give-and-take composing process and their collective, growing understanding of composing with rhetorical concerns such as purpose and audience in mind.

Miriam Camitta explains how collaboration increases audience awareness: “collaboration, both oral and written, as it takes place in the writing process, is a kind of performance in which an audience for the text is actualised, as opposed to fictionalized” (231). Gerry and D'mitria's layered, actualized audience included both imagined audiences (all new or first-year

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students) and real audiences (people in the class). As Gerry explained to Crystal,

In the middle of the project, I just realized that this video wasn't only for us, like D'mitria and myself. It was actually for the whole classroom, and Dr. Allan and Sam and you. You have to think a lot of things, knowing about what you like, but what about what they like?

What would my classmates want to see in my video?

Gerry and D'mitria's process for considering various audiences through selecting music reveals a growing understanding of literacy as ideological, where authorial choices are influenced by surrounding cultures and audience expectations, not rigid standards. This ideological understanding could support future transfer across media as Gerry and D'mitria learn to identify and write for audience needs through a variety of media.

Alan's group also used music in their video about the university's technology center. To pair with Alan's opening voiceover and images from the center's website, they selected an instrumental song that featured violins, piano, and guitar, with the violin playing a slow melody in a minor key. According to Alan, he and the group selected the music because it provided an "engaging, interesting, relaxing form of ambiguity." However, Alan and one of his partners received feedback from another group that the music seemed out of place. Alan said that the other group wasn't "100-percent sure the music was a good play or not." Alan's take-charge approach is illustrated by his explanation of why they decided to keep the violin music anyway:

We had a discussion on it, on whether or not we should change the sound and what we overall were trying to accomplish. The final factor on determining to keep it, I was like, I'll just do a narrative in the beginning, and it sounds like something that you would hear on a narrative, like on the Discovery Channel or something, or the History Channel [. . .].

Alan decided to keep the music and add his narration in order to mimic the genre of documentary films, a legitimate rhetorical strategy. Ultimately, though, he did not acknowledge when his intention did not work for his audience, perhaps due to an autonomous view of literacy that included a single right answer—here, one interpretation of the song. Alan chose not to listen to the other group's feedback on workshop day, and again on presentation day when a classmate told him that the music sounded sad. Please watch and listen to the following video to get a glimpse of what happened on presentation day:

Video Four: <https://vimeo.com/492269225>.

Descriptive Transcript of Video Four: [Here](#).

In class, Alan defended his choice by applying his understanding of the term *intuitive* to both the music and technology. Later, he appealed to an external standard: televised documentaries. However, he did not take into account how the *pathos* effect of his musical selection might be experienced differently by others. Alan resisted context-specific feedback from his actual audience and relied instead on an autonomous standard established by people he considered to be authorities: the producers of historical documentaries. He therefore missed an opportunity to adapt his literacies in response to audience needs, a practice that would have had the potential to transfer to future

composing situations.

Literacy and Transfer in Student Reflections

Finally, we would like to consider how students described their own learning in Basic Writing. Some of these comments reveal movement toward an ideological model of literacy and transfer across media; others show that some conceptions of writing and literacy remained static

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or underdeveloped, limiting opportunities for transfer. When Crystal talked with Gerry about what he learned through the video assignment and through the course as a whole, he first mentioned organization. Gerry said that his approach to writing near the end of the course was much more structured than at the beginning, stating that “in the past, I would just go to write [a paper] from the beginning without anything.” In contrast, at the end of the

course, Gerry described starting to write a paper by doing research, talking to friends, brainstorming, organizing ideas, and reflecting on related personal experiences. The video project, he told Crystal, was a key part of how he learned the importance of paying attention to the organization of ideas:

The video, it’s why I know how to organize now. [. . .] When you have twenty different videos, like video clips, and you need to put all of those in one video of three minutes, it’s like, oh wow. So yeah, if you can [do] a video, you can do anything.

Learning to knit different materials, media assets, and video clips together helped Gerry to become more aware of the need to organize ideas in any kind of writing—an early step in the transfer across media process. Indeed, Gerry and D’mitria discussed which transition to use between various sections in their video at length. Such attention to how viewers/readers might move between sections highlighted for Gerry this important skill that is a part of the standard of academic literacy. Gerry learned to adhere to such an organizational standard in a rhetorically sensitive manner that could potentially apply across media. Thus, for Gerry, considering organization was not a skills-based method, but an ideologically aware rhetorical process of considering content, context, audience, and available media.

