

# LiCS

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## LITERACY IN COMPOSITION STUDIES

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## LiCS MISSION STATEMENT

*Literacy in Composition Studies (LiCS)* is a refereed open access online journal that sponsors activity at the nexus of literacy and composition studies. We publish long-form scholarly articles and short-form pieces including book reviews, interviews, symposium essays, and work in new and emerging genres.

Given its ideological nature, *literacy* is a particularly fluid and contextual term. It can name a range of activities from fundamental knowledge about how to decode text to interpretive and communicative acts. Literacies are linked to know-how, to insider knowledge, and to social and cultural groups. Literacy is often a metaphor for the ability to navigate systems, cultures, and situations. Literacy is linked to interpretation—to reading the social environment and engaging and remaking that environment through communication. At its heart, literacy is situated within sociocultural contexts and is connected to power and inequality.

The term *composition studies* points to the range of writing courses at the college level, including FYC, WAC/WID, writing studies, and professional writing, even as it signals the institutional, disciplinary, and historically problematic nature of the field.

We invite authors to consider how multiple groups of people seize power and agency through literacy practices and to examine the ways in which literacy acts on and/or constitutes the writer, even as the writer seeks to act on or with others. By exploring the intersections of literacy and composition, we further seek submissions that draw from the broadest range of traditions possible to promote equity and justice within our disciplines, classrooms, and communities. We particularly invite work that:

- examines the literacy practices, processes, and histories of marginalized and underrepresented communities.
- adds new or challenges existing knowledge to literacy's history.
- analyzes the processes and power relations whereby literacies are valued or circulated.
- investigates the ways in which social, political, economic, linguistic, historical, and technological transformations produce, eliminate, or mediate literacy opportunities.
- analyzes how literacy practices construct student, community, and other identities.
- provides provisional frameworks for theorizing literacy activities.
- examines the literacies sponsored through college writing courses and curricula, including the range of literate activities, practices, and pedagogies that shape and inform, enable and constrain writing.
- considers the implications of institutional, state, or national policies on literacy learning and teaching, including the articulation of high schools and higher education.
- proposes or creates opportunities for new interactions between literacy and Composition studies, especially those drawing on transnational, multilingual, and cross-cultural literacy research.

## Against Autonomous Literacies: Extending the Work of Brian V. Street: Introduction to the Special Issue

The origin of this special issue can be traced to a panel at the 2018 Watson Conference, “Future Street Matters: Continuing the Legacy of Brian Street.” The panel acknowledged Brian V. Street’s passing in 2017 and affirmed his contributions to composition and writing studies. Yet the conversation did not consist mainly of glances backward. Rather, it proceeded by continuing and extending inquiries legible within the scholarly framework to which Street contributed. This extension occurred in multiple ways. For instance, although Street is not known for archival research, Jaclyn Hilberg connected archival research in literacy studies to Street’s scholarship. Likewise, although Street is not known for commenting extensively on sentence craft, John Trimbur took up the topic in “Autonomous/Ideological Models of Literacy and the Politics of Style.” And, finally, Bruce Horner worked from Street into scholarship more squarely focused on epistemology with “Knowledge as Social Practice.” In the wake of the conversation that filled the room and overran the available time, the idea for a special issue of *Literacy in Composition Studies* devoted to Street reached the editors, who have gathered this work for you here.

This special issue is not the only publication inspired by scholars gathering to look back and extend Street’s scholarship. David Bloome, Maria Lucia Castanheira, Constant Leung, and Jennifer Rowsell’s 2018 edited collection, *Re-Theorizing Literacy Practices: Complex Social and Cultural Contexts*, places its origins in a two-day event held in November 2016 in which diverse multigenerational scholars from across disciplines gathered to honor Street (video recordings of these presentations can be found online<sup>1</sup>). For the collection, contributors returned to “push beyond [Street’s work], to engage in what we eventually came to call re-theorizing of literacy practices” (Street et al. 237). In his published yet unfinished reflection on the *festschrift* seminar presentations, Street observed much expansion: expansion on what counts as literacy and expansion of various fields linking to issues and concerns related to literacy. But he also noted an ongoing need to turn research and theory into education practice and policy. Making our research legible to education policymakers, Street argues, is the next necessary step if the field is to shift conceptions of literacy away from “a narrow set of skills, to be tested by formal models” (Street et al. 239). In short, there is much more work to be done to realize the humane and just promise of the conception of literate practice to which Street made a pivotal contribution—one that, as we explore further below, is firmly rooted in the social and always already shot through with power dynamics.

The editors of this special issue come to our interest in Street’s work from different avenues, but as our title suggests, like Street, we find autonomous models of literacy to be dangerously pervasive. Though they have been directly challenged in the decades that followed Street’s elaboration of them in the 1980s, autonomous conceptions of literacy maintain an insidious hold on educators and policymakers across fields, including our own. They afford the powerful a pretext for affirming dominant cultural understandings of literate practices while subordinating others. Institutionalized, autonomous models uphold oppressive systems by legitimizing occlusion of access to disciplinary

spaces for people with diverse life experiences. They are in these ways inimical to our recognition of the many ways of knowing that support human flourishing. We believe it is imperative for research, practice, and policy in composition, literacy, and writing studies to combat autonomous views of writing.

The contributors to this special issue address both the complexity of turning research and theory into intentional practice and the ways that dominant-cultural valuations tend to remain invisible; writing against autonomous literacies tends to mean writing against White epistemologies and languaging. The writers in this issue address literacy as social practices and ideologies of literacy across multiple contexts and moments, employing a rich diversity of qualitative research methods to engage multiple communities. While the contributing authors in this issue take up the frames Street helped to make central to our shared work, they also find collective power in making connections with contemporaries across fields. Likewise, this introduction honors Street's unique contributions while recognizing this issue's range of voices that call for socially situated practices and research that challenge the powerful's control of literacy.

## Why Street for Literacy Studies Today?

In her symposium piece in this issue, "Re/Engaging Street to Address Multiplicity in Composition Classrooms," Vivette Milson-Whyte affirms the observation by one of her study participants that "Street's work, especially regarding literacy as social practice, was picked up by scholar-researchers in the Caribbean in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the point that his ideas were 'flattened'—became axiomatic." Her participant, a retired professor of literacy studies/language education responded in a survey: "I think the view of literacy as social practice is almost axiomatic now. I first encountered Street in the early 80s so anything I've written takes that orientation for granted." If a social practice view of literacy is 'in the water,' so to speak, why continue to refocus attention on this particular set of its roots? We know, as Bloome et al. point out, (citing Delgado-Gaitan; Delpit; Smitherman; Richardson; Royster; Stockman and Vaughn-Cooke; Trueba; and Woodson) that "studies by scholars of color on the spoken and written language, culture, education, and social and political marginalization of minoritized ethnic groups also played a critical role in the shift to a view of literacy as social" (4). So, why devote these pages to acknowledging Street?

In part, because we recognize that it has been useful for many scholars interested in literacy to read, recall, and cite Brian Street. It might in fact be challenging for us to discuss literacy studies without mentioning Street, particularly because literacy studies has provided a conceptual resource and field of inquiry for composition and writing studies. In fact, scholars in composition or writing studies commonly note that Street contributed much to the shared conception of literacy as a social practice made available through New Literacy Studies (Brandt and Clinton; Gee, Hull and Schultz; Pahl and Rowsell; Prinsloo and Breier; Vee; Vieira; etc.). As readers of *Literacy in Composition Studies* may recall, several of the contributors to this journal's inaugural symposium drew upon Street (Horner; Young; Vieira; Flannery), who himself was a respondent.<sup>2</sup>

The endurance of Street in our fields may also be due to the fact that his body of work continues

to be relevant to our aims. In decades of accelerating globalization and increasingly global Englishes, Street was an early source for the contention that language and literacy practices could never offer a neutral medium for communication, a contribution recognized in writing studies, composition, and English (Alexander; Canagarajah; Newell, Bloome, Kim, and Goff; Shapiro; Symons and Ponzio), as well as proximate fields like education (see, for example, Brooks and Alvarado; Yoon and Templeton). As a scholar who cited William Labov's recognition of Black American English and Shirley Brice Heath's early conception of the "literacy events" as reflecting "*larger sociocultural patterns*" (qtd. in *Literacy in Theory and Practice* 125), Street rejected the supposed divide between orality and writing, recognizing both its methodological distortions and its amenability to oppressive logics (24-30). As an ethnographer of writing, he revealed the constructedness of the printed text's supposedly intrinsic capacity to serve as the vehicle for a preferred Western rationality. Upon this basis, Street opposed dominant Western culture's leveraging of literacy as a tool of oppression both at home and abroad.

Our intention in the sections that follow is not a thorough or systematic overview of Street's work. Rather, we touch upon some of the most essential aspects of his early scholarship, those to which writers gathered in this issue refer, and to which Street himself frequently returned throughout his career ("At Last" 417; "Literacy Inequalities" 581; Street et al. "Changes and Challenges" 17). To better engage the emergence of Street's project, we also lift up some elements that are discussed less often, including contemporary scholars with whom he was in conversation. This recovery strikes us as important at a time when decolonial methods and antiracist practices have come to play a crucial role in our conversations, writing, and research.

## Street's Transformative Critique: Autonomous And Ideological Models

As the work gathered in this special issue attests, Street's theorization of an autonomous model of literacy remains salient within the conceptual landscape of literacy studies. And there is no way to reference the autonomous "school" without affirming the force of Street's transformational critique of the study of literacy as he found it in the 1970s and 80s. In both of his first two projects, his dissertation (now published) and his first book, *The Savage in Literature* and *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, respectively, Street took issue with anthropological writings that advanced ethnocentricity in the guise of authority.

And he was in good company. Many of his contemporaries at the intersections of cultural linguistics (Heath; Scollon and Scollon), sociocultural anthropology (Wertsch), cultural psychology (Scribner and Cole; Rogoff; Minick), and other fields were undertaking situated empirical studies of literate and communicative practices with similar aims. As James Gee attests, scholars who contributed to the rise of New Literacy Studies "not only came from different disciplines" but wrote "in different theoretical languages that never became unified. Nonetheless, such work seemed to be converging on a shared view about literacy" (Gee, "The New Literacy Studies"). Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole's psychological research, for example, advanced the "practice account of literacy" and questioned ethnocentric testing regimes (qtd. in Street *Literacy* 103). Street's work should be viewed

within a broader “social turn” toward sociocultural rather than cognitive conceptions of expressive and interpretive activity (Gee, *An Introduction*). One focus of the social turn was the critique of “Great Divide” theories that advanced dualistic categories in the study of culture, including oral vs. literate, primitive vs. modern, and scientific vs. mythic (McLuhan; Olson; Ong). As they pertain to literacy, Suresh Canagarajah describes “Great Divide” theories as an “apotheosis” of the tendency to value inscribed text over spoken language, regarding text as a “static, detached product, holding transparent meanings for those who could focus on its autonomous and tightly structured status” (7).

The Great Divide, though, had been questioned well before Street published *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, even by Jack Goody and Ian Watt, against whom Street wrote at length (Goody and Watt 320; Street *Literacy* 44-65). Street’s task was to point out how the Great Divide’s dichotomous valuations and oppressive hierarchies became refashioned and recirculated under the aegis of certain descriptions of literacy--particularly those making the development of alphabetic writing a central explanation of cultural difference, as in Goody’s version, or the capacity for objectivity, as in the work of Angela Hildyard and David Olson (Street *Literacy* 74; Vieira 26). Rather than simply mapping human capacities such as rationality, imagination, or empathetic powers onto race, ethnicity, class, or culture, the work of most concern to Street purported to be tracking, instead, the historically contingent development and distribution of alphabetic literacy as a technology. The benefits ascribed to institutional initiatives like literacy programs were in this way imagined as value-free and of universal application. Upon this basis Western elites could advance the autonomous model overseas via testing regimes in which “what was taken as proof of a lack of logical processes among ‘primitive’ peoples was often simply misunderstanding by ill-informed European commentators . . .” (Street *Literacy* 24). Whereas other work in the social turn questioned Great Divide thinking, it was Street who consolidated these critical efforts in the autonomous model of literacy.

Street’s counter-proposal, the *ideological model* of literacy, considers meaning-making practices within social and cultural contexts to invite scrutiny of precisely those social investments an autonomous, technical view of literacy might obscure. Street would later clarify that, for him, “ideology is the site of tension between authority and power on the one hand and resistance and creativity on the other . . .” (434). In this way, Street refused to grant reading and writing a technological function manifesting attributes outside of situated social practice. The ideological model opens acts of reading, writing, and communication, however they might be imagined as instrumental processes, to social and cultural critique. Perpetuating a reductive opposition between context and technical effects, Street would later clarify, was a position held by some of the thinkers he aggregated within the autonomous model. As Street explained in his 2001 contribution to *Literacy: A Critical Sourcebook*:

It is those who employed an ‘autonomous’ model, and who have generally dominated the field of literacy studies until recently, who were responsible for a false polarity between the ‘technical’ and ‘cultural’ aspects of literacy. The ideological model, on the other hand, 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.’ (435)

An ideological reading of an autonomous figuration of literacy reveals the agents that might be repressed by a fetishistic focus on text alone. As Bruce Horner wrote in the first issue of *LiCS*, the work of autonomous literacy offers it as a “neutral phenomenon” that the powerful can offer as “a gift to the unfortunate, who can thence be blamed for failing to make appropriate, grateful use of it to improve themselves” (2). Street’s intervention was therefore as relevant at home as it was abroad.

Against the fetishistic treatment of text, the authors gathered in this special issue often return to and re-purpose the theoretical distinction between autonomous and ideological models of literacy. Sibylle Gruber and Nancy Barrón, in “Misguided Expectations: The Ideological Framework of the Autonomous Model,” locate the autonomous model in classrooms across nations. Recounting their own encounters with the autonomous model of literacy in their undergraduate and graduate careers across transnational borders, Gruber and Barrón argue for naming and disrupting the hegemony present in academic literacies and suggest expanding literacy to include the richly diverse yet contradictory ideologies of literacy that translingual and transliterate students bring to the classroom. Anne Marie Liebel, in “What Counts as Literacy in Health Literacy: Applying the Autonomous and Ideological Models of Literacy,” demonstrates the purchase of Street’s critique of autonomy within healthcare, a space that has not always been associated with literacy research. In work that has attained even more immediate importance since it was entrusted to us, Liebel draws upon a social practices view of literacy to identify and critique the persistence of autonomous conceptions within health literacy research. She outlines an alternative research agenda leveraging an ethnographic approach appropriate for engaging the multidisciplinary care teams that work with patients in today’s medical settings. Departing from information-based models, Liebel argues for an understanding of health literacies as multiple, multimodal, and complexly situated among locations understood as both medical and non-medical spaces. Consistent with the passage from Street quoted above, Liebel’s work refuses to allow the instrumental stakes of medical care to warrant a hierarchical, autonomous view of health literacies. Even as an ideological approach provides an apt framework for her inquiry, it also encompasses Gruber and Barrón’s interventions as Austrian- and Latina-identifying scholars in the cultural and linguistic marginalization effected by US academic discourses. In these ways, the pieces included here engage and extend Street’s transformative critique of autonomous models.

## Against Technological Determinism

Prescient for those of us making use of technologies unavailable in the first decades of Street’s career is the manner in which the critique of autonomy enfolds questions of technological determinism. In taking up the mystifying effects that can follow from the framing of literacy as a technology, it is useful not only to recall Street, but to problematize *how* we recall him. In the spirit of questioning citational practices, already noted above, it is worth reconsidering what and who we lift up when we discuss canonical authors like Street (Delgado; Ahmed *Living a Feminist Life*; “Feminist Shelters”). In Street’s case, it may be easy to recount an origin story in which Street single-handedly

consolidates a field from the critical wreckage of the autonomous model. As transformative as his critical work has proven, attention to it can overlook how, even just in *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, Street's critique of autonomy was presented in close dialogue with compelling work by other writers of the day.

Inrequently discussed is the way in which Street elaborated autonomy's implications in robust dialogue with writing by anthropologist Ruth Finnegan. Street was not the only scholar questioning the tenability of a 'great divide' between oral and literate cultures, nor was he the first to critique Goody in print, and in these endeavors, we can recover a sense of Street extending Finnegan's prior efforts. At the outset of Street's chapter in *Literacy in Theory and Practice* directly addressing problems in the work of John Goody, Street cites Finnegan's questioning of the easy relegation of societies into "the supposed mutually exclusive 'pure' types' of oral or else literate culture" (qtd. in Street 46). Street credits Finnegan with an "explicit programme for future research" that abandons the "concept of a 'great divide' . . . in favour of detailed study of the specific characteristics or consequences likely to be associated with orality and literacy" (qtd in Street 95). Street presents Finnegan as challenging Goody's view of literacy as the *causal* explanation of difference among cultures. She points the way to problems of how those differences were being conceived and notes, from an anthropological perspective, the paucity of evidence supporting the attributes derived, supposedly, from those differences. Her contention is not only that the opposition itself is faulty, but also that conceiving literacy as a technology can obscure its presence as one element among many at play within the social, political, and ideological complexity of culture. Street sees her proposals as "an important corrective to the universalistic and technological determinism arguments of the 'autonomous model,'" and acknowledges his hope to develop further work in this direction (95). We note Street's engagement with Finnegan to highlight ways in which Street, in perhaps his most taught text, presents himself as extending the efforts of other scholars, whose contributions (and indeed, in Finnegan's case, long career) might disappear in our discussions of the rise of literacy studies as a field. This can happen even in conversations questioning the citational politics of returning to Street at all.

Technological determinism would retain its importance within Street's view of autonomous literacy when he extended the discussion to digital technology:

All of these features of the autonomous model were rooted in assumptions about technological determinism that the ideological model and new social practice approaches to literacy have challenged and discredited. And yet, we now find the same array of distorting lenses being put on as we ask, what are the consequences of the present generation of new technologies, those associated in particular with the Internet and with digital forms of communication? . . . [I]t would be misleading and unhelpful to read from the technology into the effects without first positing the social mediating factors that give meaning to such technologies. How, then, can we take sufficient account of the technological dimension of new literacies without sliding into such determinism? ("New Literacies, New Times" 7)

This position is both echoed and crucially particularized in today's explicitly antiracist scholarship on digital technology (Noble). Ruha Benjamin notes, for example, "The view that 'technology is a neutral tool' ignores how race also functions like a tool, structuring whose literal voice gets embodied

in AI” (29). Digital and/or non-alphabetic manifestations of expressive and epistemic practices are hardly free from the slippages toward technicist instrumentality that tend to characterize the autonomous model; the challenge of reading for the values invested in technology, familiar in print-based conceptions of autonomous literacy, continues. As Horner challenges readers of *LiCS* to recognize, the historical development of autonomy in relation to print literacy may in fact invite the temptation to fetishize particular technologies or modalities of expression enabled by digital technology as somehow inherently liberatory—a re-invocation of the autonomous model (6).

Street’s engagement with the question of technology in literacy is consonant with our moments’ range of possible writing materials, tools, and surfaces. After citing Clanchy’s work on medieval writing practices, “A particular technology of writing shapes and defines the uses of literacy in a region or culture” (qtd *Literacy* 113), Street replies, “I would add simply that the ‘technology’ is itself shaped and defined within the culture” (*Literacy* 113). The refusal to let technology step outside of cultural valuation is consistent with the ideological critique of an autonomous model of literacy.

This special issue’s authors make productive use of current technologies in multiple ways, inviting us to consider how technologies of writing shape and are shaped by our cultures of teaching, learning and research. Taking advantage of the affordances of *LiCS*’s digital platform, two pieces featured in this special issue make available video recordings of their data. Crystal VanKooten and Elizabeth G. Allan’s “Searching for Street’s ‘Mix’ of Literacies through Composing Video: Conceptions of Literacy and Moments of Transfer in Basic Writing” presents a study of how collaborative video composition can help undergraduates’ conception of writing transfer across media. Interviews and video recordings of participants’ production processes reveal how collaborative composing did and did not allow students to develop an ideological view of literacy that can “widen pathways for transfer.” This article highlights how even in composing video students can hold to a rigid autonomous view of digital literacies. Andrea Olinger, whose included article is discussed in more detail below, includes video clips of her interview participant, noting that “talk is never the only relevant semiotic channel; visual embodied actions like facial expressions and gestures also convey meaning,” an assertion that, though widely agreed upon, continues to be prohibitively difficult to enact in published scholarship, the structures of which still privilege printed text. In their nuanced and varied engagements with the digital, these pieces amplify Finnegan and Street’s early rejection of technological determinism and demonstrate the enduring relevance of the social practices approach to both pedagogy and research methods.

## From Neo-Coloniality To *The Savage In Literature*

Street’s critique of powerful actors’ deployment of self-serving constructions of literacy is consistent at points with the commitments of anti-racist and decolonial scholarship. Below, we briefly draw connections between Street’s early writing and contemporary decolonial work that seeks to parse the relationships between literacy, writing, and dominant modes of power. We aim to establish foundations linking Street’s ideas to the various articles in this special issue that push back against autonomous models of literacy that reify White and Western hegemony. Gabriela Rios, reading in

dialogue with Walter Mignolo, writes that “the spread of Western literacy (as alphabetic writing and European languages) was bound by a missionary, colonial agenda that constructed alphabetic literacy as a sign of ‘true’ civilization . . . that persists into the present day” (63). An autonomous conception of alphabetic literacy masks such a historical relation; an ideological model surfaces it. Also invoking Mignolo, Malea Powell contended in her 2012 CCCC’s address that “Western fixations with print literacy” present an obstacle to be overcome by “critical orientations to knowledge making” (401). In this way, Street’s work was meaningfully antecedent to more recent literacy scholarship questioning the alignment of literacy and power.

The later chapters of Street’s *Literacy in Theory and Practice* offer compelling examples of how Street critiqued the ends to which literacy was directed in the service of achieving its supposedly “functional” aims (188). Sometimes overlooked by anthologizers invested in sharing the most transportable of Street’s theories, chapter seven pointedly critiqued UNESCO-supported literacy ‘development’ projects sponsored by the West in less wealthy countries. Working from premises recovered from Carl and Lars Berggren’s 1975 *The Literacy Process: A Practice in Domestication or Liberation?* Street argues:

[T]he concept ‘functional’ literacy disguises the relationship of a particular literacy programme to the underlying political and ideological framework. The earlier UNESCO input, for instance, was in fact tied to a particular developmental and economic ethos. It subserved the interests of foreign investment and multinational companies on the premise that productivity and profits could be raised if ‘literacy levels’ were raised. (184)

In this scaling upward of the implications of his critique of autonomous literacies, Street found the international work of literacy programs to frequently perpetuate ethnocentric valuations of literacy in the service of Western capital. Street’s writing about UNESCO-sponsored programs points out how the presumed “rates of work and allocation of labor” which “the project organisers believed was linked with literacy, turns out on closer examination to have been crudely ethnocentric in its representation of time and work and its inability to recognise indigenous conceptions” (191).

Another version of Street’s commitments as a literacy scholar are evident in the published version of his dissertation, *The Savage in Literature: Representations of ‘primitive’ society in English fiction 1858-1920*. Composed in 1975, *The Savage in Literature* questioned the way in which popular, scientific, and anthropological discourses informed racist literary representation of non-Western, mainly African, peoples. He argued that the cultural history of this odious lineage predated the Western imperialism it could later be used to justify. “Scientific theories of race,” he wrote, “provided a framework of thought with regard to primitive peoples which justified the actions of imperialists, but they arose, not out of an imperial situation, but in a pre-imperial world of science” (Street, *The Savage in Literature* 5). Rooted in historical and cultural questions, his work challenged the notion that racism might arise, perforce or “naturally,” from cross-cultural contact. Tracking the circulation of crude ethnographic essentialisms which began to appear in “travelers’ tales,” Street noted how these representations of so-called “primitive” people were upheld by “scientifically backed metaphors,” including

the chain of being and the ladder by which all other cultures were ascribed their place in

the universal hierarchy. A people was given its appropriate rung on the ladder according to race. It was assumed that one's place in the hierarchy was determined by heredity; the ladder represented stages of social evolution with Anglo-Saxon at the top, and reporters looked for criteria by which to determine how far other races had climbed up it. (7)

Such conceits, "with European man at the top and primitive at the bottom" Street observed, were features of a longstanding social construction that was only "strengthened by post-Darwinian anthropology" (10). These principles motivated Street's project, which lifted up "the scientific ideas represented in nineteenth-century popular fiction" for scrutiny in terms of the anthropological discipline as he knew it. Street was keenly aware that such "standards are themselves embedded in the values of a particular society and will themselves be analysed in the same way by future scientists" (17). In light of such reflexivity, Street acknowledged his efforts as a "starting point" for further situated work. Many of us who have completed research and writing projects can recognize in such a stance something of our own labors, our own awareness of the limits of our efforts, and the humility that comes with realizing the truth that, even as we might strive to write in service of whatever idiom of justice guides us, our scholarly efforts to manifest it are likely to appear flawed in the sight of future judgment.

*The Savage in Literature* resonates with elements of current scholarship that have come to be central to contemporary literacy studies, such as Iris Ruiz's entry on "Race" in *Decolonizing Rhetoric and Composition Studies: New Latinx Keywords for Theory and Pedagogy*, in which she argues for a decolonial methodology that can "delink the term race from its historical ties to Western hierarchies" (5). To accomplish this work, she proposes a historical critique of Western racism's scientific, religious, and discursive origins. Similarly, *The Savage in Literature* attends to the historical construction of race, arguing that its literary figuration responded to the prior thinking of a public whose ethnocentrism had been cultivated and validated by a confluence of racism in popular, evolutionary, and anthropological discourses. As a scholar of both literature and literacy, Street staunchly opposed ethnocentric valuations advanced in the guise of authoritative objectivity, social-scientific or otherwise. The possibility of transforming a field of inquiry through our scholarship, as did Street, remains a goal worthy of our aspiration.

Even so, and as laudable as his work may have been, his methods do not achieve the reflexivity of decolonial practice, as Wan describes in the first of our four symposium pieces featured in this issue. In "Making Sense of Researcher Positionality in Foundational Literacy Studies Research," she pinpoints how Street's work, despite its gains, also continued a tradition of White and typically male scholars doing fieldwork in indigenous societies that we would do well to continue scrutinizing. Wan, whose CCCC presentation on the same helped shape our approach to this special issue, here helps us consider further the question of "how does one acknowledge 'foundational' without dominance and erasure?" Following from Wan's insights, one of our aims in this special issue has been to link foundational ideas from Street's body of work to related approaches that readers can further lift up when they take up these projects in their own work.

## Academic Literacies: Autonomy, Access, And Justice

Street's career included a robust engagement with academic literacy in higher education and K-12 schooling, and projects extending this work bear upon pressing questions of equity in disciplinary access. The turn toward Academic Literacies in Street's writing and collaborations may be read as one way in which he was unwilling to isolate his home contexts in the West, including the institutional spaces in which he taught, from the implications of the critique of autonomous literacies. We attend to Academic Literacies in some detail below because it is a concentration within contemporary writing studies research that, as such, features in several of the essays to follow.

Horner notes in the first issue of *LiCS*, research on academic writing in the United Kingdom “emerged at least in part as a response to teacher-scholars’ encounters in higher education with new populations of students with a far greater diversity of language and literacy practices than previously” (3). In their study, Mary Lea and Brian Street identified three modes of academic literacy. First, a persistent narrow view of academic literacy in terms of possession and lack, the contention that regardless of discipline, “literacy is literacy. When they [students] arrive, if they can do it, fine, if not fix them” (Street, Lea, and Lillis 384). Simply “fixing” writing is what Lea and Street call the study skills model, which emphasizes correct grammar and punctuation (Lea and Street 261). Instructors who hold to this model believe that academic literacy is universal across disciplines, and students must adapt to the university ways with words. The second model is academic socialization, which argues students need to be acculturated into a discipline's discourse and ways of thinking; however, this model “tends to treat writing as a transparent medium of representation and so fails to address the deep language, literacy and discourse issues involved in the institutional production and representation of meaning” (Lea and Street 261).

Lea and Street see the “*academic literacies*” model, the third model of academic literacy, as the most sophisticated of the three models. Academic literacies is “concerned with meaning making, identity, power, and authority, and foregrounds the institutional nature of what counts as knowledge in any particular academic context (369). This emphasis on the “the relationship of epistemology and writing” pertained “not just in the subject area in general but also more generally, in institutional requirements (e.g., regarding plagiarism, feedback), as well as in more specific contexts such as variation across individual faculty members’ requirements and even individual student assignments” (369). In other words, in academic literacies what counts as good writing depends on their cultural, institutional, and disciplinary location. An academic literacies model, when enacted as instruction, helps students learn “the shifts in genre and mode as they move between group work, speaking, note taking, presentation, more formal writing, etc.” (Lea and Street 370).

Academic literacies overlaps with the study skills and academic socialization models, but it steers away from concepts of student deficit and homogenous university culture and emphasizes transforming academic discourse for a digitally connected and more diverse world. Students and instructors work to “reveal how genres create knowledge in particular ways . . . to make visible the different ways in which particular genres shape knowledge and, ultimately, offer students more control over them and over meaning making processes. In each instance, genre is made more visible”

(Street, Lea, and Lillis 388). This collaboration isn't just between teacher and student but implicates institutional-level decision making of what counts as literacy. In the last two decades, research on academic literacies has come to span geographies and institutions, as seen in the 2015 *Working With Academic Literacies: Case Studies Towards Transformative Practice*.

Contributors to this special issue take up prior scholarship decrying the way in which higher education insists on a process of assimilation into the dominant culture via learning and the practice of homogenized, supposedly neutral styles of academic writing. For example, Carmen Kynard's assessment of literacy studies, nearly two decades after the rise of New Literacy Studies, still finds that we have not understood "the social context of literacy, language, and discourse . . . from perspectives of interrogating deep political ideologies shifts that have left structured inequalities and violence firmly in place, especially in reference to, but not solely based on, race" (64).

Authors in this issue, then, take on the challenge of exposing how educators and education shape learning in the image of dominant culture, and how they may recognize, intervene in, and transform those processes toward social justice. Bringing Street's social practice perspective to the teaching and learning of argumentation in "Composing Literary Arguments in an 11th Grade International Baccalaureate Classroom: How Classroom Instructional Conversations Shape Modes of Participation," George E. Newell, Theresa Siemer Thanos, and Matt Seymour offer a rich ethnographic framework for the exploration of the construct of learning as participation. Examining how differing modes of participation evolve out of differing opportunities in their case study, they urge researchers to look beyond the selection of pedagogical materials to consider the nature of the instructional conversations in which central teaching materials are used. Andrea Olinger's "Self-Contradiction in Faculty's Talk about Writing: Making and Unmaking Autonomous Models of Literacy" shows how universal notions of "good writing" support White language supremacy and offers the theoretical tools of interpretive repertoires and variability as resources for understanding and combating the autonomous model within individual writers. In "Brian Street and African American Feminist Practices: Two Histories, Two Texts" Faye Spencer Maor re-interprets Francis (Fanny) Jackson Coppin's and Hallie Quinn Brown's philosophies of literacy instructions as Black feminist ideological literacy, one that draws on their experiences and the experiences of the Black community to valorize and respect the languages and literacy practices of Black students in schools. Maor considers what we can learn from Coppin and Brown to transform literacy through a Black feminist lens that promotes inclusive, equitable, and socially just literacy education. This work suggests that rather than assimilating racially marginalized students an inclusive academic literacies accepts students' linguistic practices as valuable and well-suited for knowledge construction and knowledge sharing across disciplines. Pedagogies that resist linguistic racism can create pathways toward consciously revising policies of access to academic literacies.

## Concluding Remarks

By problematizing, extending, and re-engaging ideological models of literacy, we hope to, as in our call for proposals, to "[re-conceive] the extant and future relations to be found, imagined, and



composed between *literacy and composition studies*.” Street’s critical work transformed the field of literacy studies, and the pieces compiled here urge us to reflect on the work that remains to be done, from engaging marginalized communities to taking up matters of policy or direct action. This special issue came together while the United States saw its largest, most broadly supported demonstrations for racial justice ever. We hope that the articles and symposium essays in this special issue provide some generative theoretical and methodological points of departure for readers questioning how literacy upholds power for White dominant cultures, epistemologies, and languaging. The COVID-19 pandemic, too, was a backdrop for this work. At a time when faculty were responding to a worldwide pandemic, taking measures to secure the wellness of their families and shifting their teaching online, the authors whose efforts are gathered here continued to read, write, and revise. We cannot adequately thank our writers and peer reviewers, without whose patience, perseverance, and generosity of spirit we would not have been able to complete this special issue of *LiCS* honoring the work of Brian V. Street.

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Jordan Hayes—*University of Pittsburgh*

Nicole Turnipseed—*University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*



## NOTES

1. To view the Street Festschrift Seminar Presentations, visit the webpage here:  
<https://cveda.ehe.osu.edu/ideas/street-festschrift-seminar/>
2. Brian Street served on the *Literacy in Composition Studies* editorial board from 2013-2017.

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# Self-Contradiction in Faculty's Talk about Writing: Making and Unmaking Autonomous Models of Literacy

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## KEYWORDS

autonomous model of literacy; ideological model of literacy;  
white language habitus; disciplinary writing; WAC/WID; academic literacies;  
faculty writers; discourse analysis

The autonomous model of literacy—what Brian Street (*Literacy*) has characterized as a “neutral technology that can be detached from specific social contexts” (1)—infiltrates universities, from curricular structures and assessment plans to the students, faculty, and staff who enact them. As scholars in Writing Across the Curriculum/Writing in the Disciplines (WAC/WID), Academic Literacies (ACLITS), and related fields have shown, the autonomous model affects where and how writing instruction unfolds in institutions, and it shapes the conceptions and attitudes toward writing of individual faculty and students: who should be responsible for teaching it, what good writing looks like, what writing abilities should be “mastered” at particular stages of schooling (e.g., Boughey; Lea and Street; Rose; Starke-Meyerring).

Street identifies a second, contrasting model, the ideological model of literacy, which sees literacies as anchored in particular social and cultural contexts and molded by epistemologies and power relations. This model explains the situated nature of any literacy practice, including those in academic disciplines; it also accounts for the centuries-old association between academic writing and white Anglo-European epistemologies, which determine how racialized students' language and literacies are typically construed.<sup>1</sup> As Nelson Flores and Jonathan Rosa argue, “people are positioned as speakers of prestige or non-prestige language varieties based not on what they actually do with language but, rather, how they are heard by the white listening subject” (160). In these ways, the autonomous model of literacy—which includes teachers' beliefs that, in applying universal standards of “academic writing conventions,” they are assessing students' texts objectively—operates within the ideological model.

The autonomous model is ideological in an additional sense. Linguist Jef Verschueren defines as *ideological* “any basic pattern of meaning or frame of interpretation bearing on . . . aspect(s) of social ‘reality’ . . . felt to be commonsensical, and often functioning in a

normative way” (10). Because these frames are commonsensical, Verschueren explains, they may be “highly immune to experience and observation” (14). As a result, there will likely be disconnections between the ideological frame and outer experience or professed belief/opinion, or between what people say explicitly and what may be inferred from practice.

For the teachers applying a white gaze to racialized students’ language use, raciolinguistic ideology that pairs whiteness with appropriateness creates various disconnects, such as between what many profess to value (e.g., students’ rights to their own language and racial justice) and what they do in practice (e.g., grade down for deviations from “Standard English” or see deviations where none exist) (e.g., Flores and Rosa; Inoue, *Antiracist*). And in WAC/WID and ACLITS, researchers have produced compelling evidence of the disjunction between faculty members’ assertions (e.g., that good writing is universal and that they are teaching a generic academic essay) and their

***“Although they maintained their beliefs in the universal rules, their explanations for the apparent contradictions were complex, shifting, and self-contradictory. Such behavior is compelling evidence that, in individual writers, the autonomous model may be less stable than it at first seems.”***

own tacit practice (i.e., of discipline-specific literacy practices and of their assessment of student work from a disciplinary, rather than generic academic, lens; e.g., Lancaster; Lea and Street; Thaiss and Zawacki; Wilder). As a feature of any ideological frame, the presence of disconnections between representation and practice could be seen as further evidence of the resilience of the autonomous model. In this article, however, I show how a particular set of theoretical tools, when applied to conversations about such disconnections, in fact reveals the instability of the autonomous model.

In their essay, Flores and Rosa call for shifting language education from an approach that favors appropriateness “toward one that seeks to denaturalize standardized linguistic categories” (168). Thus, instead of “perpetuating the racial status quo,” researchers and teachers can “participat[e] in struggles against the ideological processes associated with the white speaking and white listening subject” (168-69). Here, I offer theoretical tools to aid in such denaturalization. *Interpretative repertoires*, a concept developed by sociologists of scientific knowledge and currently used by critical discursive psychologists, alerts researchers to inconsistency in how interviewees represent their views. Yet in literacy and composition studies scholarship, as in most qualitative studies, participants’ inconsistency is usually treated as a problem to be clarified, not as a potential site for analysis. The presence of variability in representations, I posit, shows that the autonomous model’s grip on an interviewee is not as strong as a researcher might think.

My claim draws from interviews with two faculty writers. After our initial interviews, I had noticed contradictions between previous comments these faculty writers had made espousing beliefs in particular universal “rules” for good writing and specific linguistic and textual features of the texts they had shared with me. In our follow-up interviews, I asked them to comment on these seeming contradictions. Although they maintained their beliefs in the universal rules, their explanations



for the apparent contradictions were complex, shifting, and self-contradictory. Such behavior is compelling evidence that, in individual writers, the autonomous model may be less stable than it at first seems. Ultimately, I argue that in conjunction with systemic efforts to dismantle universal notions of “good writing” and white language supremacy, interpretative repertoires and variability can be valuable resources for understanding—and loosening—the thrall of the autonomous model on individual writers.

## The Autonomous Text and White Language Supremacy

Before discussing the concepts of interpretative repertoires and variability and detailing my methods and findings, I first unpack the association between academic writing and whiteness.

Implied in the autonomous model of literacy is an ideal in which texts themselves are autonomous from context. In his 1977 essay in *Harvard Educational Review*, psychologist David Olson articulates how this view shapes the reading and writing of texts. Abiding by it, one should “write in such a manner that the sentence was an adequate, explicit representation of the meaning, relying on no implicit premises or personal interpretations” (268). This approach “allow[s] a given sentence to have only one interpretation . . . [Writers thus needed] to construct sentences for which the meaning was dictated by the lexical and syntactic features of the sentence itself” (270). Olson asserts that this concept originated in Western intellectual traditions, starting with the Greek’s invention of a phonemic alphabet and evolving with the development of the printing press, the British essayistic tradition, and the Royal Society of London’s policies for scientific prose (269). For instance, the Society’s Thomas Sprat, writing in 1667, enjoined scientists to “reject all the amplifications, digressions, and swellings of style: to return back to the primitive purity, and shortness, when men deliver’d so many *things*, almost in an equal number of *words*” (2.20.2).<sup>2</sup>

Street renders an extensive critique of the autonomous model of literacy as articulated by Olson and other scholars. For instance, Street points out that the meaning of texts changes over time and space. He further contends that “claims for the objectivity and neutrality” of sentence meaning are “themselves socially constructed conventions, developed within specific social traditions. They should not be taken at face value since they serve more often to privilege the users’ own beliefs than as rigorous standards of ‘truth’” (4). Ultimately, Street chastises proponents of the autonomous model of literacy, Olson among them, for arguing that their claims—based in their own Anglo-European essayist tradition—apply to literacy in general and for implying that “non-academics in their own culture and members of other cultures, particularly illiterate ‘primitives,’ cannot have the skills of ‘objectivity,’ ‘neutrality’ and ‘logic’” (77). These claims also rest on a problematic distinction between supposedly “subjective, context-dependent” oral language and “objective, context-independent” written language, one that persists today in conversations about “home language” (usually a racialized variety) and “school language,” with the former seen as unhelpful to the latter and both erroneously treated as stable, discrete, and homogenous (Flores; Williams-Farrier; Young).

The ideal of the autonomous text directly inspires current understandings of academic writing, synthesized into three principles by Chris Thaiss and Terry Myers Zawacki: “clear evidence in writing

that the writer(s) have been persistent, open-minded, and disciplined in study” (5); “the dominance of reason over emotion or sensual perception” (5); and “an imagined reader who is coolly rational, reading for information, and intending to formulate a reasoned response” (7). As Asao Inoue points out in his Chair’s address at the 2019 Conference on College Composition and Communication, “These judgments, these standards, seem like they’re just about language, just about communication, just about preparation for the future, just about good critical thinking and communicating” (“How Do We Language” 358). Yet, of course, given their Anglo-European roots, they are what Inoue calls “white language habitus,” whose features he adapts from Catherine Myser’s scholarship on whiteness in bioethics. These “discursive and performative dispositions” include “[a focus on] [i]ndividualism, hyperindividualism, self-determination, autonomy, and self-reliance, self-control” and the view that “cognitive capacity is the ability to think rationally, logically, and objectively, with rigor, clarity and consistency valued most” (*Antiracist* 48-49; see also “Classroom Writing Assessment”). Teachers, usually white but not exclusively so, enact this white racial habitus—part of what Inoue calls white language supremacy (“How Do We Language”)—in their assessments of student’s written and spoken language. As Flores observes, “whether one is positioned as successfully engaged in academic language is primarily determined by the white listening/reading subject whose perceptions have been shaped by histories of colonialism that continue to frame racialized speakers as coming from communities with linguistic deficiencies that need to be policed and corrected” (24).

Given that whiteness is baked into the construct of academic writing, Flores and Rosa argue that concepts like academic language “must be conceptualized as racialized ideological perceptions rather than objective linguistic categories” (152). The theoretical tools I describe below, as ways to identify and find patterns in writers’ contradictory representations, can assist in destabilizing academic writing and, it follows, white language supremacy.

## Variability as the Norm: Theoretical Tools from the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge

The concept of *interpretative repertoires* originated in a 1984 study of the sociology of scientific knowledge, Nigel Gilbert and Michael Mulkay’s *Opening Pandora’s Box: A Sociological Analysis of Scientists’ Discourse*. Analyzing interviews with scientists as well as their writings, Gilbert and Mulkay identify two repertoires scientists used when explaining the success or failure of particular theories. The empiricist repertoire “portrays scientists’ actions and beliefs as following unproblematically and inescapably from the empirical characteristics of an impersonal natural world” (Gilbert and Mulkay 56); the contingent repertoire operates when “scientists presented their actions and beliefs as heavily dependent on speculative insights, prior intellectual commitments, personal characteristics, indescribable skills, social ties and group membership” (56). They find that in interviews, scientists moved unconsciously and flexibly between repertoires, often describing their own position in the empiricist repertoire and the erroneous positions of others in the contingent. In addition, Gilbert and Mulkay observe that when pushed to resolve the contradictory representations, scientists would argue that the empiricist “truth” would eventually triumph over any contingent influences.

In a 1985 chapter, “Scientists’ Interview Talk: Interviews as a Technique for Revealing Participants’ Interpretative Practices,” Jonathan Potter and Mulkay demonstrate the utility of identifying apparent contradictions in participants’ representations and asking participants about them. This interviewing technique helps researchers “explicate the devices that participants use to resolve inconsistency and reproduce coherent and unproblematic accounts of their social world for particular interactional situations” (267). Critically, Potter and Mulkay do not treat such inconsistencies as a “technical problem” that can be resolved through clarification/reinterpretation from a participant (250). Instead, “given the interpretive flexibility of the resources that respondents use to give accounts of their actions” and the fact that “additional requests for clarification by the interviewer will often generate further apparent contradictions instead of reducing them” (253), such reinterpretations should not be automatically accepted but, instead, treated as an “analytic resource” (257).

Gilbert and Mulkay’s interpretative repertoires influenced the fields of discursive psychology and, later, critical discursive psychology (Wiggins). Discursive psychologists examine how psychological issues like attitudes, cognitions, and prejudice are invoked, oriented to, and enacted in interaction (Wiggins). Talk, as a result, is “not treated as an externalisation of underlying thoughts, motivations, memories or attitudes, but as *performative* of them” (Tileagă and Stokoe 4). Critical discursive psychology developed as an offshoot for researchers interested in how interaction may be influenced by social and cultural ideology (Wiggins).

Interpretative repertoires have been studied in interviews or focus groups about such topics as race and racism (e.g., Wetherell and Potter), gender (e.g., Edley), and marriage (e.g., Lawes). Other fields have also taken them up (see, e.g., Talja in library and information science and McCloskey in nursing). Yet with the exception of Cheryl Geisler’s scholarship, the concepts of interpretative repertoires or variability as an analytic resource have not circulated widely in literacy and composition studies.

In her 1994 book, Geisler uses Gilbert and Mulkay’s findings to understand the nature of expertise in academic literacy. She points out that scientists possess a “bifurcated practice” (27) between an autonomous notion of texts and a rhetorical one. As writers, they seek to produce autonomous texts by, for instance, making their research seem to emerge inevitably from the literature and the findings from the methods; as readers of others’ texts, however, they read skeptically and seek to reconstruct the context. She remarks, “it is only by reserving one language for writing texts about their own work and using another language for reading texts about the work of others that practitioners manage this conflict” (81). She also cites studies showing that this rhetorical view—which can be “informal and tacit” 89—does not necessarily carry over when one is reading texts outside of one’s specialty.

Despite her theoretical interest in scientists’ bifurcated discourse practices, Geisler’s case studies focus on differences between novices’ and experts’ composing processes and on the challenges of making rhetorical process knowledge visible in classrooms—not on how experts juggle interpretative repertoires in their talk. For scholars interested in tracing writers’ conceptions and attitudes toward writing, however, interpretative repertoires and variability should be essential theoretical tools.

## Methods

This research derives from a larger IRB-approved study of how groups of academic writers—from college seniors to faculty members and in such relationships as advisor-advisee and coauthor—perceive and practice “writing style” in their disciplines.