Second, Gerry talked about applying what he had learned about MLA citation and formatting. When Crystal asked him what might transfer beyond the class, Gerry explained,

So for my music class, as my final project, I had to do this program of a concerto. But I had to do it in MLA. [. . .] So I think that’s one of the things that I actually used out of my writing class. And just the way of writing the paper.

This “way” included formatting the heading correctly, using a title, and double-spacing, which were all MLA formatting standards that Gerry learned in Basic Writing. This kind of transfer as direct application is a simple, easily identifiable form of transfer, which Nowacek separates from more

complex acts of transfer as reconstruction. In this example, Gerry *applies*, but does not *reconstruct*, his knowledge.

Even so, Gerry is demonstrating awareness of academic literacies and granting himself power to speak in a context that requires a certain academic standard. While his act of transfer here is simple according to Nowacek's categories, looking at this moment through the lens of Street's literacy reveals that the knowledge Gerry is applying about academic literacy can be considered ideological. It is enmeshed in Gerry's growing understanding of the cultural values of the academy. Our program's rhetorical approach to teaching academic conventions such as MLA citation in terms of appropriateness for genre, context, and audience makes explicit that citation is tied to *ethos*. Elizabeth frequently described demonstrating familiarity with standard MLA format and citation as showing the academic audience that "you are a member of the club." As Street explains, "An 'ideological' model of literacy begins from the premise that variable literacy practices are always rooted in power relations and that the apparent innocence and neutrality of the 'rules' serves to disguise the ways in which such power is maintained through literacy" ("Introduction" 13). As he formats his paper in MLA style for his music course, Gerry follows the rules because he is aware of the power dynamics at play through such literacy practices. Our understanding of Gerry's conception of literacy as ideological makes clear that this moment of transfer is more complex than simple application.

Third, when Crystal asked Gerry what, if anything, was applicable from the video to the paper that he wrote directly after, Gerry mentioned that the video process with D'mitria helped him to consider other points of view when he wrote. He explained,

Writing from another point of view, that was actually good. Because in some way, it helped me more to write better. Do you know what I mean? Like, usually I see things in one way, but now when I was writing that paper, I could have like, I just stopped for a minute, and tried to look at it from the other way.

In higher education, willingness to consider opposing views is highly valued. Halbritter describes the purpose of video assignments as "a means to teach writing and, especially, to teach writers" (200) through the development of desired habits and awareness (199). Here, we see Gerry articulating a key writerly understanding of valuing multiple points-of-view that has been learned through the process of collaborative video composition, which Gerry described using the Spanish word *illuminativa*—illuminating. This capacity to look beyond one viewpoint represents Gerry's development as a writer who can support arguments with *ethos* through adherence to conventions and through a willingness to be persuaded based on new evidence and perspectives, a process enmeshed in ideological and cultural values.

When he summarized what the course was about, Gerry reiterated the importance of learning to see things from others' points-of-view:

Everything we do, it's about giving our point of views, and learning from other point of view [sic]. [. . .] Sometimes you, sometimes Dr. Allan and Sam, they just give a topic, and what do you think? And I don't know, maybe D'mitria starts talking about something, and [another student] starts talking about something, and [a third student] too, and me too. And it's actually something that I really enjoy. Giving my point of view, and receiving another point

of views.

Gerry's overall takeaway from the video assignment and the course not only demonstrates Halbritter's writerly awareness and a view of literacy as socially constructed, contextual, and fluid; it also reveals potential for transfer. Listening to and learning from others as he composes in the future could help Gerry better understand and reshape his own views and his knowledge of contexts, an example of Nowacek's "more complex act" of reconstructive transfer (26) and a step within the larger transfer across media process.

Alan's takeaways from the course were different from Gerry's. From the beginning, Alan's disposition toward and previous experiences with the subject matter weren't very positive. Because of his performance on a placement essay that he admitted he didn't take seriously, Alan told Crystal that "they stuck me in the very bottom [. . .] which is fine because to me, the writing classes are blow-off classes." At the end of the course, when Crystal asked him what from class was most helpful for his learning, he emphasized MLA formatting and using the rubric to guide his writing.

Regarding MLA formatting, Alan mentioned that it was "really my only take away" from the course, and the remaining course content was "a recap on things I'd already learned in lower classes and then applied in middle and upper classes at other universities." He characterized his own writing abilities as staying the same from the beginning of the course to the end, describing them this way:

Alan: I can take a set of instructions and produce a decent project out of it. I have bad grammar and spelling in some cases. That still remains. It will always remain.

Crystal: You don't think you improved at all?

Alan: No. [*Laughter*]

Crystal: Oh, why not?

Alan: Those were my hits on every project. Grammar and punctuation—when to put a comma, when to put a semicolon.