With each participant, I conducted an initial literacy history interview, collected examples of their writing (including drafts), and conducted a follow-up text-based interview (Prior, “Tracing”). When I prepared for these follow-up interviews, I reviewed the initial interview transcripts and read the texts they had shared, looking for potential differences between how they represented their writing and specific linguistic and textual features actually present. For instance, as readers will see below, I noticed that Jing Jing had described good writing as text that flowed without relying on transition words, but I found transition words in the piece of writing that she admired, and so I put this apparent contradiction on my list of topics to discuss.<sup>3</sup>

Of my eight focal participants, contradictions between representations and practices emerged in interactions with seven (two undergraduates, two doctoral students, one postdoc, and two faculty). Because of my interest in faculty members’ representations of writing, I focus here on the two faculty: Dan Simons, a tenured professor of psychology who is a white American man, and Jing Jing Chang, a tenure-track assistant professor of film studies who is a Chinese Canadian woman. Recognizing that participants have the right to claim authorship and to protect their identity, my consent form allowed them to specify whether they wanted their names or pseudonyms used. Both participants preferred their names. More details about each participant open each case study, below.

When the participant permitted, I supplemented my audio recordings with video because talk is never the only relevant semiotic channel; visual embodied actions like facial expressions and gestures also convey meaning (see Olinger, “Visual”). I videorecorded Jing Jing but not Dan, although he consented.<sup>4</sup>

After producing rough transcripts of the interviews, I identified the excerpts in which, prompted by my questions, Dan and Jing Jing accounted for apparent contradictions between representation and practice. I transcribed these excerpts in finer detail, adapting conventions from conversation analysis (e.g., Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson; see Appendix A). A key principle of discourse analysis is that utterances are context dependent and accomplish social actions. As a result, transcribing my questions and backchannels, pauses, and other paralinguistic details (e.g., laughter, intonation) helps me, and readers, understand the co-constructed nature of the interaction (see also Potter and Hepburn). For instance, an interruption from me (“Oh wow. Okay”; see Appendix B/line 19) might be excluded from a transcript with less detail. But this utterance, far from irrelevant, shows me doing work as the interviewer: I am indicating that Dan’s explanation is new and surprising to me and that I accept it.<sup>5</sup>

After I produced the more-detailed transcripts, I examined those excerpts for the explanation each writer gave for the contradiction I identified. Noticing that there were multiple different explanations, I kept track of each one.

For the case studies below, I first describe the initial representation and then present the

apparent contradiction that I had noticed when reviewing the texts I had collected. Next, I narrate the conversation I had with each participant about this apparent contradiction; as I do this, I identify each different account as it emerged. Lastly, I gather the multiple accounts produced by each writer and reflect on what they mean for the autonomous model of literacy.

## Dan Simons: “Show, Don’t Tell”

Dan Simons is a cognitive psychologist and tenured full professor who has taught at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) since 2002. With Christopher Chabris, he published *The Invisible Gorilla: And Other Ways Our Intuitions Deceive Us* (Chabris and Simons), a *New York Times* bestseller. In 2010, Dan and Christopher blogged for *Psychology Today*, and they have written many essays for popular media that apply findings in experimental psychology to contemporary issues or review books by science journalists. Dan also developed a writing guide for colleagues and students that is available on his website.

Our initial in-person interview (56 minutes, 10/18/12) covered his experiences with academic and popular science writing, stylistic preferences, collaborations with Chabris, and approach to teaching writing in psychology. We also discussed my feedback on his writing guide, in which he had expressed interest when we had met to discuss his participation in the study. Afterwards, Dan shared multiple drafts of a coauthored article and an op-ed, and I saved copies of his blog posts. The follow-up interview (48 minutes, 3/28/13), which was also in-person, involved text- and discourse-based questions about his writing and student writing containing his comments.

### *The Initial Representation*

Dan’s eight-page writing guide describes “broad principles of effective writing,” which include suggestions for an “enticing” opening, “flow,” “structure,” and revision. These principles are followed by 31 “common mistakes and pet peeves.” At the end is a “revision worksheet” containing a distillation of the guide’s advice.

One of the 31 “common mistakes and pet peeves” is “Don’t say something is interesting without explaining why it is interesting. Better yet, don’t say it—show it.” This advice is also the last “pro tip” on the sentence-level section of the revision worksheet: “Show it, don’t tell it. Give an example to illustrate your point rather than just stating your point. Show that the result is interesting rather than stating that it is.”

Several assumptions underlie “show, don’t tell.” First is the importance of disciplinary evidence, which reflects white language habitus in the preference for logic and rigor. Second is the ideological frame that good writing is universal, which suggests that characteristics of one genre will apply to others. “Show, don’t tell” is standard advice in creative writing (e.g., Henkin), and although creative writing is usually considered quite different from academic writing, writing advice for academics may include such guidance (Schimel; Sword). Dan nods to this idea when he writes on his website that the guide covers “scientific writing, but the same principles apply to most non-fiction (including journalism)” (Simons, “Writing and Revising”).

Dan and I discussed this advice during our initial interview, when we reviewed my feedback on his guide. I remarked that I was wondering if he felt that “show, don’t tell” applied to popular science writing, scientific writing, or both, or whether it operated in one type more than the other. I declared that although I understood how this principle functioned in journalism, I was curious how it applied to scientific writing. He replied that it “applies to everything” (line 1; see Appendix B for the subtitled audio and transcript) and provided an example from a personal statement for graduate school, in which a hypothetical student wrote that they developed “outstanding insights into: clinical populations” (lines 3-4/B<sup>6</sup>). Dan remarked that the student shouldn’t *say* they developed “outstanding insights”; instead, they should *show* that they did. He called this advice a “classic mantra for journalism” (lines 7-9/B).

I then asked him for another example, saying I was “having trouble visualizing” how this advice applied to scientific articles. He responded by raising the issue of using “interestingly” to evaluate data. He implied that “interestingly” isn’t necessary because readers will “come to that evaluation” themselves if writers show why the findings are interesting (line 20/B). He added, “And you know I’m guilty of that as well. ‘Interestingly’ is an easy transition. But if you have to say it’s interesting, then it probably isn’t to other people unless you (.) explain why, so, just (.) explain it.” (lines 22-24/B). Here, he acknowledged the difficulty of always following his advice, and he attributed his inconsistency to willpower, admitting that he has been “guilty” of using an “easy” transition that does not force the writer to explain *why* something is interesting. Although explaining why might arguably fall under “tell”—it is just a different kind of telling than “interestingly”—this possible contradiction did not come up.

To summarize, Dan upheld the view that “show, don’t tell” applies to all good writing and gave two examples of evaluative language (“I developed an outstanding understanding...”; “Interestingly...”) that should be avoided by writers, who would instead *display* that understanding and that interestingness. At the same time, he mentioned that he has not always followed this advice. Moreover, his comment about the need to explain why something is interesting hints at the flexibility of “show, don’t tell”—a quality that recurs in our follow-up interview.

### *An Apparent Contradiction*

After that interview, I examined the texts that Dan had sent and also began reading his blog. I noticed that one of his scholarly articles was discussed in a blog post (Simons, “Demographics”). Examining the post, I found two instances in which Dan seemed to veer from his advice (See Fig. 1):

In writing the paper and re-weighting the samples, I discovered something interesting about who responds to these sorts of surveys. Although both could be weighted to a nationally representative sample, the raw demographics of the samples were vastly different. They were roughly comparable on most dimensions (e.g., income, education, region of the country), but their ages differed dramatically.

...

For me, this figure was eye opening. I wasn't surprised that an online Mechanical Turk sample would be disproportionately younger, and I assumed that phone surveys would oversample the elderly, but I had no idea how extreme that bias would be. What that means is that any national survey conducted by phone is mostly contacting older people. Unless the sample is adequately large, the number of young respondents will be minuscule, meaning that the weighting for those respondents will be huge. If a small survey happened to get a few oddball younger respondents, it could dramatically alter the total estimate.

Fig. 1. Two excerpts from Dan's blog (underlining added).

Immediately after he used the words, Dan explained why the findings are “interesting” and why the figure is “eye-opening.” But because he had outlined a rather strict policy to “show, don't tell” where it is preferable to “let [readers] come to that evaluation” (line 20/B) instead of doing the work for them, I wanted to learn his take on his usage. During our follow-up interview five months later, I reminded him of his emphasis on “show, don't tell,” showed him the first example from the post, and asked for his “read” on the language (line 13; see Appendix C for the subtitled audio and transcript).

#### *Accounting for the Apparent Contradiction*

As I will show, Dan accounted for the apparent contradiction between representation and practice by arguing that the advice to show, not tell was being applied in the wrong context. Yet in resolving this contradiction, he introduced some new contradictions and redefined “show, don't tell” in the process.

First, he offered a simple explanation: “Um (1.1) Blog style. (1.0) So blog style has more personal (.) narrative uh content to it.” (line 14/C). He elaborated by saying that he might write “I discovered something” in a blog, but “I would never do that in a journal article.” (line 15/C). Yet he then qualified this reason: he stated that he might use language like “we encountered something odd or unusual” in journal articles, although he did not give a reason, and that although he does not like the expression “something interesting,” he intentionally uses it in blogs (lines 16-17/C).

Next, he gave another reason besides personal narrative content: “I want to flag what people should pay attention to in that context,” (line 21/C). Here, he commits to the value of words that guide the reader through a text and lack a propositional function—thus undermining the autonomous view of texts underpinning much academic writing advice.

When I showed him the second excerpt (See Fig. 1), he accounted for his language use with the



same reason as before: “So this is- this is basically s- you know blogs are are supposed to be more personal, so (.) I try to give my reactions to things a lot more often,” (lines 28-31/C). He explained that many of his posts “are a bit more opinionated and have a bit more of a- you know (1.0) sort of evaluative component to it, and kind of self-evaluative too.” (lines 34-37/C). He clarified that he tries to avoid using “interestingly” but sometimes still “need[s] to” use it in blog posts (lines 39-41/C).

I then jumped in with my own defense of his use of “interesting” in the first excerpt: “But it seems to be different because it is (0.2) it is more personal than interestingly.” (lines 43-45/C). He agreed and said that because this is a post *about* a journal article, “here I have to be commenting on something other than just what’s in the paper. So (1.0) the the goal is to you know here I kind of put in a little bit about discovery sorts of issues. Right (0.2) whereas I wouldn’t talk about (.) the discovery process in a journal article, that’s just not what you do.” (lines 47-56/C). He added that he does not edit these as much as he does journal articles (line 58/C). I stammered that I didn’t mean for my question to come across as a critique (lines 59, 61/C), and he replied, “Yeah, I know but I I might if I were revising it I might change that. °I don’t know.° I mean I edit before I post these things, but not (1.0) not the way I would for a journal article. And I’m the only one who looks at it” (lines 62-66/C).

In saying this, Dan returned to his point that “show, don’t tell” applies to journal articles and not blogs, but he acknowledged that he might have deleted that language had he taken more time to edit—or had someone else flagged it. Although Dan justified this apparent contradiction by saying that “show, don’t tell” does not apply to blog posts, his comment may indicate that he still feels ambivalent about his use of evaluations like “interesting” and “eye-opening.” The desire to follow writing advice universally, to be consistent across genres, seems strong.

After Dan made his point about editing, I interrupted him to return to the writing guide, asking if show, don’t tell was relevant in the two examples from his blog post (line 67/C). He replied, “It’s more tell.” (line 68/C) and qualified his statement: although the post includes the sentence “I found something interesting about who responds,” he is “still setting up a mystery here, I haven’t told you (.) you know the critical finding yet.” (lines 70-73/C). He added, “it’s a little more tell” than he usually includes in his posts (line 77/C), “but- if if you look at some of the other ones, I kind of have teasers up at the beginning and then I tell.” (lines 78-79/C). Looking across these explanations, “telling” now means not only evaluating the findings (“I found something interesting about...”) but also explaining the mystery introduced in the beginning.

Dan then gave a final reason: “There’s also the journalism principle that (.) you not not bury the lede. Right. So you’re (.) supposed to have something in the first paragraph that pretty much gives away everything you’re talking about, so and you have to do that in a blog or nobody reads the whole thing.” (lines 83-87/C). Although I had showed him the fourth and sixth paragraphs, he uses this “journalism principle” to support his redefinition of “tell.” With this journalism principle, telling happens in the first paragraph.

### *The Value of Studying These Accounts*

Dan’s initial representation of good writing was that “show, don’t tell” applied to all good



writing—in essence, supporting the autonomous model of literacy. Yet when accounting for the apparent contradiction by explaining that such markers of affective stance (“interesting,” “eye-opening”) were appropriate for “blog style,” he validated the notion that good writing is context-specific. This difference alone is enough to reveal cracks in the autonomous model. By looking even more closely at his multiple accounts, however, we can see even more cracks. In this complex series of accounts of his practice—which I as interviewer co-construct, given that I elicited them, accepted them, and offered my own—Dan contends that “show, don’t tell” applies everywhere, that it does not apply to blogs, that it is a mantra of journalism but that a basic rule of journalism (don’t bury the lede) calls on a writer to tell in the introduction (although the case in point was not actually in the introduction), and that the writing process (with less editing) may account for what must then be seen as a problem.

These cracks in the autonomous model are difficult to notice because of what Gilbert and Mulkay call “conceptual vagueness” (80). Dan suggested that blogs can admit more “narrative” features than traditional journal

articles, yet in this more narrative genre, “telling” before “showing” fits right in. The vagueness of “telling” resembles the discourse of Gilbert and Mulkay’s scientists when they used the contingent repertoire to account for the success or rejection of particular theories. Gilbert and Mulkay note that conceptual vagueness can be

expanded or contracted, withdrawn or supplemented, without creating glaring inconsistencies, to meet the exigencies of each new conversational exchange. They [i.e., vague terms] enable speakers to carry out complex and subtle interpretive work in a way which always leaves them room for further manoeuvre and which always seems to allow the speaker’s own scientific views to emerge unscathed. (82)

Indeed, there were no “glaring inconsistencies” during our conversation; it was only upon my scrutiny of what Dan meant by “telling” that contradictions began to emerge. Whereas his initial contradiction was quickly apparent, the additional ones were not immediately visible until after I did more refined transcription and reflection. These inconsistencies reinforce the ideological model of literacy: conventions for good writing are contingent, not universal. Dan is a highly successful, flexible, reflective academic writer, publishing journal articles, popular science writing of various genres, and writing advice. If anyone were to be consistent, perhaps, it would be him. As critical discursive psychologists have shown in various domains, however, these kinds of complex, conflicting accounts are far from unusual. Without these theoretical tools, we would not be able to see the autonomous model crumbling as it is.

***“Dan contends that ‘show, don’t tell’ applies everywhere, that it does not apply to blogs, that it is a mantra of journalism but that a basic rule of journalism (don’t bury the lede) calls on a writer to tell in the introduction (although the case in point was not actually in the introduction), and that the writing process (with less editing) may account for what must then be seen as a problem.”***

## Jing Jing Chang: Good Writing Flows Without Metadiscourse

Jing Jing Chang is a tenured associate professor of film studies at Wilfred Laurier University (WLU) who moved from China to Canada when she was nine. At our first interview, she was nearing the end of her first year as a tenure-track assistant professor at WLU, in a job she accepted upon graduating from UIUC with a PhD in modern Chinese history and a minor in cinema studies. She had published several book reviews and was working on articles. I met Jing Jing through another participant in my study, a Chinese PhD student at UIUC for whom Jing Jing was a valued writing mentor.

Our initial Skype interview (100 minutes, 5/22/12) included text-based questions about feedback she provided to that UIUC student and questions about her own experiences with academic writing. During our conversation, she mentioned that she admired the writing of an English literature PhD student, “Adam,” a white Canadian man who took her Identity Politics in Film seminar. She connected me with Adam and, with his permission, sent me his final paper with her comments, along with two of her published book reviews and some of her graduate school papers.<sup>7</sup> After I read her feedback on Adam’s paper, I conducted a follow-up Skype interview (80 minutes, 9/12/13).

### *The Initial Representation*

During our initial interview, Jing Jing articulated the view that a good academic writer is one who transcends seemingly rudimentary supports like transition phrases. She expressed this view when I asked if she noticed any differences in writing style between the English graduate students she now taught in WLU’s Department of English and Film Studies and her former graduate-student peers in UIUC’s history department. She said that “generally speaking, English students actually write very well” and, laughing, observed that “in fact, I think they can write better than I do.” The more courses that history graduate students take, “the more they lose in terms of writing in a very interesting fashion,” but English graduate students “write to express themselves” and “want the language, the words, to become beautiful. They want to express an aesthetics.” I now provide more detailed quotations from when she began describing, and embodying, these stylistic differences. (See Olinger, “On the Instability,” on how gestures can function as metaphors depicting stylistic qualities.)

Jing Jing asserted that writing in history is “stuck” between the social sciences and the humanities (line 1; see Appendix D for the subtitled video and transcript). She explained that history grapples with “big problems” like the humanities do (line 3/D), but its style is similar to that of social science fields like library science, communication studies, sociology, and political science (lines 4-5/D). She then described this social science style as “very boring, like math” (line 6/D), and characterized it by breezing through a typical structure: “step one, step two, step three. Okay this is what I want to prove this is how I’m going to prove it.” (lines 8-11/D). As she articulated the stages in this structure, she sliced her flattened hand down through the air in successive steps, enacting the style’s cut-and-dried nature (See Fig. 2). Although not apparent in the images, Jing Jing’s movements were quick and sharp, demonstrating her negative stance toward this style.

About a minute later, she mentioned Adam, an English PhD student who had taken her seminar



Fig. 2. Jing Jing slices a flattened hand down in stages to describe a “math” style (lines 8-9/D).

and whose style epitomized this aesthetic sensibility, as he “writes beautifully compared to history students” (line 1; see Appendix E for the subtitled video and transcript) and his style “flows so well” without what she called “arbitrary transitional: phra(h)ses” (lines 8, 11/E). While saying that his style “flows so well,” her hand moved from a higher plane to a lower one, as earlier, but she smoothly combed her fingers down through the air (see Fig. 3), indicating that she valued this style’s “flow” more highly:

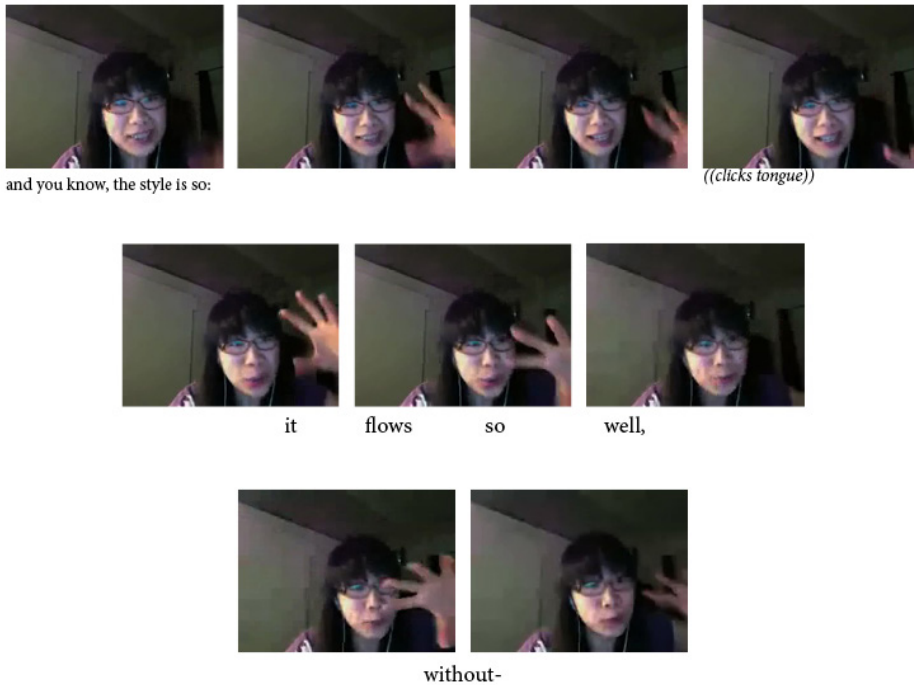


Fig. 3. Jing Jing’s gestures describing Adam’s flow (lines 5-9E).

In trying to describe what Adam's writing flows without, she introduced her own habits: "like he wouldn't use like- I I would have this problem I- sometimes I will still use some arbitrary transitional: phra(h)ses to help my paragraphs transition smoothly. In fact the ideas might not flow, but in his writing, he- his ideas flow, (0.8) without those- those phrases," (lines 10-18/E). This pattern—glowing descriptions of his style co-occurring with self-deprecating ruminations on her own—recurs in our follow-up interview.

Jing Jing's views are grounded in the ideal of the autonomous text, which asserts that written language should not require any additional context to be interpreted and which values concision (recall Sprat's "so many *things*, almost in an equal number of *words*"). Aligning with this view are critiques of academic writing (e.g., Pinker) that argue that language indicating how readers should interpret content but not directly communicating that content ought to be eliminated. One form of such language is metadiscourse, the "linguistic devices writers employ to shape their arguments to the needs and expectations of their target readers" (Hyland 134). Jing Jing's examples of the problematic style were "interactive resources," one of Hyland's two categories of metadiscourse that "allow the writer to manage the information flow to explicitly establish his or her preferred interpretations" (138). Hyland notes that transitions "mark additive, contrastive, and consequential steps in the discourse, as opposed to the external world" (138) while "frame markers" like "my purpose is to..." and "to conclude" are "references to text boundaries or elements of schematic text structure, including items used to sequence, to label text stages, to announce discourse goals, and to indicate topic shifts" (138). Jing Jing associated metadiscourse with a plodding, step-by-step, abrupt, inelegant style typical of social science fields (and her own writing) and its absence with the flowing, beautiful style typical of English Department writers like Adam.

### *An Apparent Contradiction*

Jing Jing's representation of Adam's writing, however, differs from what appears in Adam's texts; namely, he uses interactive metadiscourse. When preparing for our follow-up interview about four months later, I recalled her view that Adam did not use transition words, so I searched for them in his seminar paper. In one section, I found three: the words "however," "therefore," and "also." (See Fig. 4). In our follow-up interview, I asked her about them.

Like *Flowers of War*, *Empire of the Sun* breaks down the binary of West/East, but it ultimately does not relinquish the Other, nor give up a view of China as either passive victim or thieving rogue. **However**, for most of the film, Morris contends, “Spielberg unreels a solipsistic *vision* of war, involving projection into different positions, rather than any attempt at objective realism” (138). **Therefore**, the film reveals Orientalism to be representations and not reality. Jamie’s personal changes are **also** connected to the imperial/colonial themes of the film. Jamie’s shattered illusion of control and modernization/maturity parallel Britain’s decline and America’s ascension, respectively. Does the war’s shattering of Jamie’s illusion merely substitute one colonial power for another though? Is another Orientalist illusion adopted in the end? Hopefully Jamie closing his eyes in his mother’s arms signals his embrace of a less discriminatory reality, but the film does not entirely rule out the possibility that Jamie will become just another bureaucrat in the Empire like his father.

Fig. 4. Excerpt from Adam’s paper (bold added).

#### *Accounting for the Apparent Contradiction*

As I will show, Jing Jing accounted for the apparent contradiction between representation and practice by arguing that she had simply mischaracterized his writing during our first conversation. Yet in resolving this contradiction, she introduced new ones as she sought to describe what made Adam an exemplary writer.

As we looked at Adam’s paper, I pointed out the transition words, and she agreed that they were there (lines 30-37; see Appendix F for the subtitled video and transcript). I responded by providing a reason for the discrepancy between her perceptions of Adam and the reality of his writing: “But they must not have been so noticeable.” (line 38/F). Jing Jing agreed and said she didn’t notice them because “it’s not the same word over and over and over again” (line 39/F). Adam’s virtue lies in the fact that he does not rely on the same transition words, not that he uses no transition words.

Jing Jing then contrasted herself and Adam: “I have this problem with writing, it’s ver:y bad.” (line 40/F). After I asked what she meant, she clarified that her problem was using the same words, namely, the phrase “as such” at the start of a sentence. I responded by laughing and saying, “Okay well that’s only one word! .hh ha ha one phrase” (lines 67, 69/F). It appears I thought the issue was lighter than she did. Although she was smiling while I said that, she sounded unconvinced: she replied, “ehhh”, exhaled, and shook her head while smiling (line 70/F). My response was again to make light: “that’s funny.” (line 71/F).

After that exchange, I turned to my final question: what her graduate students struggled with and how Adam was different. She responded that Adam made connections between seemingly opposite ideas, used the theories to understand the films, always had something to say in class, worked harder than other students, and clearly wanted to be there. I then asked whether Adam’s language was “more sophisticated or different” from that of other graduate students she had taught. Her reply provided additional representations of Adam’s style.

First, she renewed the contrast between herself and Adam, stating, “I hear a voice, I hear his voice. (1.0) Whereas myself included, I I (0.8) am not a good writer.” (lines 1-3; see Appendix G for

the subtitled video and transcript). After a pause, she added, putting her head in her hands, “Um Ohhh (I’m) so: struggling with my writing.” (lines 3-5/G). She then said that when she reads his writing, she does not see much language like “According to this writer, he said this, uh there’s this (0.8) limitation of this, there’s a gap and therefore we should look at this. From this way.” (lines 8-12/G)—i.e., in technical terms, she does not see evidentials (“According to...”)<sup>8</sup> or explicit statements about one’s argument and its place in the larger conversation, which could be described as frame markers (Hyland). While she uttered these paraphrases of hypothetical text, she scooped her voice, enacting the rudimentary quality of each utterance (line 11/G).

Jing Jing then clarified that Adam *does* use this kind of language, but it is not noticeable: “The way he writes it is- there is that, but everything is embedded. It’s not- it’s not sequential.” (lines 12-15/G). She gave another example: he does not use language like “this is what this writer said, okay I disagree because there’s something wrong, and this is the new way.” (lines 17-20/G). She then evaluated her hypothetical example as “formulaic” (line 24/6), stating that Adam is “willing to even challenge” “the conventional academic style.” (line 27/G).



Fig. 5. Jing Jing contrasted Adam’s style with step-like gestures (lines 15-16/G).



Fig. 6. Jing Jing used step-like gestures while giving examples of formulaic language (lines 17-20/G).



As she described what Adam did *not* do, she flattened her hand and stepped it down several levels to depict the “sequential” nature of this kind of formulaic writing (lines 15-16/G; See Figs. 5-6):

Jing Jing initially resolved the seeming contradiction between her representation of Adam’s writing and his actual writing by saying that he did not overuse the same transition word. Later in the interview, however, she acknowledged that although he used metadiscourse (not her word), his use was not “sequential” and was instead “embedded”; thus, “You don’t hear that.” (line 21/G); “You don’t see that formula.” (line 24/G). Still, when I went back to see if the text was consistent with these representations, I realized that her account had created opportunities for new contradictions. For instance, in the following section of his paper, Adam distinguished his own points from those of Barlow and Said through language like “Barlow explores . . .,” “By extension, I would argue that . . .,” “Said never makes clear . . .,” and “. . . but I would suggest that. . .” (See Fig. 7):

**Barlow explores** the difficulties of talking about China as a colony, for as many scholars argue, “China was never really colonized” (368). She suggests the need in postcolonial studies to move away from the predominant England/India colonial model (371). **By extension, I would argue that** Said’s Anglo-French-American/Near Eastern model of Orientalism does not precisely apply to China, despite his scattered examples suggesting so. In the chapter, “Orientalism Now,” when Said states that “A wide variety of hybrid representations of the Orient now roam the culture” (285), he goes on to mention China and Japan (as well as Indochina, India, and Pakistan). **Said never makes clear** whether these South and East Asian representations are hybrids of Orientalism, **but I would suggest that** hybridity is a useful way of thinking about Orientalist representations of China.

Fig. 7. Excerpt from Adam’s paper (bold added).

An out-loud reading of those phrases (see bold text in Fig. 7)—“Barlow explores this, By extension I would argue this, Said never makes clear this, I would suggest this”—resembles Jing Jing’s stylized version (lines 10-12, 17-21/G), intended to represent what Adam *did not* do. Although

*“What changed, instead, were her representations of the features that demonstrated beautiful writing: Adam didn’t use transition words at all, he used them but varied them, or...he used them but embedded them, or he used them in a context where his overall writing had a distinctive and interesting voice.”*

I identified this passage after our interview, I suspect that asking her about it would not have settled the matter. As Potter and Mulkay show, variability in a participant’s responses is rarely a “manageable technical proble[m]” that can be resolved by “further interpretive work by both parties” (250).

#### *The Value of Studying These Accounts*

Like Dan’s explanations for his use of “show, don’t tell,” Jing Jing’s accounts were complex, shifting, and co-constructed—as I elicited her accounts, offered my own,

professed to be working on similar issues, and laughed off her assertion that her metadiscourse use

was problematic. Whereas Dan's accounts invoked, depending on the interactional context, both the autonomous and the ideological model of literacy, Jing Jing's accounts maintained the truth of the autonomous model—specifically, the idea that textual meaning is autonomous and that good writing should therefore flow smoothly without such supports as transition phrases or overuse of the same phrase, code glosses (“as such”), evidentials (“according to...”), or sequential or overly explicit frame markers (e.g., “this is what I want to prove”; “There’s a gap and therefore we should look at this”). Yet whereas this idea remained constant, what changed were her representations of the features that demonstrated beautiful writing: Adam did not use transition words at all, he used them but varied them, or—in conceptual vagaries that can be defined by the beholder—he used them but embedded them, or he used them in a context where his overall writing had a distinctive and interesting voice. Again, during the interview, I noticed no inconsistencies (beyond the initial contradiction). It was only upon more-detailed transcription and closer inspection, using the lens of variability from the sociology of scientific knowledge, that the deeper meaning of this interaction was revealed. Although the autonomous model seems to be resilient, the presence of multiple, conflicting accounts belies this apparent strength.

### Implications: The Unmaking of the Autonomous Model Of Literacy

By applying the concepts of interpretative repertoires and of variability as a resource, I gained a close look at the autonomous model as it informed two faculty members' representations of writing during interviews. Although each person produced multiple, shifting explanations, Dan ultimately moved between accounts that good writing is universal and good writing is situated, while Jing Jing maintained that good writing flows without metadiscourse.

Their commitment to the autonomous model, even when shown contradictory evidence, supports research by Laura Wilder on discipline-specific writing in literary studies. Wilder illustrates the effectiveness of a curriculum that explicitly taught the special topoi of literary analysis<sup>9</sup> in writing-about-literature (WAL) courses designed as gateway courses to the major or as general-education courses for non-majors. In her chapter on faculty resistance, she analyzes the reasons of three literature faculty who expressed objections. One, Professor Gregg, was studied separately; Wilder spent a semester observing his WAL course for non-majors in order to see how the topoi naturally informed his teaching. She found an “unacknowledged preference” (63) for the topoi in lectures, discussions, and student papers. After reading a draft of Wilder's analysis, Professor Gregg acknowledged his use of the topoi but rejected their association with disciplinary rhetorical strategies; he preferred to see them, in Wilder's words, as “widely applicable critical-thinking tools” (186), “correct ways to argue” (187) that students could transfer to different contexts. Because of his view of writing and critical thinking as separate from disciplinary knowledge-making, Professor Gregg resisted teaching the topoi more explicitly. To Wilder, his response “suggests that motivating changes in classroom practice may not be accomplished simply by unmasking for professors the ways in which disciplinary rhetorics function” (179). In this case, the influence of the autonomous



model was stronger than Wilder's intervention.

This research reinforces the presence of contradictions in any study of ideology (e.g., Verschueren). Although our explicit understandings of language and writing do partially shape practices (e.g., Bou Ayash, Calvet), our dispositions often wiggle away, leading to inconsistencies between practices and representations (e.g., Anson, "Pop"; Berkenkotter; Lindenman, et al.). Furthermore, these disconnections are compounded by the fact that our awareness of our own language use is naturally incomplete, a phenomenon documented not only in writing studies scholarship (e.g., Donahue; Nowacek) but also in linguistic anthropology (e.g., Silverstein), sociolinguistics (e.g., Babel; Preston), and psycholinguistics (e.g., Camps and Milian). Even composition and literacy specialists harbor and enact ideologies they themselves might disavow on reflection (e.g., Anson, "Pop"). In my interviews, for instance, I noticed myself promoting views I disagree with (e.g., with an undergraduate who worked with Dan, we laughingly "caught" Dan veering from a writing guide principle in his coauthored book). And, as I mentioned in the introduction, how many of us profess a belief in students' right to their own language but still measure students against a white racial habitus? As writing specialists, we both recognize and resist the pull of the autonomous model—but we cannot expel it entirely. This work requires ongoing self-scrutiny.

Why is the autonomous model of literacy so resilient, despite the glut of evidence that supports the ideological model? So-called universal rules of writing and language, introduced in early schooling (Geisler), become calcified through repeated exposure. Moreover, the fact that "standard language" and "academic writing" are constructs of white language supremacy make them especially inured to disruption. As Flores writes,

Raciolinguistic ideologies were foundational to European colonialism and continue to be used to justify the continued maintenance of white supremacy by suggesting that the roots of racial inequalities lie in the linguistic deficiencies of racialized communities and that the solution to these racial inequalities is to modify their language practices. (24)

Conforming one's practices to an ideological frame can therefore provide a feeling of security: Writers may imagine themselves to be performing membership in particular communities in order to achieve goals, such as getting published and receiving tenure. Janet Giltrow's characterization of meta-genres—"language users' accounts of what they do" (190), whether delivered via handbook, marginalia on student papers, or conversation—acknowledges the safety of these representations. As "widely recognized frames for the writing they direct, shared by readers and writers, collating their perceptions," meta-genres "promis[e], perhaps misleadingly but nevertheless assuringly, an eventual ratification of writers' efforts. Semiotically tied to their contexts of use, accumulating through generations of institutional life, these meta-genres are not lightly surrendered" (199). Safety may be a fiction, but, for these reasons, it is not surprising that the act of presenting writers with apparent contradictions may not be enough to disrupt their understandings about writing or language.

The constancy of Jing Jing's admiration for Adam's writing, despite shifts in what she finds praiseworthy, is a case in point. Across both interviews, reflections on Adam's writing occurred alongside reflections on her own self-perceived flaws. Her steadfast belief that Adam used metadiscourse differently may be rooted in her own lack of confidence in her writing: because she

struggled with such basics, she may have reasoned, a good writer like him surely did not.

Jing Jing provided more insight into her lack of confidence at other points during our follow-up interview. For instance, she declared that in the first year and a half of her job, “I was too proud, I did not even show my work to anyone, of course I got rejected [from journals]. I was just so afraid, maybe I felt ashamed of my work, and I had to relearn everything. It’s been so long since my dissertation, and it’s been a struggle” (Interview, 9/12/13). She also remarked that the stakes—publishing enough to get tenure while managing a heavy teaching load—are high. It therefore may feel risky to abandon familiar notions of good writing. Her experience of having to “relearn everything” since her dissertation and her struggle to make time for research have arguably attached considerable anxiety to this figure of a “good writer” Adam represents.

The above analyses reveal the invisible labor involved in upholding the autonomous model of literacy<sup>10</sup>. Perceived qualities of “good writing” are not emanations from the text but are co-constructions, molded by the values of the listener/interlocutor or reader (Olinger, “Sociocultural”). And given that all perceptions of language are shaped by raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores and Rosa; Inoue, *Antiracist*), they may be entirely disconnected from the text. Flores and Rosa give examples of racialized students being heard by teachers as uttering nonstandard speech even when they are producing standardized forms; in a similar way, Jing Jing “read” into Adam’s writing qualities that were directly contradicted by textual evidence. In both cases, what is “read” are not linguistic features but, more broadly, an assemblage of embodied semiotic features—such as apparent skin color or proximity to whiteness, clothing style, or posture (e.g., Agha; Rosa and Flores). Jing Jing praised Adam’s thinking, work ethic, and class participation; these attributes may inform what she sees when she reads his writing, even if the text does not back her perception.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Adam’s position as a white Canadian English speaker and writer may undergird these judgments.

Given the harm these representations can sow, college writing teachers must come to terms with the racism that underlies their judgments.<sup>12</sup> Of course, we cannot stop at the individual level. Synthesizing language ideology scholarship and critical race theory, Mark Lewis warns sociolinguists not to focus their activism solely on correcting erroneous views through the presentation of linguistic evidence—a practice similar to thinking that racism can be solved simply by changing the beliefs of individuals. Sociolinguists who seek social change, he argues, need to recognize and target the material structures in which these representations of language are embedded.

Activism directed at the structures of white language supremacy has involved addressing admissions and placement testing and revising curricula, learning outcomes, and classroom-based assessments (e.g., Inoue, *Antiracist*, “Classroom Writing Assessment”; Kareem; Perryman-Clark and Craig). Recent initiatives in WAC/WID have also focused on institutional structures (e.g., Cox, Galin, and Melzer),<sup>13</sup> and the University of Minnesota’s Writing-Enriched Curriculum initiative demonstrates an institutional approach that uses regular department meetings to unearth and trouble individual faculty’s assumptions (Flash). Yet WAC/WID has long neglected issues of racism and white language supremacy (Anson, “Black Holes”; Kareem; Poe). One exciting development is Jamila Kareem’s “CSP-WAC”: a culturally sustaining WAC pedagogy that “treats the literate cultural perspectives from communities of color or with the same respect, circulation, and criticism typically

reserved for the mainstream Euro-Western cultural practices of the academy” (301). CSP-WAC refines the approach of Writing Across Communities (Kells) through an emphasis on sustaining raciolinguistically marginalized students’ literate practices.

How powerful are the theoretical tools of interpretative repertoires and variability, really? Because many people will not be convinced by evidence, our attention as scholars must be directed at dismantling systemic barriers. And even as some *will* be convinced by evidence, we nevertheless must target institutional structures, the seedbed of linguistic racism. Yet when combined with systemic efforts, work at an individual level is not in vain: In exposing the instability of individuals’ representations of writing, interpretative repertoires and variability reveal cracks in the autonomous model of literacy that would not have emerged otherwise. May these tools, therefore, be more regularly enlisted and discussed—with writers, teachers, research participants, and others we might collaborate with—to split open altogether the false construct of “good writing.”<sup>14, 15</sup>

## APPENDIX A: TRANSCRIPT CONVENTIONS

Symbol	Gloss
D: [gives away everything] [[you're talking]] about, A: [Mmm hmmm]                      [[hmmmmm]] *** J: <u>step</u> [[one,]] <u>step</u> [[two,]] <u>step</u> [[three.]] [[ <i>(steps flat hand down a level)</i> ]]	Brackets (single, double, or triple) indicate overlap.
D: kind of um= A: =would	Equals signs indicate the utterances follow one another without a pause.
<i>(steps flat hand down a level)</i>	Italicized text within parentheses indicate embodied actions like gestures
they'll (draw the right idea)	Single parentheses indicate the transcriber's best guess at what was said.
(2.0)	Numbers in parentheses indicate the duration of a pause in seconds.
(.)	A period within parentheses indicates a micropause, about one-tenth of a second.
°Right°	Degree signs around an utterance indicate that it was spoken at a lower volume.
I had no idea how >blah blah blah blah blah<	Greater-than and less-than signs around an utterance indicate that the utterance was rushed compared to the surrounding talk.
And here too for eh- I like this example too	A hyphen indicates cut-off speech.

Symbol	Gloss
the style is so:	One or more colons indicate a sound stretch—the more colons, the more prolonged the sound.
Right?	A question mark indicates rising intonation, not necessarily a question.
Political science.	A period indicates falling intonation.
you have emphasized kind of “show don’t tell”,	A comma indicates rising-falling (“continuing”) intonation.
<u>Blog style</u>	Underlining indicates a stressed syllable.
hah, heh, hih	Hah, heh, and hih mark laughter.
What are the sa(h)me words that you u(h)se.	H’s within parentheses mark utterances infiltrated by laughter.
.hh	A period plus one or more h’s indicate that the speaker has inhaled. The more h’s, the louder and longer the in-breath.
hh	One or more h’s indicate that the speaker has exhaled. The more h’s, the louder and longer the out-breath.

## APPENDIX B: DAN'S EXPLANATION OF "SHOW, DON'T TELL" (INITIAL INTERVIEW, 10/18/12)

Subtitled Audio: <https://vimeo.com/492250886>

- 01 D: I think this applies to everything. Right, so, you kn- this i- this is the one where- I'm  
02 now reading their personal statements for grad school, right. A.nd, they'll say things  
03 li:ke, uh: I developed an outstanding underst- ya know- outstanding insights into:  
04 clinical populations. (1.0) Don't say: [you've] developed outstand-, show that you  
05 A: [hahaha]  
06 D: have. Right. So, I mean- but that's not talking about findings, it's talking about (.) your  
07 [abilities] But it applies everywhere. That's- that's just kind of the classic  
08 A: [R i g h t]  
09 D: [[mantra for journalism, right, so]]  
10 A: [[Right. (And) I guess for- thinking about-]] when I was thinking about a scientific  
11 article, I was having trouble visualizing it.  
12 D: Mmhm  
13 A: And so I really wanted to see an example of-  
14 D: Yeah  
15 A: of what that looked like, what did it mean you- would s- you would use the data to sh-  
16 to show:, or  
17 D: I (.) I think it's more in the evaluation part. Right, so (.) the phrase "interestingly"  
18 [ (2.0) ]  
19 A: [Oh wow. Okay]  
20 D: That's an evaluative state[ment.] Let them come to that evaluation. Show it, and  
21 A: [Okay]  
22 D: they'll (draw the right idea). And you know I'm guilty of that as well. "Interestingly" is  
23 an easy transition. But if you have to say it's interesting, then it probably isn't to other  
24 people unless you [ (.) ] explain why, so, just (.) explain it.  
25 A: [Mm]  
26 A: O:kay. That mak-=  
27 D: =Yeah=  
28 A: =that-  
29 D: [(that's- I think that's a)]  
30 A: [(Now/No) I think that makes] clearer sense  
31 D: It's more in the evaluation end of it than in the presentation of data.  
32 A: Tch okay, okay.

## APPENDIX C: DAN'S ACCOUNT FOR THE APPARENT CONTRADICTION (FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW, 3/28/13)

Subtitled Audio: <https://vimeo.com/492251966>

- 01 A: It was [really cool to see] your blog post of the- of the article  
02 D: [that blog post huh] Mm hm  
03 A: and to compare them and I know: you: have emphasized kind of “show don’t tell,”  
04 D: Mm hm  
05 A: And so I wondered if you could talk through (.) what you think about  
06 [(1.0)]  
07 D: [Mm]  
08 A: um for example >I discovered something interesting (1.0) Buh da da da da da<  
09 so you  
10 D: Mm hm  
11 A: um you say what’s interesting, but you I I know that you’ve [(.)] kind of pointed  
12 D: [Right]  
13 A: this out so how- what’s your read (0.5) on this.  
14 D: Um (1.1) Blog style. (1.0) So blog style has more personal (.) narrative uh content to it.  
15 So you >can say I discovered something,< I would never do that in a journal article.  
16 Right. Um, you might say we- you know, you might say we encountered something  
17 odd [(.)] or unusual, right. Um, I normally don’t like saying something interesting, but  
18 A: [Hm]  
19 D: (if) you’ll notice I do it a lot more in the blog, and it’s intentional.  
20 A: °Right°  
21 D: because it’s- I want to flag what people should pay attention to in that context,  
22 A: °Mmm°  
23 D: um [(2.0)]  
24 A: [°Hm°] (2.0) And here too for eh-  
25 D: Yeah  
26 A: I like this example too- I wasn’t surprised that >dih dih dih< but I had no: idea  
27 how >blah blah [blah blah blah.<]  
28 D: [Mm hm Right.] So this is- this is basically s- you know blogs are are  
29 supposed to be more personal, so (.) I try to give my reactions to [things] a lot more  
30 A: [°Mmm°]  
31 D: often, um  
32 A: °Mmm°  
33 D: so I mean if you if you look through most of the blog posts I have, (1.0) um they have  
34 a l- some don’t, (.) but (.) a lot of them are a bit more opinionated [and] have a bit  
35 A: [°Mm°]  
36 D: more of a- you know (1.0) sort of evaluative component to it, and kind of self-  
37 evaluative too.  
38 A: °Mmm okay°  
39 D: I wouldn’t- I wouldn’t- I try and avoid saying you know interestingly (1.0) um at least  
40 now I used to. I kind of s- that’s kind of a dumb thing to do. So I’ve kind of worked  
41 away from that, but (.) on blog posts you still [kind of] need to every now and then.  
42 A: [°Mmm°]  
43 A: But it seems to be different because it is (0.2) it is more personal than

- 44 D: Yeah,  
 45 A: interestingly.  
 46 D: And this was kind of I I mean- since- the paper speaks for itself as a- as an empirical  
 47 piece, so here I have to be commenting on something other than just what's in the  
 48 paper.  
 49 A: °Mm [hm°]  
 50 D: [So] (1.0) the the goal is to you know here I kind of put in a little bit about  
 51 discovery sorts of issues.  
 52 A: °Mm [hm°]  
 53 D: [Right] (0.2) whereas I wouldn't talk about (.) the discovery process in a journal  
 54 article,  
 55 A: °Hmm[mm°]  
 56 D: [that's] just not what you do.  
 57 A: Right:: (3.0) [°Kay°]  
 58 D: But (1.8) And you know, I don't edit these as much as I do a journal article(h) hh  
 59 A: Oh I I I  
 60 D: Yeah.  
 61 A: And I wasn't (.) pointing that [out (as a critique)]  
 62 D: [Yeah, I know but] I I might if I were revising it I might  
 63 change that. °I don't know.°  
 64 A: °Okay°  
 65 D: I mean I edit before I post these things, but not (1.0) not the way I would for a journal  
 66 article. And I'm the only one who looks at it and- (that's)  
 67 A: Would you fit this under the "show don't tell" uh (1.0) kind of um=  
 68 D: [=It's more] tell. Um I mean wh- this is- you know, I probab- (2.8) when I try I still  
 69 A: [=(would)]  
 70 D: try and kind of set up (.) "I found something interesting about who responds," but I'm  
 71 still setting up a mystery [here,] I haven't told you [(.)] you know the critical  
 72 A: [°Mmm°] [°Mmm°]  
 73 D: finding yet. Right, (.) Um (6.0) Yeah. (2.0)  
 74 A: °Mm [kay°]  
 75 D: [So] I mean hh it's kind of in between,  
 76 A: Yeah,  
 77 D: It's a little more- it's a little more tell than I typically do in this sort of context, but-  
 78 if if you look at some of the other ones, I kind of have teasers up at the beginning  
 79 [and then I tell.] hh  
 80 A: [°Mmmmmmm°] °Hmm°  
 81 D: Um  
 82 A: °Hm kay°  
 83 D: There's also the journalism principle that (.) you not not bury the lede. Right. So  
 84 you're (.) supposed to have something in the first paragraph that pretty much  
 85 [gives away everything] [[you're talking]] about,  
 86 A: [Mmm hmmm] [[hmmmmmm]] huh  
 87 D: so and you have to do that in a blog or nobody reads the whole thing.