Alan highlights grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors when he describes his own writing and when he remembers the feedback he received on his work in the course—examples of easily identifiable student writing errors, Halbritter's "low-hanging fruit" (58). In reality, Elizabeth's feedback on Alan's written work always emphasized appropriateness for the target audience and reader-friendly versus author-centered rhetorical choices. For example, Elizabeth advised Alan to revise his third paper by removing the section headings that he had used to structure his essay: "Support 1," "Support 2," and "Support 3." After many unsuccessful attempts to dissuade him from limiting himself to a five-paragraph essay format and to encourage topical subheadings, Elizabeth commented, "[These subheadings] were useful as an organization tool for you, but they aren't descriptive enough to be helpful to your readers."

Even with this kind of feedback from Elizabeth, correct grammar and punctuation remained at the core of Alan's definition of writing and literacy. We see this also in his video composing, as he spent noticeable time on Halbritter's audio-visual mechanical error of "volume agreement" (60). Alan brought up spelling and grammar when Crystal asked him what he wanted to work on in his next writing course, and again when she asked him what concepts might transfer beyond the course: "If I have to use MLA again. Definitely the use of a semicolon. I've been using that at work."

Like Gerry, Alan's potential and actual transfer of MLA format and semicolon usage outside of the classroom are moves of direct application. Unlike Gerry, however, Alan does not link the choice to use MLA or correct punctuation to contextual or socially constructed factors: "To me, really, writing is just getting started and then going with it. It's kind of like digging a fighting hole. You just get the shovel and start—and get to work. You just chip it away." For Alan, it appears that literacy is autonomous: good writing involves correct grammar and punctuation; writers succeed by digging in with their heads down.

Elizabeth did, however, see some evidence of growth and the potential for transfer in Alan's developing understanding of rhetoric. Elizabeth reflected on a "breakthrough moment" regarding a title of one of Alan's essays:

[Alan] had used military jargon in his title, and he'd also used something that he uses at work with [the corporation]. His title made perfect sense to him. It didn't make sense to me. [. . .] He was using an acronym, a military acronym, that he hadn't actually formatted like an acronym. It was INDOC, but he had written it in his title as the word *In* and then *Doc*. [. . .] I was like, "What does that *stand* for? What does it actually *mean*? [. . .] Is that how it's written when it's used in the military? Is it written as two words like that?" [Alan responded,] "Oh, I don't know." [. . .] So he went and Googled it, and then he saw how it is all in caps, I N D O C, standing for *indoctrination*. Then that made sense to him. It was one of those things where he had never questioned how it should be transliterated. He just had heard it. When he came to write it down, it made sense to him but to me it looked like *in* [pause] *doc*. [. . .] I think that was a breakthrough moment for him where he realized, "Oh, I've been writing this down wrong."

Elizabeth interpreted Alan's realization as a glimmer of hope for transfer: "He learned that what was clear to him in his own context from his prior knowledge wasn't necessarily clear to the reader." However, Alan's focus was still on correctness, even in this instance: for him, the fault lay in his "spelling" error, not in his assumptions about his audience's familiarity with military jargon. In the video assignment, this tendency to misread the audience was also evident: Alan assumed that his video audience not only shared his prior knowledge of History Channel documentaries but would also recognize his choice of similar music as an intentional rhetorical strategy that would evoke "intuitiveness," despite feedback from classmates that this was not the case. Even so, we value Alan's small movements toward transfer and a more capacious definition of literacy as he started to consider if and how he might adjust his communication in response to audience feedback.

Alan's persistent, autonomous view of literacy, rooted in his military experiences, is encapsulated in a final interview exchange with Crystal when he responded to her invitation to share any final thoughts about the course:

Alan: Yeah. I prefer to write in black.

Crystal: [*Laughter*] The color of the ink? Is that what you're saying?

Alan: That's because of the Marine Corps. You're not supposed to write in blue. [. . .] I just always write in black.

As a Marine, Alan was used to hard and fast rules: Always black ink, never blue; no exceptions.

He was used to giving and receiving orders, and he liked things that way. Thus, he concludes his interview talking about what we might first have perceived as a mundane, silly detail about his writing life—that he only writes in black ink. However, when seen in the context of Alan’s life experiences, black ink represents military ideology shaping practice and reinforcing a predominately autonomous view of literacy. Helping Alan to realize that some audiences might prefer blue ink, or even pink or purple ink, and that these other colors might actually be a better choice in some contexts—this is a metaphor for movement toward an ideological model of literacy and toward transfer across media.