## APPENDIX D: JING JING'S CHARACTERIZATION OF WRITING STYLE IN HISTORY (INITIAL INTERVIEW, 5/22/12)

Subtitled Video: <https://vimeo.com/492252346>

01 J: So history is [stuck,] I think [stuck] in between (.) the social sciences and humanities.(.)  
02 [brushes taut hands against each other as if creating friction]  
03 Big problems, the big problems is humanities, but the style itself is more still social  
04 science style. Right? Like like library science or- or communication studies very-  
05 sociology, right? Political science. If you read sociology, a work in sociology, political  
06 science, they're very boring, like math, okay >bl- blah [blah blah okay]  
07 [(slices flat hand in stages down through the air, then raises it)]  
08 step [[one,] step [[two,] step [[three,]] Okay this is what I want to [[[[prove]]]  
09 [[(steps flat hand down a level)]] [[(raises flat hand)]]  
10 this is how I'm going to [prove] it.<  
11 [(raises flat hand)]

## APPENDIX E: JING JING'S DESCRIPTION OF ADAM'S WRITING STYLE (INITIAL INTERVIEW, 5/22/12)

Subtitled Video: <https://vimeo.com/492252624>

- 01 J: Well from my perspective he he he writes beautifully compared to history students  
02 A: Mm::  
03 J: um so it's  
04 A: hm  
05 J: it's loading loading [and and] you know, the style is [[so: (.)]]  
06 A: [(Do you know what)]  
07 J: [(combs hand down through air)]  
08 (clicks tongue) it [flows] so [well,] without (1.0)  
09 [(combs hand down through air)]  
10 like like he wouldn't use like- I I would have this problem I- sometimes I will still use  
11 some some arbitrary transitional: phra(h)ses to (audio breaks up) [help my paragraphs]  
12 [(places flat hands in air on top of each other)]  
13 transition smoothly. In fact [[the ideas might not flow,]]  
14 [(jostles cupped hands as if representing a jumble of ideas)]  
15 A: [Mm]  
16 J: [but] in his writing, he- his ideas flow, (0.8) without those-  
17 A: (clicks tongue)  
18 J: those phrases,  
19 A: Mm::  
20 J: um: yeah.

*Note:* Her comment that “it’s loading” (line 5) refers to the syllabus file she is trying to open.

## APPENDIX F: JING JING'S ACCOUNT FOR THE APPARENT CONTRADICTION (FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW, 9/12/13)

Subtitled Video: <https://vimeo.com/492252942>

- 01 A: I remember the last time we spoke you talked about uh transition words, .hh and [how]  
 02 J: [oh yeah]  
 03 A: you (0.2) um tch in your own writing you really tried to: get rid of them?  
 04 and and [craft] (.) craft transitions without relying on those [[words,]] and you- I think  
 05 J: [yes] [[yes]]  
 06 A: you mentioned that he- (1.0) he was- he did a good job of that?  
 07 J: yes I think so  
 08 A: um [and so I] I was um-  
 09 J: [I remember.]  
 10 A: so I was [[looking out for transition words in this paper]]  
 11 [[(s m i l i n g i n t o n a t i o n) ]]  
 12 [and um]  
 13 J: [were there?]  
 14 A: hih hih .hh  
 15 J: were there?  
 16 A: there were!  
 17 J: (starts smiling)  
 18 A: and I think maybe especially on page thirteen (1.0)  
 19 J: ahh  
 20 A: hih hih hih [hih hih] hhh um (1.0)  
 21 J: [ha ha ha]  
 22 J: yes  
 23 A: see I- I mean I- I'm trying to work on that too in my own writing, and so I'm interested  
 24 in- in these- (1.0) in transi[tion words]  
 25 J: [oh yeah yeah] I see that yeah  
 26 A: um the [[the first paragraph]]  
 27 J: [[oh yes yes yes]]  
 28 A: on [page thirteen so I just thought [[[that]]] was um]  
 29 [(s m i l i n g i n t o n a t i o n) ]  
 30 J: [[[yeah]]] oh yes (1.0) oh yeah (2.0) yes I  
 31 see that. Yes I see. There's a lot  
 32 A: hh  
 33 J: In fact.  
 34 A: .hhh  
 35 J: yeah yeah yeah  
 36 A: .hh  
 37 J: yeah (.) yeah  
 38 A: But they must have not been so noticeable.  
 39 J: .hh yes because it's not the same word over and over and over again (3.0)  
 40 I have this problem with writing, it's ver:y bad. (1.0)  
 41 A: of using the same words?  
 42 J: [uh huh!] Using the same words  
 43 [(nods)]  
 44 A: hih hih .hhh

- 45 J: It's terrible.  
 46 A: What are the sa(h)me words that you u(h)se.  
 47 J: hh (1.0) uh As [such (0.8)  
 48 [(*smiling*)]  
 49 A: ha ha ha ha ha really!  
 50 J: [mm hm]  
 51 [(*nods, smiling*)]  
 52 A: .hhh hah!  
 53 J: ah (0.8) Basically that's it.  
 54 A: A(h)s su(h)ch! [Tha(h)t's] the(h)  
 55 J: [mm hm]  
 56 J: [(*nods, smiling*)]  
 57 J: mm hm [*shakes her head, smiling*]  
 58 A: I can't even think of the- the context of-  
 59 J: [As such,  
 60 [(*smiling*)]  
 61 A: Oh oh: As su:ch, [[duh:: ]]  
 62 J: [[As su:ch,] >bu- duh duh duh duh.< As su:ch, >duh duh duh duh  
 63 duh<  
 64 A: In this way, [it's sorta a- kinda a- similar okay]  
 65 J: [(*nods, smiling*) ] [[hh  
 66 J: [(*smiling, shaking her head*)]  
 67 A: Ha ha .hh Okay well that's only one word!  
 68 J: [hhh] [hhh (*smiling, looks away*)]  
 69 A: [.hh] ha ha [one phrase ]  
 70 J: eh hh (*shakes her head, smiling*)  
 71 A: that's funny.

## APPENDIX G: JING JING'S ADDITIONAL DESCRIPTION OF ADAM'S STYLE (FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW, 9/12/13)

Subtitled Video: <https://vimeo.com/492253171>

- 01 J: I hear, I I see in his in his [writing,] I hear a voice, I hear his voice. (1.0) Whereas  
02 [(draws a finger through the air like a pencil)]  
03 myself included, I I (0.8) am not a good writer. (1.0) Um [[Ohhh]]  
04 [[(puts her head in her hands)]]  
05 (I'm) so: struggling with my [writing,] But I- I I I hear I see that he- somehow the first  
06 A: [hhh]  
07 J: impression I got when I read that paper or in his class in his other writing (1.0) he I- I  
08 don't see:, I don't hear: um tch oh (1.0) I don't see so much of this. [Such as]  
09 [(makes air-quotes)]  
10 According to this [writer,] he said [this,] uh there's this (0.8) limitation of this,  
11 [(scoops voice to create simplistic air)]  
12 there's a gap and therefore we should look at this. From this way. The way he writes  
13 it is- there is that, but [everything is embedded.]  
14 [(circles hand around face)]  
15 It's not- it's not [[sequential.]] .hh (1.0) uh [[The- the the w- the]] um tch  
16 [[(steps flat hand down several levels)]]  
17 It's not, okay [this] is what this writer said, [okay] I disagree because [there's]  
18 [(steps flat hand down a level)]  
19 something wrong, and [[this]] is the new way.  
20 [[(steps flat hand down a level)]]  
21 [This] is the new pers[[pective.]] You don't hear that. You don't hear  
22 [(slices hand for emphasis)]  
23 A: [[Mmm]]  
24 J: that (2.0) mm formulaic way. You don't see that formula. It's it's it's something  
25 different. It's a new- it's a confidence that I see. In his writing. [That] That he's  
26 A: [Hmm]  
27 J: willing to even challenge the (2.0) uh (1.8) the the conventional academic style.  
28 (2.0) uh (1.0) Think that's (1.0) that's what I felt.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I follow Flores and Rosa and Rosa in using “racialized students” instead of “students of color” to emphasize the social processes through which race is constructed.

<sup>2</sup> See Walters for a more nuanced reading of the Royal Society’s theories and practices of language and Street (39-40) for a biting critique of Olson’s point.

<sup>3</sup> If I had multiple drafts of the same text, I developed discourse-based interview questions that queried reasons for particular changes (Odell, Goswami, and Herrington; Prior, “Tracing”). For the texts examined in this article, however, I did not possess multiple drafts. I also traced participants’ interactions with more novice academic writers, but that, too, is not the focus of this article.

<sup>4</sup> The reason was, to be candid, that, at the time of the interview, I was feeling overwhelmed and did not want to bother setting up the camera. For more on the vagaries of collecting usable video data, see Olinger, “Visual,” 11.

<sup>5</sup> For conversation analytic work on “oh” and other response tokens, see Gardner, Heritage, and Wilkinson and Kitzinger.

<sup>6</sup> Letters after line numbers identify the appropriate appendix.

<sup>7</sup> Adam became a study participant.

<sup>8</sup> Evidentials “indicate the source of textual information which originates outside the current text” (Hyland 139).

<sup>9</sup> Examples include appearance/reality and paradox.

<sup>10</sup> This work was at first barely noticeable to me as an interviewer. For several years after conducting the interviews—in multiple presentations—my analysis of these moments would stop at identifying contradictions between representation and practice and asserting expert writers’ limits of awareness. It was only after I looked more closely, beyond the writers’ initial responses, that I began to notice the different accounts that unspooled.

<sup>11</sup> See also Paul Prior’s analysis of how Dr. Kohl “read into” his students’ texts (*Writing/Disciplinarity* 86).

<sup>12</sup> Inoue acknowledges that because teachers may have trouble shedding their preference for students who enact a white language habitus, structural changes—even in one’s classroom—are needed: “I’m not saying we have to change our perspectives, soften our hearts. Our hearts are not the problem. In fact, I’m actually saying the opposite, that we cannot change our biases in judging so easily, and that your perspectives that you’ve cultivated over your lifetime are not the key to making a more just society, classroom, pedagogy, or grading practice. The key is changing the structures, cutting the steel bars, altering the ecology, in which your biases function in your classrooms and communities” (“How Do We Language” 364).

<sup>13</sup> Ursula Wingate remarks that ACLITS research has tended to focus on “individual understandings and applications . . . in confined contexts” (186). “When it comes to changes in institution-wide policies and practices that would result in transforming the experience of whole student populations,” she writes, “Academic Literacies has had less impact” (ibid.).

<sup>14</sup> Potter and Mulkay as well as Margaret Wetherell and Potter provide useful guidance for

researchers seeking to analyze interpretative repertoires and understand the patterns behind seeming inconsistency.

<sup>15</sup> I am indebted to Dan and Jing Jing for sharing their writing and their ideas with me, and to Niki Turnipseed, Antonio Byrd, and Jordan Hayes, along with the reviewers, for their generative and generous comments. Lastly, enough thanks cannot go to Paul Prior, Katherine Flowers, Sandra Tarabochia, Zak Lancaster, and Jonathan Lippman for their feedback on versions of this article.

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# Searching for Street's "Mix" of Literacies through Composing Video: Conceptions of Literacy and Moments of Transfer in *Basic Writing*

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## KEYWORDS

literacy; video composing; multimodal; transfer; basic writing;  
first-year writing; pedagogy

**O**n 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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

***“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.”***

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

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

<sup>2</sup> 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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## Brian Street and African American Feminist Practices: Two Histories, Two Texts

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### KEYWORDS

feminism; uplift; racial pride; racial responsibility; literacy; literacy practice; literacy workers

“One must also accede that the intersecting issues of race, culture, history and literacy produce a juncture of complexity that cannot be easily unsnarled by a single, definitive treatment.”

—Joyce L. Harris, *Literacy in African American Communities*

The literacy history of African Americans is long and complex, and here I offer a treatment of this complex history in light of the work of Brian Street. This study examines the lives, practices, and words of two important African American literacy workers and suggests that the work they did in the nineteenth century is an example of Street’s ideological theory of literacy. Francis (Fanny) Jackson Coppin (b. 1837) and Hallie Quinn Brown (b. 1849) intentionally created written texts from which succeeding generations of literacy workers should learn. In this article, I try to fulfill what John Hope Franklin said was “the solemn obligation to rewrite the African American story from the perspective of the experiences and struggles of their own generation” (qtd. in Rudder 259). By focusing on these women and their work, I hope “it may be clear that critical examinations of how and why African Americans institutionalized their literacy traditions, passing them along to succeeding generations, contributing to the whole of American traditions, are potentially far more relevant and thought-provoking than descriptive accounts of literacy attainment” (Belt-Beyan 10).

The “who” and “why” of literacy is an ever-present question for me. It motivates and fascinates me. I believe the experiences of African American women and their literacy history can teach all of us a great deal about what various students bring to the classroom and that these histories can enrich our understanding and practice of literacy today. Brian Street’s *Literacy in Theory and Practice* presents two models of literacy theories that he argues should make us all reconsider what we mean when we use literacy as a measure of opportunity, success, and civilization. Street writes that what “reading and writing are for a given society depends upon the context; that they are already embedded in an ideology and cannot be isolated or treated as ‘neutral’ or merely ‘technical’ . . . I shall demonstrate that what practices are taught and how they are imparted depends upon the nature of the social formation” (Street, *Literacy in Theory* 1). That demonstration is what I try to

do here as well. Two primary questions guide my work:

1. What were the literacy practices enacted by those who were born into slavery and marginalized by race and racist practices that allowed for the movement of teachers and their students to “create” and “form” a new community independent of and different from their previous social condition?
2. What is the ideology embedded in the social formation of literacy for African Americans post-slavery?

Candace Epps-Robertson writes that African Americans have believed “access to literacy and language has represented power” (2). Therefore, I read the texts of Coppin and Brown for ways of understanding the context of the “social formation” Street suggests, and the ways in which these women helped their students “access” power. I argue that these African American women’s literacy practices in the nineteenth century are feminist/womanist and distinct. I also do a type of “recovery” work. Epps-Robertson explains the usefulness of recovery work in this way:

A look at recovery work in rhetoric and composition and literacy studies since the late 1990s (Enoch, *Refiguring*; Prendergast, *Literacy*; Gold, *Rhetoric*; Logan, *Liberating*; Moss, *Community Text*; Schneider, *You Can’t*; Wan, *Producing*) demonstrates the interdisciplinary effort to understand histories of rhetoric and literacy for groups that were long ignored by mainstream scholarship. (2)

Therefore, this examination can help us to interrogate master narratives about literacy, race, and citizenship. I seek to add to and complicate the “master narrative” of literacy in general and African American literacy specifically.

While Coppin and Brown have been studied and written about, the focus is often on their feminist rhetoric and activist practices or they are simply noted for their speeches and as notable figures. For example, Jacqueline Jones Royster’s book *Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change Among African American Women* discusses Coppin as one of several outstanding African American women in the nineteenth century to lead the way in African American education and rhetoric. More recently, Hollis Robbins and Henry Louis Gates in *The Portable Nineteenth-Century African American Women Writers* collection provide not only Coppin’s reprinted speeches but also writings about her life and work by one of her peers, S. Elizabeth Frazier. Finally, Susan Kates studies Brown’s elocution texts in an article entitled “The Embodied Rhetoric of Hallie Q. Brown.”

Less has been written about their texts as they relate specifically to their teaching practices. A close reading of Coppin’s *Reminiscences of School Days and Hints on Teaching* and Brown’s *Bits and Odds: A Choice Selection of Recitations for School, Lyceum and Parlor Entertainments* reveal the belief in and practice of a Black feminist/womanist ideological literacy. In fact, these women, and their texts, help us do what Street suggests: “To name something is to position it somewhere in the nexus of power relations that are sustained by the rhetorical force of the naming term” (Hager and Holiday, qtd. in “Literacy Inequalities”). In creating physical texts, Coppin and Brown “name” their practices and ideology, thereby positioning themselves, both then and now, in the power relations of rhetoric. These texts are intentional. These women meant their practices to continue. These texts helped create, form, and codify literacy ideologies and practices for African American students.

To see what these texts offer literacy and composition studies, I provide a brief overview of African American literacy. Then I focus on the lives and texts of Coppin and Brown. Finally, I consider Coppin's and Brown's texts as Black feminist work connected to and carried on in important ideologies of well-known contemporary scholars in literacy, education, and African American studies, which in my view demonstrates a continuation of the feminist literacy ideologies found in Coppin's and Brown's texts. Brian Street's work helps us unpack these women's activities, texts, and teaching as encompassing a type of anthropological social literacy practice, while the examination here also aids us in understanding Street's work and how his ideas and theory might look in practice. Ultimately, my reading of these texts suggests a Black feminist ideological literacy model in action, which pushes against narratives of literacy deficiencies and instead embraces literacy "traditions," thereby seeing literacy in these groups as "adding to" rather than "creating or erasing."

## African American Literacy Practices: Contributing to Communities

The experiences of the Black community regarding citizenship and education often differ from the experiences of the White majority. Since the arrival of enslaved people in the Americas, access to literacy and language has represented power; nevertheless, acquisition of literacy has not remedied all problems of injustice. Beyond struggle and oppression, both Black adults and children have worked valiantly to provide their communities with access to educational opportunities when all else seemed to fail (Epps-Robertson 2). Coppin's and Brown's lives are evidence of this idea. An examination of Brown and Coppin reveals that literacy and schooling have not always been thought of as ways to power, proof of value, or paths to solving injustice, as Epps-Robertson suggests. While Coppin and Brown agree that literacy is important to all of those things, we also see that for many, literacy helps individuals contribute to the community. Maisha Fisher writes in *Black Literate Lives: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* that "part of becoming 'literate' was to assume the responsibility to contribute to one's immediate and at-large community" (18).

African Americans have indeed made progress and contributed to our communities. Today we can say literacy rates of African Americans have increased; enrollments of African American students in all types of educational institutions surpass whatever could be imagined by many literacy workers of the late nineteenth century (Roser and Ortiz-Ospina). However, increases in enrollment and access do not always mean increased or improved literacy or acquisition of power. Yes, we have more scholars of color researching and writing in the field than ever before, and we have done much work to understand, dissect, and appreciate African Americans ways of using English, from Ebonics, which identified cultural and grammatical structures of African American language use, to code meshing, code switching, and vernacular resistance to community literacy to African American Vernacular English (AAVE). All this work has sought to understand and explain how language is used, within and against African American communities and individuals. We have come a long way.

However, there persists a need to be better, to understand, and to explore concepts of literacy

in marginalized groups: from where do they come? What should we call these concepts, and, most of all, how can we practice them and utilize what we learn to teach those who need to develop dexterity in language use? Time and community have changed since the time of Brown and Coppin, and the African American community today is not the community of the women discussed here, a community of tight-knit neighborhoods—everyone on the block. Indeed, technological and social changes have affected the formation and appearance of that community. The African American community has changed. In many places children no longer stay in the same town as their parents and everyone who lives in the neighborhood is not known. Despite these changes and scattering, there remains a sense of African American community, and this sense of community continues to dictate that the acquisition of literate skills, reading, and writing was, and is, vital for members of the community to acquire. There is a need for understanding that individual acquisition and mastery of literacy has and/or should have a direct and far-reaching impact on the collective community, no matter how scattered or physically disconnected. We still associate literacy with power, but what that “power” is varies. Coppin said that when one rises to speak, especially in the halls of academia, the whole race rises (F. Coppin 15), and this sense of collective responsibility persists.

Few of the African American literacy workers of the nineteenth and early twentieth century left texts concerning their work. We have even fewer texts by African American women of that period on “how to teach.” Instead, we must glean many of these women’s legacies through studies of the number, diversity, and prominence of their students, who went on to become leaders in a plethora of professions and spaces. Their legacies are also found in discussions of institutions they founded, some of which are still in operation. Women like Coppin and Brown had knowledge and practices that allowed them to “develop language and literacy practices to resist White supremacist and economically motivated stereotypes conveying subhuman or immoral images” (Richardson 74-75). Further, Richardson adds, “I see African American literacies as including vernacular resistance arts and cultural productions that are created to carve out free spaces in oppressive locations such as the classroom, the streets, the workplace, or the airwaves to name a few” (76).

Specifically, Brown carves a free space for herself through vernacular resistance in her text *Bits and Odds*. Coppin enacts her literacy practices by advising teachers to create classrooms as free spaces within the oppressiveness of male-dominated institutions through methodologies preserved in the *Reminiscences of School Life and Hints on Teaching*. Teachers’ efforts to educate “their own” were often discouraged by attitudes that said it was useless to educate Black children in the classics or “academic subjects.” They also had to fight against patriarchal attitudes and actions that tried to subvert, cover up, and appropriate their work. Coppin, for example, was criticized for having a classical curriculum at the Institute for Colored Youth, and after getting married she was expected to stop teaching. She did neither.

Coppin and Brown produced texts to discuss what they felt should happen to Black children in the classroom. These texts are pedagogical. Coppin’s and Brown’s commitments and efforts are also documented and should be studied and celebrated. We should discover why Coppin’s name endures through institutions like Coppin State University in Baltimore, Maryland, which began

as a teacher's college and was named for her because of her accomplishments in teacher training. Brown's name and legacy lives on through the Hallie Quinn Brown Library on the campus of Central State University in Ohio. What greater honor to bestow a literacy worker than to name a library after her? I see these women and their texts as a way of understanding African American literacy practices as "multiple and varied." This supports Street's point in "Literacy Inequalities in Theory and in Practice: The Power to Name and Define," that "ethnographic perspectives and an understanding of literacy practices as multiple and culturally varied, can help avoid simplistic and often ethnocentric claims regarding the consequences of literacy based on one-dimensional and culturally narrow categories and definitions" (580).

## Frances Jackson Coppin: Literacy of Responsibility

Frances (Fanny) Jackson Coppin was born into slavery in 1837 in Washington, DC. Coppin benefited from the generosity of freed family members to gain her own freedom, most particularly her Aunt Sarah. She, in fact, remembered little of her time as an enslaved child. Coppin attended the Rhode Island State Normal School, where, she writes, "Here my eyes were first opened to the subject of teaching. I said to myself, is it possible that teaching can be made so interesting as this?" (F. Coppin 11-12). Subsequently, she went for further study at Oberlin College in Oberlin, Ohio, which was the only college open to women and African American students at the time. She was the second African American woman to successfully complete the *gentleman's course*, in which women were advised not to enroll at Oberlin.<sup>1</sup>

After her graduation from Oberlin, Coppin became principal of the female department of the Philadelphia Institute for Colored Youth (ICY). Four years later, in 1869, she became principal of the entire school (Cromwell 216). Coppin's legacy of care for students, in and out of the classroom, included the development of the Colored Woman's Exchange, which offered opportunities for the public to view the various artistic and practical accomplishments of the city's African Americans, and the founding of the Home for Girls and Young Women—a boarding house for young women in domestic service (F. Coppin 216). In 1881 she married Levi J. Coppin, who served as editor of the *AME Christian Recorder* and later became a bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, of which Frances J. Coppin was a lifelong member. As M. A. Majors wrote in *Noted Negro Women: Their Triumphs and Activities*, published in 1893, Fanny Coppin "has probably attained more fame as a teacher than any of the noble Afro-American women of the age" (171). Bert Loewenberg and Ruth Bogin note a description of Coppin by a Philadelphia writer who said, "By common consent Mrs. Fanny Jackson Coppin ranks first in mental equipment, in natural gifts and achievement among colored teachers . . . for more than thirty years she . . . was the most thoroughly controlling influence in moulding the lives of the colored people of that great city [Philadelphia]" (as qtd. in Loweberg and Bogin, 302).

Coppin's only book, *Reminiscences of School Life and Hints on Teaching*, was published after her death in 1913 and is divided into two parts. Part I was completed prior to her death and contains a short autobiography and instruction on how to teach various subjects. Part II, while roughly

drafted by Coppin, was completed for publication by her former student and colleague William Bolivar and focuses on notable students who attended the Institute. Bolivar says, of Coppin's desires for the book, that

[t]he spirit of altruism, the self-abnegations of a lifetime, were obvious in her motive in the other part she had planned. She meant that those who had helped her, and that some of the exceptional scholars from the school in which she had taught for nearly forty years, should be a part of her last effort. All the details, and all the persons noted in the pages to follow, were her thought, suggestion, and arrangement. (F. Coppin 137)

I focus here on Part I of *Reminiscences of School Life and Hints on Teaching*, which demonstrates Coppin's distaste for rote learning, drills, and memorization. Coppin practiced what some would call process and *self-motivated* learning, where critical thinking and reasoning were the preferred skills to be learned and practiced by her students (40). She advocated a style of teaching and learning that followed the process and need(s) of the individual students: "Growth in learning and acquisition proceeds slowly and by steps, and we must follow nature's direction" (40). In this quote, the phrase "nature's direction" points toward the needs of the student and not a set curriculum, a pedagogy that characterized much of Coppin's teaching and later her work as a trainer of teachers.

Coppin advises teachers, "Never let the word 'dumb' be used in your class, or anything said disrespectful of parents or guardians who have helped the child" (40). She discourages heavy reliance upon textbooks, a practical notion for the time. I believe she signals here the need to create or "customize" the curriculum for whatever situation the teacher confronts. This need also exists in many contemporary classrooms. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many teachers continue to teach with limited resources such as textbooks, or materials of poor quality and demeaning rhetoric. Coppin tells teachers, whatever the difficulty, it can be overcome.

When reviewing work done by elementary students, Coppin tells us, "the pupils will profit by the criticism of one another, the teacher making no correction that can possibly be made by the class; thus inviting and stimulating critical knowledge and judgment of all" (41). Today we might call this peer review or a "flipped classroom"; Coppin calls it "co-operative correction" and says it not only benefits the student but also helps lighten the load of the teacher (46). Coppin's gentleness, kindness, love and devotion to students are suggested in chapters 4, 6 and 7 of *Reminiscences and Hints on Teaching*. These chapters are titled "Diagnosis and Discipline," "Punishment," and "Moral Instruction and Good Manners," respectively. Although the chapters are brief, Coppin offers instruction to teachers that emphasizes engaging the "whole" student. She instructs teachers to use love and kindness and always to be self-reflexive about what is happening in the classroom and the teacher's role in that classroom. Chapter four, "Diagnosis and Discipline," for example, begins this way:

It is possible for the teacher to notice who those are in the class who do not care for learning what we have to give them; and the question to ask ourselves is, Why? Are the lessons too hard? or are they too long? Is the child well? Above all, does he seem to pass from one to another part of study with ease and comfort to himself, or is he troubled and uncertain? (51)



It seems Coppin rarely gave up on a student but instead sought to discover the difficulty or obstacle preventing the student from achieving or making progress in the areas the teacher desired. One method of successful diagnosis and discipline Coppin used was the individual and private examination: "Examinations privately conducted without letting the person know what you are looking for may give the true source of trouble" (52). Further, she admonishes teachers to be patient, wise, and skillful: "the teacher should be as conscientious in the endeavor to improve himself as he is to improve the child" (53). Here Coppin tells us the problem is not necessarily in the student. It may, in fact, be us, and we should work on ourselves to become better in helping the student.

Through every lesson, Coppin tries to motivate students to learn the subject that is being taught. For example, when advising teachers how to teach reading in the primary grades, she says, To learn to read, write and spell one word the first day, will be found to be very interesting to the children. The word "man" is a good word to begin with, because day after day by the addition of one more letter each day we can form a sentence. *Words are more interesting than letters, and sentences are more interesting than words. So that as soon as possible the teacher wants to make a sentence.* (65, emphasis added)

She calls for explicit teaching when she writes,

But it is not supposed that we should omit to teach the alphabet in order, for we know that this is necessary. But by no means allow this to be done mentally. Have the book or chart with the letters larger and distinctly made, and have the children's eyes follow the work as the teacher points to each letter and call its name . . . But there can hardly be a better way to train a child to think and reason than by the constant comparisons which he has had to make use of in learning the letters and all about them. (65-66)

Coppin tells teachers specifically what should be taught. More important to Coppin is *meaning*. Meaning is all important (67) even when teaching the alphabet; Coppin encourages teachers not only to teach the alphabet but also to engage students in understanding what letters are. I believe this advice tells us that even learning to read for her students was an opportunity to also teach them the concept of what language is, why it is, and what it is used for. Coppin believes students should become able to get the meanings, concepts, "sense" of the letter, word/lesson before considering errors. At the same time, she admonishes teachers not to condemn home languages. She advises:

Do not stop to correct mis-pronounced words, but wait until the lesson has been read thru once. In this way we shall get the sense of the lesson. It is objected that if we leave the corrections until the reading is finished, they will be forgotten; but stopping after each one reads, to say what you noticed was wrong, etc., keeps the pupils from getting a connected idea of the lesson, and hence, destroys the interest in it. (67-68)

Here she privileges understanding over correctness.

Coppin's study and teaching of writing immediately follows her discussion of reading, primarily because she argues that writing reinforces reading and that "[f]ive words correctly defined and written in sentences are of more value than twenty words simply spelled correctly" (68). It is also through learning to spell and understand the meaning of words that Coppin suggests



the rules of grammar and punctuation will be learned and understood. Thinking, reasoning, and stimulating interest in literacy as well as the materials used to develop that literacy are simultaneously important in her pedagogy. More specifically, Coppin uses an exercise in which students compose a letter to their mothers. Using this exercise, she argues, teaches both reading and writing. Coppin writes, “The child’s interest is awakened, and he [sic] will try his best to learn other words that he will write to his mother. If this begins in the first reader [reading textbook], before the third is finished the child will be quite a little scribe” (69). She continues, “It is well worthwhile to let the child see how he is getting ahead. The English language is certainly not an easy one to learn, and much patience is required to learn and use it correctly; but a thoughtful teacher can by pointing out differences help the pupil to remember the many points necessary in correct reading and spelling” (69).

Literacy teachers today are still having debates and discussions about what kinds of readings we should use for our students. What kinds of readings have meaning and can capture and motivate the culturally and ethnically diverse students we teach today? Coppin had advice to teachers about that too. She writes:

There is a world of happy thoughts all about us, and if we make wise selections in teaching, they are quite sure to be remembered. And the grain of truth which they contain is as encouraging in bringing forth, as is the grain of mustard seed. What we sow we reap, and there is no field more fertile than that of a child’s mind. If we plant tomatoes, we get tomatoes; we certainly should not expect to find potatoes. And so, if we plant beautiful thoughts and beautiful words in the child’s mind, we shall certainly get the same. But I do not forget the parable of the tares of the field, for whatever we do, there is always an active enemy who is doing his sowing at the same time, and for this reason we must humble ourselves and pray that the Lord of the Harvest may protect our child’s mind from the sower of evil; for in spite of all you may do, you will find things in that child’s mind which you never taught, and which you cannot account for. (73)

In this quote, Coppin does not prescribe specific readings or writings to give students; instead she focuses us on what the reading selections should do, planting “beautiful” thoughts and words in the readers’ minds. How can these beautiful thoughts and words be grasped by readers if those readings are divorced from the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of the reader? If ethnography involves the examination of customs and traditions of a people, then in the above quote, Coppin’s use of religious imagery, traditionally used in African American rhetoric, both then and now, enacts the “ethnographic perspective” of literacy that Street describes. More specifically, her use of religious imagery to talk about teaching reading elevates the acquiring of reading skills to being divine, eliminating notions of students having a deficit. Street says an ethnographic perspective helps us shed notions of literacy as “deficit” and it “shifts us out of this mind set and helps us firstly to ‘imagine’ things that do not exist in our own world” (“Literacy Inequalities” 584). For Coppin, reading not only helps the student see “happy thought and truths, but it also is a divine skill, a thing of beauty. “Truths” are not imagined things. In our classrooms today, what materials do we use to help our students “imagine,” or gain “happy thoughts,” beautiful words and ideas? What does

not exist in their worlds but that could? More specifically, how does Shakespeare create beautiful thoughts and truths for the student from Hendersonville, North Carolina?

Coppin's idea of reading practice goes hand-in-hand with writing as she suggests,

As the pupils advance in their lessons, it will be a very good thing to have many little essays written on the power of words to bless or destroy and on the responsibility of those who use them, for "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." . . . those whom we teach must be inspired to think about the different effect of kind words and unkind words, therefore, to think before they use them. (76)

I believe we see Street's ideological theory of literacy rooted in responsibility and liberal education though Coppin's emphasis on developing within students the responsibility words reading them and writing them. She tells teachers that they have the responsibility to teach students the power of words/language, and because language is powerful it must be used responsibly.

### Hallie Quinn Brown: The Literacy of Pride

At the same time Coppin was teaching, Hallie Quinn Brown, slightly younger than Coppin, was an elocutionist, political activist, club woman, and teacher. She was one of the busiest and most productive African American literacy workers of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Brown was born to a mother and father who were both slaves and of mixed blood (Black, Indigenous, and White). Because of his mixed heritage and prominent white family, Brown's father, Thomas Arthur Brown, despite being born a slave, was able to gain his freedom by working as a valet for his cousin, who was a United States Representative. After he purchased his freedom, he found employment as a steward and express agent on a steamboat. Thomas Brown served on the steamboat *Pennsylvania*, the very steamboat upon which Samuel Clemens received the name "Mark Twain" (McFarlin 14). As a result of his work on the steamboat, Thomas Brown was able to purchase property and afford what some would call a good living for his family. Hallie Quinn Brown's family, and particularly her father, had a profound effect on her and her work, as evidenced in the book *Tales my Father Told*, published in 1925. In this book, Brown provides an intimate portrait of her home life and retells childhood stories from her father regarding his adventures as a riverboat pilot and of her family's experiences hiding runaway slaves.

After living in Canada during the Civil War, when Brown was about the age of 18 or 19, the family moved back to the United States, and Brown was told she would be sent to school in Ohio. That school was Wilberforce University, the school Brown would be associated with for most of her academic career. According to Annjennette Sophie McFarlin, the Brown children had "experienced racial prejudice and humiliation. It was due to these experiences and other sorrows that Brown's parents decided she should go to a school that had been built for Black people, Wilberforce University" (19). At Wilberforce, Brown was to live and work with one of the greatest Black leaders of the time, Bishop Daniel Payne. He would also be her first and most influential mentor. Brown's discussions of her years at Wilberforce, 1868 to 1873, are loving, appreciative, and energetic in tone. She projects an image of the institution as young, but full of life, activity, and ambition, and she

caught that energy herself: “I applied myself diligently to my books. Our school was in formation, wholly unorganized . . . For the first time, I felt the spur of competition and delighted in having better class recitations than some of my older fellow students” (McFarlin 22). After graduating Wilberforce in 1873, Brown took a teaching position in South Carolina and then Yazoo City, Mississippi. Later she taught at Wilberforce University and served as president of women at Allen University in South Carolina.

In Yazoo City, Brown had to live in a one-room house with a family of three, people she had never met before. She had to compete with the needs and demands of the poor families, sharecropping, and the demands of the growing and harvesting seasons. The school building was dilapidated (McFarlin 28), but despite these conditions, she says she looked at the run-down schoolhouse and realized, “I could do it” (29). She immersed herself in the community, her work, *the cause*. During her time in Yazoo City, Brown succeeded in getting the school house built, and she is also credited with building a new church, starting Sunday School classes, and teaching “the women and girls on the plantation how to knit and sew and make flour bread” (30). She was so successful and effective that during the first year there that she was able to lengthen the school year from five to eight months and was offered another year’s contract. However, she left Mississippi and went back to South Carolina because her parents felt rural Mississippi was too dangerous at that time for her to return (31).

In South Carolina, Brown accepted and completed her first public speaking, what was then called elocution, engagements. She says she gave her first performance in the woods of South Carolina on a tree stump: “A hundred dark faces with searching eyes peered into mine. It seemed unreal, uncanny under the light of wavering torches” (McFarlin 34). This was the beginning of what became the primary focus of her life’s works in teaching and public life, public speaking, elocution.

An elocutionist is a person who has perfected the artistic style or manner of speaking or reading in public, one who is able to capture the meaning and feeling of an author and communicate its meaning and feeling naturally. Brown, who lived to be almost 100 years old, did her literacy work through public speaking, teaching, and writing. She wrote and published over eight texts and her fame, in terms of literacy work, was gained through her performances of recitations, readings, teaching and writings. Brown used her elocution skills to raise money for Allen University and her alma mater, Wilberforce, in England. One British minister, after attending a recitation in Liverpool, wrote to a former student of hers, “I know no English Elocutionist, man or woman, who recites with the naturalness and charm, the vivacity and power of Miss Brown. I never knew until tonight what the human voice could do” (qtd. in Gomez-Jefferson 51). She was impressive in every way.

Brown’s text *Bits and Odds: Selections of Recitations for School Lyceum and Parlor Entertainments* suggests an ideology of racial responsibility similarly to Coppin’s, but Brown complicates and/or builds upon Coppin’s notions to an ideology of *racial pride*. In a 1997 article, Susan Kates suggests that Brown’s approach to elocution and her deliberate attention to the history and folk art of African Americans, as seen in *Bits and Odds*, is evidence of an ideology of literacy and education as “racial uplift,” social responsibility, and more importantly, pride. Kates says, “By

making language and history such important components of her elocutionary curriculum, Brown foregrounds the relationship between the development of cultural pride and social and political action” (67).

Like Coppin, Brown saw literacy, for the African American, as an instrument of service, strength, and pride, not just in the individual, but also in the community—the race. It is only through *service*, Brown says, that an individual’s true gifts can contribute to his or her success, and education literacy is the vehicle through which one may become *fit*—capable, deserving even—to serve. Brown argued, “The Great and ultimate object of all education is to fit the individual for service. One may be endowed with superior gifts, yet by neglect, or lack of use, utterly fail in the race of life” (McFarlin 173). Further, Brown saw her teaching and learning processes as activities that had, always, to embody two values—knowledge and discipline. Racial pride and the celebration of African American history and culture were ideals Brown pursued, and these ideals permeated her teaching, her performances, and her politics. Language was the fuel that powered and moved Brown’s philosophy of racial responsibility and service as well as the ideal of racial/cultural pride and history.

Brown’s life and writings give an interesting view of not only her ideologies of literacy, but also her ideologies of human behavior and purpose. Faustin Delany’s introduction to *Bits and Odds* suggests that in elocution, it is vital for the student to *feel* the emotions and thoughts of the author. The call for the student to feel the thoughts and emotions of the writer, I believe, helps the student develop empathy and care for the author, to understand the emotions of the author, to see how another person might be experiencing life. In turn that empathy for the author demands from the elocutionist a sense of the responsibility to listener. “It is not essential for him [sic] [the student] to lose his individuality. The reader has more to do than to imitate. He must feel and then express those feelings . . . It is the cultivation of *our own* natures that is aimed at and not the imitation of the nature of another” (Brown, *Bits and Odds* 6; emphasis added).

Connection and responsibility to the author and listener might be why Kates calls Brown’s use of language in *Bits and Odds* an *embodied* rhetoric, a rhetoric that gave, and gives, life, form, and shape to the ideals, philosophies, cultures, and histories of African American literacy. Kates argues that Brown’s selections are purposeful with the intent of meeting and serving the needs of African Americans (59). Brown’s purposeful selection of readings encourages and demands a cultural literacy of the pupils and the audience. Kates writes,

She [Brown] raised questions about the relationship between schooling and social responsibility, using and transforming mainstream elocutionary theory in order to address these issues. The goal of Brown’s pedagogy was an “embodied rhetoric,” that is to say, a rhetoric located within, and generated for, the African-American community. (59)

An example of what Kates describes is seen in the selection, “Brother Watkins,” a humorous story of a minister breaking the ice with a new congregation, and it utilizes the vernacular and mannerisms of black preachers that may have been common in the nineteenth century. By including the selection “Brother Watkins,” Brown makes disinterested knowledge explicit knowledge. For example, to read “Brother Watkins” correctly, emphasis must be placed at the end of certain

words. For example, “My beloved brederin before I take my text, I must tell of parting with my old congregation-ah on the morning of last Sabbath-ah” (Brown, *Bits and Odds* 34). If Faustin Delaney suggests, or demands, the elocution pupil must *feel* the emotions and thoughts of the author, and that the reader must use his/her own knowledge and feelings to express those feelings, then “Brother Watkins” forces the reader to enter into a realm and world of African American language and culture, and the expression of the feelings, I argue, requires valuing and respect. To recite “Brother Watkins,” the elocutionist has to become “literate” in the culture, history, and language of the people in the story. He or she must appreciate, and be responsible for, the vernacular as it is if he/she wants to understand it and recite and communicate the author’s meaning.

In this collection, Brown calls for not only a literacy of language, but also a literacy of community, culture, and language practices. She values the literacy in these communities as it exists. Inclusion of pieces like “Brother Watkins” shows a valuation of community, culture, and experience. This demonstration of racial responsibility and respect—the demonstration that cultural stories and traditions have value and can and should be used in a person’s education—was unique in the day. We are still battling for the acceptance, appreciation, and use of AAVE in formal writing. Just as in the nineteenth century, we still fight the notion that those who do not use spoken and written Standard English are those who are uneducated, and those who are uneducated are those of whom we should be ashamed. This idea is not exclusive to African Americans. Consequently, I believe Brown goes much further than merely enacting a pedagogy located in, and for, the African American community.

However, Brown not only uses selections that use Black or African American dialect; she also uses pieces that require the reader and reciter to speak with Irish, Yiddish, and German accents, and/or dialects. The accents and dialects are not from the so-called “educated” classes, but rather, she calls for the reader to enter, acquire, and “perform” various cultural literacies. *Bits and Odds* requires the reader to adopt *feeling* for, and performance of, English in various vernaculars, thereby creating a literacy phenomenon consisting of multiple models of literacies that can be valuable to the field (Street, *Theory and Practice*). For African American students, and others interested in Brown’s text, these pieces force them to go beyond their culture and become sensitive to, and respectful of, the cultures and experiences of others. Brown’s collection is radical, challenging, entertaining, and educational. Brown believed elocution was one of the primary ways a student could become literate, educated, and cultured. Delaney suggests,

The elocutionist has a broader field. He [sic] has not so much to do with giving forth the original thoughts and feelings of his own mind as he has in giving forth those thoughts and feelings he has created in his mind, suggested by the expressed words of another, and causing the listener on the other hand to start the kindred chords vibrating in union with his own. (Brown, *Bits and Odds* 5)

Elocution challenged and educated its practitioner and audience. Through serious study and development of the discipline, students would come to an appreciation and pride in the diversity of the world. Brown’s collection forces both the reader and audience to interact with, understand and merge their experiences, finding a common ground upon which the reader and audience become

one—transcending racial and cultural differences.

## Feminist Black Literacy and Brian Street

Literacy workers like Brown “create” a pedagogy and ideology that encompasses the various worlds and positions in which they found themselves. Jacqueline Jones Royster asserts that African American women write out of what she called their “multivocal” abilities. More specifically, she writes:

They [African American women writers] convey an intent to satisfy (more comprehensively than just one mode can do) two imperatives: to enact their own complex expressive purposes and to meet a range of audience needs. One might say that these writers embrace the notion that what they feel compelled to say is not only worth saying more than once but also worth hearing in more than one way. (22)

Black feminist ideology argues that literacy for African Americans must be comprehensive, holistic, and encompass all the intersections through which a Black woman moves and exists. More specifically, Black feminism seeks to explore how race, sex, class, work, education, and religions impact one's life. Beverly Guy-Sheftall, in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American Feminist Thought*, delineates five premises of black feminism. Among those premises are that black women work and live in a type of “triple jeopardy” of oppression due to sexism, racism, and classism, and because of that triple jeopardy, the needs of Black women are not the same as those of white women. Black women have to simultaneously struggle for equality and liberation from racism (2). Consequently, “black women intellectuals have always engaged in important philosophical ideas of their time, utilizing, developing and critiquing these ideas as they saw fit in order to address concerns of race, gender, and more specifically their place in social systems in which their race, gender and sexuality designated them as absences from intellectual life” (Davidson, Gines, and Marciano 3).

In this brief examination of two Black women of the nineteenth century, we see Brown and Coppin enact Black feminist work. The double jeopardy of being women and African American informs their work in every way. In addition, Coppin's and Brown's texts challenged the places in the social systems they were supposed to occupy. The nineteenth century is known for its cult of true womanhood where women were expected to devote themselves primarily to the establishment and keeping of a home, children, and husband. Brown never married and was once stranded in Arkansas after a tour she was on collapsed. Instead of panicking, she performed her way back to the East coast. Coppin married a man younger than she and refused to stop working after the marriage. Her husband, Bishop Levi Coppin, reflects on this in his autobiography, *An Unwritten History*. He says after he married Coppin, he wanted her to stop teaching. Of that the Bishop says, “There are two ways to stop an automobile, viz., to slow down, or, to run the machine against a stone wall” (L. Coppin 358). Neither Coppin or Brown let marriage or social norms, practices, and expectations stop their work.

This against-the-grain determination by Coppin and Brown do exactly what Street calls for

when he says, “An ethnographic perspective shifts us out of this mind set and helps us firstly to ‘imagine’ things that do not exist in our world and then understand them in their own terms rather than to see them, in our terms, just as a ‘deficits’” (Street, “Literacy Inequalities” 584). These women lived and worked in a world that never thought of them, their people, their sex as fully human or equal. They, by the very color of their skins, were “deficits,” but they did work in which they had to “imagine” themselves, their students, their futures as equal, literate, and empowered. Further they could not, as both women and pioneers, see literacy or education as a “single uniform thing called ‘literacy’” (Street, “Inequalities” 580). Street’s work enables current scholars to go beyond examining the work of Coppin and Brown as recovered histories and portraits of activism. His work enables us to see and, hopefully, enact in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, their techniques and pedagogies as an anthropological and social approach to literacy.