Literacy and Transfer in Our Instruction: Closing Reflections

Street argues, “The ways in which teachers or facilitators and their students interact is already a social practice that affects the nature of the literacy learned and the ideas about literacy held by the participants, especially new learners and their positions in relations of power” (“New Literacies” 4). Thus, we close by reflecting on the aims and design of our instruction, thinking through a few small ways that our choices as instructors might make movement toward an ideological model of literacy, as well as transfer across media, a more common occurrence in a class like Basic Writing.

Elizabeth intended the video portion of Project 2 to scaffold synthesizing information from multiple sources of primary data. She anticipated that students would transfer knowledge about synthesis developed and implemented in the video portion of Project 2 to the paper for Project 2 and then to Project 3, where students were required to synthesize print sources. In the interview with Crystal, Elizabeth explained, “What I was hoping would happen with the video was that they would understand synthesis in terms of layering, like how you present information either with text on the screen or with a voiceover or the actual audio, and that they would get the concept of synthesis from that.” For D’mitria, transfer of synthesis across media did in fact occur. Throughout the semester, Elizabeth had emphasized description and visual rhetoric as *pathos* strategies. D’mitria used both of these techniques to convey that the FYAC is a student-friendly campus resource in her essay:

When walking into the FYAC, which is located in North Foundation Hall, you will first be greeted by a receptionist asking, “When you would like to schedule your FYAC appointment and what would you like to talk about at that time.” [sic] You can also schedule an appointment online on the FYAC web page. Coming into the FYAC you will see photos of students interacting with the advisors on the wall and glass windows. In the FYAC the staff is very calm and approachable. “Come prepared for your appointments by being ready to share your ideas, concerns and questions about your education” (FYAC).

In this short excerpt, D’mitria uses descriptive language and weaves together information from her field observation, the FYAC website, and the video-recorded interview to paint a verbal picture of the FYAC office. In her paper, D’mitria reconstructs the scene from the video she and Gerry created, demonstrating an act of transfer across media.

Even so, Elizabeth reflected in interviews that such transfer was not commonplace. Elizabeth noted that many students did not synthesize in the layered ways she had expected, weaving together information they learned from the websites, field observations, and interviews to create video that

combined screenshots, photographs, written text, and audio or video interview clips. Instead, she observed that the footage they already had from video-recorded interviews was “the easiest thing to work with [. . .] Just make the video the [interview] footage. Then talk around it.” Elizabeth reflected, “I didn’t emphasize enough that I wanted to see all three strands of research present in that video.” One takeaway for us is that, due in part to the web of factors influencing the writing situation (here, conceptions of literacy, dispositions, and identities), transfer across media requires even more direct instruction, scaffolding, and emphasis at all stages of a composing process than we had anticipated.

Reflecting on Gerry’s movement toward an ideological model of literacy and Alan’s inclination toward an autonomous model, we realize now that we could have disrupted autonomous conceptions of literacy much more explicitly for all students. Even for students like Gerry, who demonstrated movement toward an ideological model, markers of literacy as autonomous such as a hyper-focus on grammar, punctuation, and correctness were commonplace. We posit now that more direct confrontation of autonomous values—through class discussion, one-on-one conversations, and assignment instructions—might be necessary and helpful for students in basic writing courses.

We close this inquiry by celebrating the successes that have become evident and the mix of literacies developed through Gerry’s, D’mitria’s, and Alan’s multimodal composing experiences in Basic Writing. All three students experienced moments of transfer across media during the course—some simplistic, some more complex. Gerry and D’mitria embraced collaboration with one another, both learning to listen, to see another viewpoint, and to give and take. Gerry learned about organization and citation, applying and reconstructing this knowledge in new contexts in rhetorically-sensitive ways. Even Alan, who focused on grammar and punctuation within his rather static definition of writing, showed moments where he began to consider his audience as more than just an extension of himself and to think through the rhetorical contexts for his composing choices. Even if his views on literacy had not fully shifted in the end, even though he was still writing only in black ink, Alan was exposed to the fact that there are other colors of ink out there, other audiences and contexts that might shape his authorial choices.

For Elizabeth, using collaborative video composition to scaffold synthesis was a pedagogical experiment. For Crystal, Elizabeth’s video assignment offered an opportunity to study transfer across media. Reflecting on our interactions with students through the lens of Street’s theories of literacy has revealed how our pedagogical choices, along with other social, cultural, and ideological factors within students’ experiences, have the power to shape views of literacy and to widen (or limit) pathways for transfer across media.

NOTES

¹ In this article, we use the real names of participants with their informed consent.

² The research study was approved by Oakland University's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, Reference #816019-2.

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