Literacy must provide skills to meet immediate needs while also developing and challenging the intellect. Coppin and Brown did not see the need for compromising literacy formation in an ideology of either/or, and the creation of the texts of this study are evidence of their resistance to that “either/or” ideology. Coppin and Brown believed and worked with the notion that all African Americans should, and could, gain a literacy for the complete person, a literacy that would give them the skills to establish and maintain a solid economic base, as well as acquire the intellectual prowess to negotiate the dominant white world. They resisted other nineteenth century educators like Booker T. Washington, who argued that African American students wasted time studying Greek and Latin, and W. E. B. DuBois, who advocated for a “talented tenth” who should pursue a classical “higher” education and subsequently “lift” the rest of the race. Brown and Coppin are feminists/womanists, women who worked for all.

## Twentieth Century Echoes

Frances Jackson Coppin’s literacy practice is embedded in an ideology of literacy as a privilege and responsibility. Her rhetoric points to a belief that excelling in literate practices was one of the best ways to prove to the white society in which she lived the humanity of a people once thought of as nothing but property; and as a former slave who had an education, Coppin was obligated to and responsible for aiding all members of her race in reaching her level of achievement and beyond. Her work centered around “lifting” everyone she could, in whatever ways she could, not just the lifting of a talented few, as DuBois advocated. As a woman, Coppin struggled to enact her ideologies in a male-dominated world. Even though many teachers in Black post-slavery classrooms were women, the philosophies, ideologies, and pedagogies of the profession were largely male. Coppin’s feminist approach did not place limitations on what a student could do, regardless of background or social and economic standing. For Coppin, a student’s social and economic standing were all considered in literacy practices to find multiple ways to meet students’ multiple needs. This pedagogy requires that the teacher, through self-reflection and formal and informal assessment of students, constantly measure her effectiveness. Are students reaching their goals? Are the methods and approaches to learning accomplishing the goals set by the teacher? The answers to



these questions dictate change. This pedagogy requires change when change is needed.

I first saw the influence of Coppin's ideology and methods of teaching reflected in important scholars like Lisa Delpit. In her book, *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*, when clarifying her position on the skills/process debate concerning writing instruction, Delpit writes,

I am proposing a resolution for the skills/process debate. In short, the debate is fallacious; the dichotomy false . . . [T]hose [teachers] who are most skillful at educating black and poor children do not allow themselves to be placed in "skills" or "process" boxes. They understand the need for both approaches, the need to help students establish their own voices, and to coach those voices to produce notes that will be heard clearly in the larger society. (46)

Here Delpit's point is exactly the aim in Coppin's and Brown's work. Delpit entered the scene at the height of the process vs. skills pedagogy debate and came to her conclusions after reflecting on why African American students seemed to want more from her when teaching in a university, more than what she offered in the classroom: her secret to success, the details of how she got to be a university professor. She felt African American students looked for her "secret to success," namely because they looked at her as an African American who had the "secret" to how to write and speak at the white school. It is this expectation of her, on the part of her students, that led her to research and write about perceptions of literacy and how it is taught for, and to, African Americans. Delpit's use of the term "coach," in reference to the teacher, in relation to students, is a reflection of Coppin's statement that "he [the student] must educate himself under the direction of the teacher" (F. Coppin 44). Delpit and Coppin enact literacy that desires to empower students in their own learning. The teacher serves to direct and assist as part of her pedagogy. Coppin, working with an ideology of racial responsibility, knew what African American students would face once they left school.

Before Delpit, Geneva Smitherman, the pioneer of what we now call African American Vernacular English (AAVE) as a tool to better educate black students, says, in *Talkin' and Testifyin': The Language of Black America*, "Black dialect is an Africanized form of English reflecting Black America's linguistic-cultural African heritage and the conditions of servitude, oppression and life in America" (2). Therefore, the way many African Americans speak reflects ways of knowing that have played vital roles in the survival of black people in America. Further, Smitherman says, the way African Americans speak must be valued, celebrated, and used to spread literacy in meaningful ways to students, especially black students. Smitherman agrees with Brown's and later Carter G. Woodson's thinking when, in *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, he says African Americans have been taught to speak and write "correctly," not for the purpose of instilling pride in themselves, or their culture, let alone critical thinking and analysis. The emphasis on "correctness" Smitherman contends, directs African American students toward the values of the dominant culture (Smitherman 203). Notions that provoke negative images and thinking about AAVE, she argues, derive within a type of "black pathology"—the notion that something is not "normal" with African Americans (202). "Normal" is being white and middle class. However, speaking and using "correct"



English, Smitherman says, does not ensure success, and she therefore discourages the connotation of the word “uplift” as the idea of making one white. This is the fight of the technical outlook Street laments.

African Americans’ educational achievement is the result of pedagogies centered in the individual teacher. It is in making these pedagogies literacy workers should add to their resources. Smitherman writes,

I contend that it is still individual teachers in their individual setting that are the single most important factor in the educational process. The individual teacher has a tremendous impact on, and responsibility for how, what and how much students learn.  
(216)

Smitherman goes on to say, “What is needed to prevent further mis-education of black kids is a change in teacher attitude and behavior, a complete reordering of thought about the educational process and place of black students in that process” (217). This change partly consists of a change in negative attitudes toward and respect for students’ “home language.” Negative attitudes, she argues, “negatively impact the teacher’s ability to effectively teach that student (Smitherman 219).” In 2020, these conversations continue.

Brown is of like mind, reclaiming and using AAVE, as well as other ethnic forms of English, in her instruction. In order to teach the recitations, in *Bits and Odds*, written in vernacular forms, instruction regarding that form’s grammatical and rhetorical structures and patterns would have to be taught and understood, which is what Smitherman, and others, call for. Brown says, “It is not essential for him [the elocutionist] to lose his [her] individuality. He must feel and then express those feelings . . . . It is the cultivation of our own natures that is aimed at and not the imitation of another” (*Bits and Odds* 6). Brown tells us, in 1880, a person does not have to forfeit their culture to gain a high level of literacy and appreciation for other cultures. What must happen, however, is that the student must cultivate and nurture what they already have and bring to the text and make it grow and blossom. Further, like Coppin, Brown, and Delpit, Smitherman says the role of the teacher in literacy teaching is to “. . . serve as guide, question, raise points and examples” (Smitherman 224). She goes on to write, “What teachers would be doing, then, amounts to a social and political act, which, like charity, begins at home” (241). For women like Brown and Coppin, the classroom was never a place devoid of the influence and importance of identity. Racial identity was key to Brown’s and Coppin’s motivations and persistence. The classroom was a place where racial identity, racial responsibility and racial pride met, mingled, battled, and cooperated. After all, for both Coppin and Brown, literacy was key to their status and success in a post-slavery world.

## We Do What We Do

“I do not see how a teacher can succeed well without ingenuity,  
because ways of finding means to an end must be discovered by the teacher.”  
(F. Coppin 42)

Making a way outa no way is what they did. Coppin's enslavement and work as a maid to becoming a world-famous teacher, and Brown's education at a new, small, black college, first working as a teacher in a school house with dirt floors and gaps between wall boards, and then becoming a world famous elocutionist performing for the Queen of England, demonstrate these women's abilities to make ways outa no ways. For Coppin and Brown, the need for a distinct approach, attitude, and concept of education was dictated and necessitated by the social condition of slavery, prejudice, and racism. Literacy was a principle of the African American slavery and post-slavery culture that was internalized as vital to the success and continuation of an African American community and culture.

I have tried in this article to do some of what Abul Pitre suggests needs to be done in the text *African American Women Educators: A Critical Examination of Their Pedagogies, Educational Ideas and Activism from the Nineteenth to the Mid-Twentieth Century*. Pitre says, "While scholars have sought to understand how to prepare teachers to effectively teach African American students, few have used the historical experiences of African American women educators as a tool to gain insight about effective pedagogical strategies" (1). Although classrooms of the nineteenth century and twenty-first century are quite different, as are the societal and cultural contexts, relationships, and connections exist between teachers then and teachers now. We continue to encounter many of the issues, dilemmas, and debates Coppin and Brown faced, and the need for effective solutions remains. I believe the texts examined here and the recovery of them can aid us in finding more complex and holistic solutions. Coppin and Brown believed and worked with the notion that all African Americans should, and could, gain a literacy for the complete person, a literacy that would give them the skills to establish and maintain a solid economic base, as well as acquire the intellectual prowess to negotiate the dominant white world.

We still have to make a way outa no way, for students, for we must overcome and make headway in the battle against the much-lamented phenomenon of African American students' continued academic underachievement, alienation from schooling, low self-esteem and low expectations from teachers, and social violence and misinformation. We must look back for what persists. The societal and educational climate of the nineteenth century may have been more oppressive than it is today, but a disconnect from core community survival themes and literacy practices might be key to our survival. Here I have tried to provide another perspective/history of two important women who codified us their work in texts about their work. Street writes,

An alternative perspective shifts the focus from schools and from children and instead sees reading and writing as always taking place in some specific sociocultural context. One is never "learning to read"; one is ever only "learning to read some specific text or other in a specific context." It is the sociocultural context and the practices that take place within it that give reading (and writing) its meaning. ("Learning" 336)

The sociocultural context Street speaks of clearly impacts the ideologies, philosophies, and practices of Brown and Coppin. Their texts reflect practices born out of experiences in multiple worlds—lands of existence—the land of the slave and freedwoman, white, black, literate and illiterate. Like theirs, our pedagogies are also shaped by real-life experiences and desires, social

contexts. A Black feminist lens on the work of Street helps some who know nothing about the “Black experience” of women to engage in Black feminist ideological literacy.

In “Society Reschooling,” Street reviews Shirley Brice Heath’s *Words at Work and Play: Three Decades in Family and Community Life*, a follow up to her classic, *Ways With Words*, and a British edited collection entitled, *The Great Literacy Debate: A Critical Response to the Literacy Strategy and the Framework for English*. These texts, Street writes, suggest that we must consider teaching what we might call “home,” or everyday, literacies, at the same time we try to “teach” what we call “formal” or school literacy. Instead of “home” and “formal literacies being seen as opposites, they might be seen as necessary to a literacy strategy that meets students/people’s needs. For me this notion points directly to Guy-Sheftall’s premise of Black feminism that delineates the multiple stresses/jeopardy it seeks to liberate us from. Therefore, a literacy strategy that encompasses both formal and informal literacies might be one to facilitate that liberation. I believe Coppin and Brown used their version of Street’s ideas to negotiate and embody their own Black feminism and ideology. We have much to learn from both.

We must renew our view of the work of women like Coppin and Brown not just for their political and activist histories but also for their pedagogical lessons and practices. We must, like them, use our public spaces to initiate change in order to do what Royster notes in *Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change Among African American Women*: “engage in complex discursive practices that mirror the complex social, historical, and cultural positions from which they speak. ... engage in a ‘simultaneity of discourse,’ speaking in the creation of a single text both in a plurality of voices and in a multiplicity of discourses” (Royster 20). The coupling and examination of Coppin and Brown through the work of Street demonstrates a goal of literacy studies: “to enhance our capacity to build a more richly endowed knowledge base, carry out a more inclusive research agenda, and generate greater, more inclusive interpretive power” (Royster and Kirsch 134).

Brian Street, Frances Coppin, and Hallie Brown believed in an ideological model approach to literacy instruction. What I have briefly examined here is a small part of the collective resource of their teaching with their hearts, bodies, and minds. We must preserve, study, name, and use what has been left for us, and by doing so, place them, and ourselves, in a legacy of literacy practices that recognizes and grapples with who we are as we relate to the cultural, racial and, social history through which we view literacy. Then, perhaps, we will serve all our students more profoundly. Street’s notion of the “social formation” of literacy, in light of African American and African American feminist practices, helps create a richer “interrogation” of literacy narratives. Perhaps we might also be able to re-evaluate and present practices and approaches that might be more anti-racist, or, at the least, more empowering for both students and teachers.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Oberlin had two courses for men and women. The “Women’s Course” focused on literature and music, while the “Gentlemen’s Course” focused on ancient languages, mathematics and the sciences.

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# Composing Literary Arguments in an 11th Grade International Baccalaureate Classroom: How Classroom Instructional Conversations Shape Modes of Participation

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“**A**cademic Literacies” sees reading and writing as practices that are shaped by ideologies, identities, and institutional power relations that may either afford or constrain students’ participation in disciplinary knowledge (Lea and Street 156-57). For example, in US secondary schools, because of an emphasis on supporting students’ test performances shaped historically by autonomous notions of reading and writing, there is an overriding emphasis on formulaic approaches to argumentative writing instruction in English language arts. The ideology of the autonomous model for teaching and learning argumentation and argumentative writing tends to trivialize disciplinary norms of argument and evidence (Applebee and Langer), ignore the experiences and knowledge of adolescent writers, and focus attention on objectifiable text features and structures (Prior and Olinger). When arguments are reduced to forms where students are asked to drop content into pre-determined slots, it is no wonder that scholars such as Todd DeStigter have questioned the usefulness of the large presence of argument in the US secondary English curriculum. However, when teachers embrace a more dialogic view of argumentation, they leverage the unique social experiences and practices within a particular context as “keys to understanding the human condition and the social, cultural, and political conditions of people’s lives”

***“Although Lea and Street and other scholars often reference ‘participation as learning,’ we explore this construct in some detail by examining how differing modes of participation evolve out of differing opportunities.”***

(Bloome, Newell, Hirvela, and Lin 1).

This article is an effort to provide an ethnographically informed framework for understanding for whom, how, when, and to what extent it is possible for students to participate, through argumentative writing, in the study of literature as the central disciplinary content of English language arts. Although Mary Lea and Brian Street and other scholars often reference “participation as learning,” we explore this construct in some detail by examining how differing modes of participation (Prior) evolve out of differing opportunities. We also (re)frame the teaching and learning of argumentation and argumentative writing as a social practice, always embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles rather than a technical and neutral skill (Street).

## The Context for the Study

The ethnographic and discourse analytic case study reported here was part of an eight-year, US Institute of Education Sciences (IES) funded research project on teaching and learning of literature-related argumentative writing in high school English language arts classrooms. We have collaborated with 61 classroom teachers in urban and suburban schools in central Ohio in the US Midwest. Among the array of approaches that we observed over the eight-year period were alternatives to traditional approaches; however, we are now looking with particular concern for what students are learning to do in and through writing in these classrooms that include writing practices for addressing a range of purposes and audiences. Arthur Applebee and Judith Langer offered a challenge to teachers “to provide students with a rich understanding of the rhetorical context implicit in such writing, and of strategies for addressing such tasks effectively without reducing them to a formula” (181). In turn, we have challenged ourselves to study how, when, and under what circumstances this is possible in teaching argumentative writing that allows for flexibility and choice in what students write and how they write it.

We note that argumentative writing is not monolithic and that even though people might use the same term—argumentative writing—they are not necessarily referring to the same thing. Simply stated, teachers and students might define argumentative writing as the taking of a position and advocating for that position competitively through argumentation (warrants, evidence, counter arguments, etc.). Alternatively, teachers and students might define argumentative writing as the exploration, learning, and advancement of an idea not in competition with others but in cooperation and dialogue with others who might have begun with a different perspective. Understanding that engaging in argumentative writing is pluralistic has implications for how the teaching and learning of argumentative writing might be framed as social practices.

As an extension and further exploration of previous studies of teaching and learning argumentative writing as social practice in English language arts classrooms—described in George Newell, David Bloome, and Alan Hirvela’s *Teaching and Learning Argumentative Writing in High School English Language Arts Classrooms*—this article considers how students in a high school International Baccalaureate (IB) Literature classroom learned to write by participating in a particular “community of practice” (Lave and Wenger). The purpose of this study is to explore an IB teacher’s



instructional approach for teaching literature-related argumentative writing, an approach that did not specify a particular form or formula that students needed to use. Instead, the teacher's instructional conversations and instructional activities helped students learn to make the moves—ways of taking action—that constitute literary argumentation (VanDerHeide).

Our project was directed by two questions: (1) What were the key events of an instructional unit during which students' modes of participation were made manifest through intertextual tracings? (2) How were the students' modes of participation revealed in and fostered by speaking and in writing when making literary arguments as revealed through intertextual tracings?

### *Theoretical Framework*

In contrast with the dominant "skills" view, we have adopted an "ideological" view of literacy, in which literacy not only varies with social context and with cultural norms and discourses (regarding, for instance, identity, gender, and belief)—what might be termed a "social" model—but also that its uses and meanings are always embedded in relations of power. It is in this sense, we suggest, that literacy in general and teaching and learning argumentative writing in particular can be seen as ideological: they always involve contests over meanings, definitions, boundaries, and control of the literacy agenda. For these reasons, it becomes harder to justify teaching only one particular form of literacy when the learners already will have been exposed to a variety of everyday literacy practices (Lea and Street).

We also take a situated, emic view of what counts as "good writing," grounded in theories of writing as social practice within a broader theoretical framework of social constructionism in

***"In our view, rather than formulas and recipes, what fosters 'good writing' in a classroom is interactionally constructed during instructional conversations in which the teacher and students are acting and reacting to each other as well as to the content and form of the written texts."***

which languaging and languaging relations are central to how people act and react to each other (cf., Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, and Shuart-Faris; Gergen; Newell, Bloome and Hirvela). In our view, rather than formulas and recipes, what fosters "good writing" in a classroom is interactionally constructed during instructional conversations in which the teacher and students are acting and reacting to each other as well as to the content and form of the written texts. Following the work of David Bloome, Stephanie Power Carter, Beth Morton Christian, Sheila Otto, and Nora Shuart-Faris,

*Discourse*; Roz Ivanič; Paul Prior; and Brian Street, we view writing as languaging knowledge and learning embedded in particular social events with all of the complex social and cultural processes involved in human relationships.

Many of the classrooms we studied using ethnographic methods and perspectives over eight years took up an "argumentation as learning" perspective to the teaching of literature. Argumentation as learning within English language arts asks students to consider complex and multiple definitions

of knowledge and ways of knowing and to recognize that insights into an understanding of the human condition and their own lives are continuously evolving (Bloome, Newell, Hirvela, and Lin). This framework is grounded in the idea that knowledge is discursively constructed over time and that discourse processes, social actions, and communicative practices shape what counts as knowing and doing within a particular group (Gergen; Prior).

Accordingly, arguing to learn can be seen as the ability to participate more effectively in written genres of a wider range of communities of practice (Applebee). One way to conceptualize this social action through language is with the term “writerly move,” or action mediated through language (Harris; Bazerman). Grounded in Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger’s view of learning as participation, Prior has described two modes of participation (in a graduate school context) as “procedural display” and “deep participation.” These modes “involve ascending levels of access to and engagement in disciplinary activity” (Prior 100) such as learning how to make a literary argument in a high-level IB English high school classroom. An important implication for understanding “learning to write” is to avoid relying on single idealized pathways or trajectories of expertise. Instead, we embrace what Prior has pointed out from Lave and Wenger that “forms of participation in communities of practice are diverse, multiple, always peripheral, and that there is no core to such communities” (102). This idea shapes the general argument that we are making about learning to write within a social constructionist framework.

## Methods

### *Design of the Argumentative Writing Project Study*

Teachers were recruited to the study based on recommendations of school district administrators and teachers associated with the local National Writing Project affiliate. Our project was designed as follows: each academic year, seven to thirteen teachers were recruited to participate in the project; the summer before each academic year, the teachers participated in a three-week summer workshop on the teaching of argumentative writing. The content of the summer workshops was based on the concept of argumentative writing as inquiry and learning (cf., Newell, Bloome, and Hirvela). The workshop consisted of discussions of academic articles and sections of George Hillock’s *Teaching Argument Writing* and the writing of arguments by the teachers in response to essays and exercises (such as the “slip or trip” exercise in which readers must examine a picture for clues as to whether a murder suspect is lying and then write a “report” to the police chief warranting their claims). During the last week of the workshop, teachers individually developed curricular and instructional plans for teaching argumentative writing. Although teachers shared ideas with each other, no attempt was made to standardize their instructional plans or how they conceptualized argumentative writing as inquiry and learning. At the end of the workshop, members of the project met with each teacher to discuss research procedures for the upcoming year.

A member of our project was assigned as the lead researcher for each classroom to conduct an ethnographic and discourse analytic case study of the teaching of argumentative writing across the ensuing year. During the academic year, we observed and video-recorded an average of at least two

class sessions per week (depending on what was happening in the classroom, observations and video recordings might be conducted every day for a few weeks, while at other times not for a few weeks). We also conducted teacher and student interviews, collected classroom documents and student work, and debriefed with the teachers frequently. Monthly meetings were held with the teachers for them to share their experiences teaching argumentative writing with each other.

### *Research Site and Participants*

The study took place in the 2014-2015 academic year (the data presented later is from the autumn 2014 semester). The site of the research study and the source of our data for this article was an 11<sup>th</sup>-grade IB English classroom located in an academic magnet school in a major urban school district in the state of Ohio in the US. The school has a reputation for academic excellence and various options for participation in both Advanced Placement (AP) and IB programs across a range of content areas. Please note that the constraints of The Ohio State University Institutional Review Board only allow us to use pseudonyms for all references to the teacher and the students. The teacher, Ms. Hill, self-identified as African American, female, and having twelve years of English language arts teaching experience at the time of the study. She had taught IB English for three years. At the time of the study, Ms. Hill had just begun a master's degree in English education. At that time, the class was composed of 22 students who self-identified as white (16), African American (2), Somalian American (2), Latina (1), and Asian American (1). The majority of the students also were enrolled in other AP and IB courses. According to school policy, Ms. Hill and her students would work together for two years, 11<sup>th</sup> grade and 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

### *Case Study Students*

Out of the students who agreed to be regularly interviewed, Ms. Hill chose four focal students whom she believed represented different kinds of experience with and knowledge of writing literary arguments. For purposes of this study, we selected only two students: Gary (white, male), who was one of the stronger readers and writers in the class and was a frequent contributor to whole-class discussions, and Catherine (white, female), who often contributed to class discussions but struggled with reading and writing. She revealed to us that she felt “a bit intimidated” by some of her peers in the IB classroom. However, she said she wanted to use the school year with Ms. Hill to learn how to be a better writer and to get a high-level IB diploma.

Our selection of Gary and Catherine as case studies was purposeful in that we were especially interested in developing “telling cases” of deep participation and procedural display (Lea and Street, Prior, respectively). To be clear, we are not proposing these two modes as a classification of “good” or “poor” writers. Although the two modes—deep participation and procedural display—are a limited heuristic, we think they capture important patterns of school-based disciplinary socialization that Lea and Street treat as necessary but not sufficient. Rather than treating disciplinary practices and genres as relatively stable and as unproblematic for students to reproduce once learned, academic literacies enabled us to understand Gary's and Catherine's argumentative writing practices “as more complex, dynamic, nuanced, situated, and involving both epistemological issues and social processes

including power relations among people and institutions, and social identities” (Lea and Street 228). Specifically, we examined Gary’s and Catherine’s argumentative writing practices by considering when, how and what adaptations they made.

The 11<sup>th</sup> grade IB English class was embedded in a “humanities” program, an advanced or “high level” IB option students could self-select for the study of literary analysis. The course description on the IB website states:

The course is organized into three areas of exploration and seven central concepts, and focuses on the study of literary works. Together, the three areas of exploration of the course add up to a comprehensive exploration of literature from a variety of cultures, literary forms and periods. Students learn to appreciate the artistry of literature, and develop the ability to reflect critically on their reading, presenting literary analysis powerfully through both oral and written communication. (Retrieved from <http://www.ibo.org/>)

We include this quote not only to highlight the academic demands of the course, but also to point out that Ms. Hill took the course description seriously, as the criteria implied in the quote above were reinforced by an IB assessment regimen consisting of “two essay papers, one requiring the analysis of a passage of unseen literary text [literary argument], and the other a response to a question based on the works studied” as well as “a written assignment based on the works studied in translation, and [performance] of two oral activities presenting their analysis of works read.” This testing regimen shaped a great deal of Ms. Hill’s instructional conversations with students. However, rather than separating test preparation from her concerns with engaging her students in new argumentative writing practices, before an IB test she took limited time to review and practice the format. She also used the testing regimen to teach students to be reflective about their reading and writing performances (using rubrics across the school year) within the larger institutional context of the IB testing program that included a range of oral (e.g., “formal oral commentary and interview”) and written assessments (e.g., “literary commentary”). As background, it is important to note that two years earlier, the students’ ninth grade English language arts course was their entry into formal, academic writing. Ms. Hill described the writing instruction in the ninth grade as an “introduction to the five-paragraph theme” and “a kind of academic boot camp to tear you down to build you back-up as a student” (interview, 18 Sept. 2014). In other words, Ms. Hill challenged her students’ notions of what counted as good argumentative writing, including practices that had been sanctioned within the school context, and engaged them in discussion of and practice in arguing to learn while also embedding various requirements of the IB assessment within their discussions and writing.

### *Data Collection and Data Analysis*

Following Street as well as David Bloome, Judy Klamane, and Matt Seymour, as ethnographic researchers our approach to data collection and analysis is to hover just above classroom events; that is, we observe events in their immediate contexts. It is in the events that teachers and students employ a range of practices that privilege some discourses and as well as some students over others. In this section, we describe our approach to data collection and analysis as a part and parcel of a logic of inquiry guided by these assumptions.

Because class sessions occurred two days (Monday and Thursday) per week each for 80 minutes, we were able to video record almost every class session. The teacher focused her instruction during the autumn semester on writing arguments in response to literary texts: a set of Hemingway short stories and Book VI of Virgil's *Aeneid*. After reviewing the data collected from Ms. Hill's classroom and in collaboration with her, we identified two key classroom events to analyze. Event 1 occurred an hour into the class session on October 30th, when Ms. Hill distributed what she labeled "Paragraph A" and "Paragraph B," two essays that students in the class had written in response to Hemingway's short story, "Up in Michigan." Event 2 entailed a small group discussion of a thematic analysis that considered connections between "Indian Camp" (Hemingway) and Book VI of Virgil's *Aeneid*. During this event, one of the case study students, Gary, proposed a broader archetypal framework for interpreting literature, a topic he took-up in his literary argument, while Catherine struggled with what she regarded as a "totally new way to write." With Ms. Hill, we understood these classroom events as key because during these events Ms. Hill and her students engaged in instructional conversations that explicitly explained criteria for "good" argumentative writing (event 1) and for supporting students' own topic selection for writing a literary argument (event 2).

The corpus of data used in this study consisted of classroom instruction (video recordings and field notes) that occurred across an initial instructional unit (September 8 to November 3) that concluded with a summative writing assignment, teacher interviews, and collaborative data analysis (with video clips); student interviews about instruction and their writing; samples of student writing; and related documents. For this article, we also analyzed two essays written by the two case study students—Catherine and Gary—in response to what Ms. Hill described as an IB "literary commentary with an unspecified topic" that she reframed, through dialogic interaction with her students, as a literary argument.

In order to respond to our first research question regarding analysis of key events in the instructional unit, the theoretical framework for the procedures used in data collection and data analysis derive from Bloome, Power Carter, Christian, Otto, and Shuart-Faris and are labelled microethnographic discourse analysis. Throughout data collection, researchers, in collaboration with the teacher, asked what are the key events in the classroom that need to be explored in depth in order to better understand the teaching and learning of argumentative writing (Mitchell 238-41). A key event is defined here as a classroom event that is viewed by participants as crucial for students' acquisition of those social practices that define them as engaging in writing a "literary argument," that is, a literature-related argument. We need to note that the acquisition of a social practice involves both its situated enactment (the procedures that count as doing that social practice in social situations) and the social and cultural ideologies that provide a social practice with its meaningfulness (cf., Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, and Shuart-Faris). A key event may be recurrent, such as a series of instructional conversations on what counts as "literary argument," or it may be a single occurrence of an event (as per Mitchell's telling case).

After identifying key events in the classroom, we analyzed video recordings of those key events using procedures described in Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, and Shuart-Faris. In brief, the event was transcribed and an utterance-by-utterance analysis conducted of how the teacher and students

acted and reacted to each other and constructed meaning and conceptions of argumentative writing. In order to capture how a key event was situated within the flow of classroom activity and learning, classroom lessons both before and after a key event were also analyzed. We also looked for analogous classroom events before and after the targeted key event in order to understand how a social practice (such as using argumentative moves to teach literary argument) evolved over time. As part of the analysis of each key event, we interviewed the teacher and students about the event, how it fit into the broader context of classroom activity, and how they interpreted the meaningfulness of what occurred in the key event.

To respond to our second research question regarding students' modes of participation, case study students' written products were examined for evidence of the influence of key events through intertextual tracings (Olsen, VanDerHeide, Goff, and Dunn). We also interviewed students about their writing. We asked students to read their writing aloud and then describe how they composed it. Our goals in these interviews were (a) to understand how each student conceived of the writing task; (b) to trace features of previous instructional conversations; and (c) to find connections to their sources (primary and secondary sources).

In order to trace how students' enacted modes of participation in writing practices and shifting writer identities, we began our analysis with the students' final essays. We conducted a multi-phased and multi-layered analysis using procedures (based on previous intertextual analysis scholarship and backward mapping processes suggested by Green and Wallat; Prior; Olsen, VanDerHeide, Goff, and Dunn). First, we constructed a data set of transcribed classroom interactions, curricular materials, and writing from within the instructional unit. Second, we analyzed each essay for connections to the texts and talk over time, marking the traced connections. Third, we used "text-based" interviews in which the students described their writing process; we analyzed these interviews for connections to the essays as well as personal background that were not accessible from the essay (the product) itself (Prior). The tracings among the essays and other texts, and modes, illustrate the actions the students took to participate in the writing practices of the classroom community.

## Findings

Before describing how we interpreted and understood Ms. Hill's approach to teaching literature-related argumentative writing and how her students responded, it is worth recalling that we are particularly interested in Streets' academic literacies model and related work (e.g., Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, and Shuart-Faris; Lewis, Enciso and Moje) whose learning theories foreground power, identity, and agency in the role of language in learning processes. Specifically, we are concerned with how Ms. Hill re-locates authority in two classroom events. That is, rather than assuming that the authority for what counts as a "good" argument resides in her own pre-set criteria or in the demands of the IB writing assessments, she and her students socially construct what makes sense through and within instructional conversations. Of course, such a shift is not easy or simple, and, as will become obvious, Ms. Hill and her students engage in moments of tension.

*Instructional Context*

Over the course of the semester from August 28 to November 20, Ms. Hill spent some portion of each of 14 sessions teaching her students both the Toulmin model of argumentation and how to write “an essay on some aspect of Hemingway’s short stories, Book VI of Virgil’s *Aeneid* or a comparison of the two” (See Fig. 1 below.) A key feature of this assignment is the absence of a particular topic or question to consider. In an interview, Ms. Hill reported that the reason for this decision was to introduce her students to the nature of the IB’s assessment of literary commentary: “They [the students] have to choose the topic. The teacher is supposed to be pretty hands-off. And that is part of the struggle. And there are [IB] rules where I am able to read it [essay] but not comment on the paper or able to make very specific comments” (interview, 13 Oct. 2014).

1B      English      11  
 Argumentative Essay  
 Hemingway and The Aeneid Book VI  
 100 points

Due Date: Thursday, November 20,, at the beginning of class. No exceptions!

## Requirements:

- Essay must be typed in MLA format (heading, double spaced, quotations, etc.).
- Your essay must be 800-900 words (approximately 2 typed pages),
- The word count must be included at the end of the essay.
- Use 12 point font.
- Double space ... PLEASE!
- Be sure to print your essay before Thursday! We have all learned through experience the reliability of CCS computers and printers.
- The essay is due at the beginning of class. Remember, if you are unable to come to school, your essay must find a way to make it to school! You have a few options. You can have a trustworthy friend personally hand me the essay before the beginning of class. You may email me the essay by 12:00 p.m. and then hand me a paper copy of the essay the first day you return to school. Late papers will NOT receive a grade.

Fig. 1. The writing assignment.

Another feature of the assignment was the absence of any prescription for essay structure. For Ms. Hill, early efforts to teach argumentative writing during autumn 2014 focused on form and then by late October began to shift toward using argumentation as means of developing original ideas rather than adhering to a pre-set form. Ms. Hill’s experience during the 2014 summer workshop shifted her approach to writing instruction away from a focus on structural concerns to a concern for ideational issues as she decided to move her students from argumentative writing with a pre-set format (five-paragraph essay) to a more dynamic consideration of format including claim, evidence, warrants, and counterarguments for literary arguments. Put another way, Ms. Hill began to shift toward arguing-as-learning, but this move inserted an element of risk on the part of both her students and herself as their teacher. Perhaps the clearest example of this shift is how Ms. Hill employed certain writing samples during instructional conversations and activities to entextualize



(Bauman and Briggs) her notions of literary argument. We noted that Ms. Hill entextualized literary argument on at least three different occasions (October 23, October 30, and November 3) and in doing so demonstrated the importance of generating, developing, and elaborating on evidence using warrants.

However, this shift presented a significant challenge for her and her students, as she had to strike a delicate balance between teaching the form of the writing and the content of the writing. To accommodate IB demands that students develop their own content, Ms. Hill's approach to the first argumentative writing assignment (literary argument) was to do several lessons on argumentative terms such as claim, evidence, and warrant. To accommodate her concerns about her students' reliance on the pre-set form of the five-paragraph essay, she did not discuss form. When her students asked about the organization she expected to see in their essays, she reminded them of the single format that they had learned in ninth grade and in tenth grade and suggested that now it was time to try "new forms that weren't so structured and [to] focus on your ideas." As we describe, in event 1 and event 2 she also relied on students' ideas and students' writing samples as sources for considering a range of ideas and formats for literature-related argumentative writing.

#### *Event 1: Small Group Discussion of Archetypes in Literature*

During the session of October 23, Ms. Hill asked her students "to try out an idea" by reading a handout titled "Katabasis: The Journey to Hell and Back: The Descent Motif" that included a general description of descent myths in antiquity and then listed seven "characteristic elements of the Journey to Hell or Katabasis (literally 'descent')." Ms. Hill then proposed the idea of analyzing literature by comparing how two or more texts might share a motif, a symbol, etc. She then asked the students, "Do you buy this idea or is it too much of stretch?" Ms. Hill invites her students to critique the motif by asking them to consider how far they are willing to "stretch" its sense-making value. After a brief exchange in which the students expressed conflicting points, she asked them to read through the first two paragraphs of "Indian Camp" and the episode in Book VI of *The Aeneid* in which the Sibyl guides Aeneas to his father's spirit. In She then initiated the following brief discussion as a prelude to small group discussion:

Ms. Hill: Do you see any connections here?

Student 1: Both have boats.

Students: (laughter)

Student 2: In both stories they cross rivers... geographical barriers are crossed.

Student 3: The Indians are like the Sibyl that guide a character and ferry across a river.

Ms. Hill: Okay. How many of you think the comparison is too much?

Student 1: Sometimes a river is just a river.

Ms. Hill: Yes. Sometimes a river is just a river. Let's consider if it is possible to make such a comparison. Get into your [assigned] groups and discuss if you feel, "no way," or "maybe" and then jot down an example.



### Small Group Discussion

In advance of this event, Ms. Hill had agreed to place four case-study students—Gary, Catherine, Raed, and Angela—in a small group so that we could focus our analysis on how students were participating in both whole-class and small-group discussions. Moving between these two participant structures allowed us to trace how various students were participating in learning how to write a literary argument. The small group work lasted about 13 minutes, during which the students compared the two texts for similar imagery, symbols, and themes. Gary, one of the group members, also made the argument that, while the comparison is possible, it is not because the motifs in these two stories are shared or that one author influenced another author but because there are archetypes in all literature. He commented that,

I think there are connections between Hemingway's "Indian Camp" and Virgil's *Aeneid* but it is a connection of archetype between all creativity and not just these two stories. And if you look hard enough, you can find anything if you look hard enough. Those [*Dora the Explorer* and other examples from popular culture] are some of the examples that I found.

With five minutes left for the small-group discussion, Ms. Hill moved into their circle, and asked, "How is it going?" Raed reported that the group had made the comparison she had requested, and then Gary commented, "You know, the story ["Indian Camp"] has the archetype of the journey across a river but it was not inspired by *The Aeneid*." Ms. Hill asked him to explain. The following exchange unfolded.

Gary: We were talking about how literature in general has archetypes [makes a circling motion with his hands].

Ms. Hill: Are you talking about real connections or something silly?

Gary: Okay. We did the comparison you wanted us to do. [Gary shows Ms. Hill a page from his notebook with a list of points of comparison the group developed. Raed briefly summarizes the group's list.]

Raed: In "Indian Camp" Nick learns from his father and in *The Aeneid*, Aeneas learns from his father about his future. They are both learning from their fathers.

Ms. Hill: Okay.

Gary: We have come to a consensus ... a mutual consensus ...

Ms. Hill: Wait a minute. Everyone agrees with Gary?

Raed: [Shrugs his shoulders and smiles.]

Gary: We agreed ...

Ms. Hill: Really?

Students: (laughter)

Gary: We think that the comparison is there but the authors did not make the connections explicitly. They were inspired by archetypes. [inaudible]

Ms. Hill: Give me an example.

Gary: In "Dora [the Explorer]," she constantly has to cross a river. [inaudible] I think there are archetypes that inspire all writers...

Students: (laughter)

Raed: [With a smile] He's convincing. I'm convinced.

A close look at this exchange shows a subtle conversational move that Ms. Hill makes to shift the authority from herself to the discussion, to a stance of "power with." For example, she asks for evidence for Gary's claim: "Give me an example." Authority for reasonableness of an evidence- and warrant-based claim is located not in her authority *per se* but as a moment in the flow of the argument Gary is making. This approach continued during the whole class discussion when Ms. Hill asked all of the students to consider Gary's ideas regarding the centrality of archetypes in literature. This shift in the location of authority in both the small group and in the whole class from a person or persons to the dialogic interaction is key to moving from a stance of arguing for one's claim (i.e., traditionally defined argumentation) to a stance of dialogic consideration in which the power for constructing meaning, is a "power with" rather than a "power over" (cf., Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, and Stuart-Faris; Noddings).

### *Event 2: Entextualizing Sample Essays: Toward an Integration of Form and Content*

About an hour into class session eight—one week after event 1—Ms. Hill distributed two writing samples that she had labeled "Paragraph A" and "Paragraph B" (See below.) She entextualized (Newell, Bloome, Kim, and Goff) these samples by first excerpting and retyping two of her students' essays written in response to Hemingway short stories during the summer and then bringing them into an instructional conversation about the significance of evidence and backing in literary argument. Ms. Hill excerpted the samples from her students' required summer reading and writing assignments rather than from their work during the autumn 2014 semester. The use of "sample" essays from the summer reading/writing assignments to entextualize that for which she wanted her students to be held accountable was quite intentional.

#### Paragraph A

The theme of innocence is portrayed by the character Liz in the short story, *Up in Michigan*, by Ernest Hemingway. The thoughts and actions of Liz helps the reader to better understand the nature of innocence within the story. For example, Liz feels funny about the fact that she likes the color of Jim's hair above the tan line. This funny feeling represents a lack of maturity in Liz because if she can't handle looking at Jim's arms, how will she be able to handle a physical relationship with him? So, Liz's reaction to seeing Jim's arms, represents an innocence that she had with men. Liz's innocence is revealed again when she expects something to happen between her and Jim when he returns from the hunting trip. "Liz hadn't known when Jim got back but she was sure it be something. Nothing had happened. The men were just home, that was all." Nothing could possibly happen between Jim and Liz if the two never held a conversation. This situation proves that Liz has optimism in a futile situation. This means that Liz hopes for something that she does not put any work into, while at the same time, allowing the reader to yet again realize that she presents a sense of innocents when dealing with men. Therefore, the character, Liz reinforces the theme of innocents in the story *Up in Michigan* by Ernest Hemingway.

During an interview, Ms. Hill pointed out that rather than selecting the "perfect paper," she wanted

to “begin to make them [students] see the bigger picture—claim and evidence and the analysis. They always want to do this picking on words and mistakes someone made in the writing rather than paying attention to the ideas and the analysis.” In the instructional conversation below, after a student reads Paragraph A aloud, Ms. Hill asks for overall impressions of the paragraph.

Ms. Hill: What did you guys think of this, just overall? Yes.

Student 1: There was lack of ideas ... Like they were partial but not necessarily completed.

Ms. Hill: What kind of ... are you talking about ... ?

Student 1: Sorry ...

Ms. Hill: So, the evidence you think?

Student 1: Yeah. Evidence.

Ms. Hill: I think the evidence there is good, but maybe another piece [of evidence] would be better. Hanna.

Hanna: Explanation of the analyzing or arguing is not as thorough as it could be.

Ms. Hill: Okay. Huh. Are you talking about the warrants and the backing?

Hanna: Yeah.

Ms. Hill: Alright. Anybody else? Ok, Amy.

Amy: I think the explanations are made kinda informally. It just doesn't sound as formal as ...

Ms. Hill: So just the word choice, right?

Amy: Like the sentence structure.

Ms. Hill: (Shaking her head.) The sentence structure. So, yes. Uhm. Anything else? Margie?

Margie: I thought that some of the sentences weren't (inaudible), and that .... And rephrase it and make it, like, useful.

Ms. Hill: Uhm. Were some ideas like repeated? Is that what you are telling me?

Margie: Yeah. Okay. So, with this paragraph, really everything that you guys have said is something that I have mentioned. Right? Now, I do think... that we need to give a little bit more credit to the explanation of the evidence.

Ms. Hill: Okay. So. One of the things you guys have said, I actually ... And you know that this paper is actually somebody's paragraph in the room, right?

In this segment of the instructional conversation, Ms. Hill focuses the students on two issues: (1) how the sample demonstrates a well-developed approach to constructing a literary argument with evidence and warranting; and (2) since the sample was composed by a classmate—a point she had made clear before distributing the sample—that their remarks should “give a little bit more credit” to the writer's efforts. Simultaneously, she languages what constitutes effective use of warranted evidence (“to give a little bit more credit to the explanation of the evidence”) as well as the need to treat one's peers with sensitivity and understanding (“you know that this paper is actually somebody's paragraph in the room, right?”). We think this illustrates the use of a writing sample both to teach literary argument and to language relations to build a community of writers willing to support one another's writing efforts.

Later in the same instructional conversation, Ms. Hill introduced a second sample (Paragraph B

below) to consider another feature of the literary argument: the claim or thesis statement.

Paragraph B

In “Father and Sons,” a short story by Ernest Hemingway, a theme of escape and return is prominent. The theme is illustrated through the subject of Nick’s relationship with his father, a relationship that is described in two different ways. The first way is described through childhood experiences that Nick remembers sharing with his Father, whereas the second is through Nick’s reflections as a grown man. As an adolescent, Nick often went to the woods behind the Indian camp to escape from his father. He also tried to escape his father’s conservative values by having sex with Trudy. But children generally need their parents and almost always return home. Even though Nick could temporarily escape his father, he always returned to the tense relationship. During the story, Nick recalled one of his more hateful memories of his father; when Nick came home from fishing without it and said he lost it, he was whipped for lying. Afterwards he had sat inside the woodshed with the door open, his shotgun loaded and cocked, looking across at his father sitting on the screen porch reading the paper, and thought, ‘I can blow him to hell. I can kill him.’ Finally, he felt his anger go out of him and he felt a little sick about it being the gun that his father had given him. Then he had gone to the Indian camp, walking there in the dark.

During this segment of the instructional conversation, Ms. Hill shifts the focus to what she believes is a complex claim. Her students’ response to the sample suggests that they are surprised that the claim does not include the three-point structure they had learned in ninth and tenth grade.

Ms. Hill: One thing that I want to say about this. You remember “Fathers and Sons,” right? Uhm. One thing that the writer did very well. I think this would be difficult to write. Because you have Nick as an adult and then Nick as a child. And how do you organize that? Do you know what I mean? So, I thought the student did a great job of that I think that sentence there where it says. Uhm, Let’s see. (Reads from sample:) “The theme is illustrated through the subject of Nick’s relationship with his father, a relationship that is described in two different ways.” Do you see how the writer lets the reader know that we are going to talk about two different things here? That was good I thought. So, what did you think of the claim?

Sandy: If you are referring to the first sentence, it is kinda short but it does mention the theme.

Max: Like last year it [claim] had to have three points. This has just one idea.

Sandy: I am wondering what you want us to do with the claim. Can we say it our own way?

Ms. Hill: Okay. When we are talking about the claim, we are talking about what is the writer trying to prove, right? One thing that I told Mario is that ... remember freshman year when [the teacher] used to say “Your thesis needs to be one sentence. The thesis must be one sentence with title, author and assertion or it’s wrong,” right? And be done. We have to teach you format somehow. Otherwise, you will be all over the place when you are trying to write your [literary] argument for IB. So, if you can state your claim in the first sentence or two then you are okay. Are you

okay with that?

When Ms. Hill asks, “So, what did you think of the claim?”, an interesting interaction emerges that suggests the students’ legacy of writing instruction requiring formulaic claims (“Like last year it [claim] had to have three points”) that the students had encountered in ninth and tenth grade. In a debriefing session, Ms. Hill discussed this moment: “My comments were probably confusing because I pointed out what was good about the claim. But then I realized that the claim may not work in writing a literary argument for the IB assessment.” Of significance here is Ms. Hill’s emphasis on working through the criteria for what counts as a good claim within the discussion, embracing tensions that are present because of students’ past writing experiences. Ms. Hill stresses a genuine openness to her students’ ideas and opinions as they analyze their own writing practices.

The evolution in the instructional conversation above from a focus on style and structure to ideas reveals how Ms. Hill is implicitly defining a good literary argument, at least in that classroom event. At a theoretical level, what the analysis of the instructional conversation shows is that it is not in the selection of the writing sample *per se* that teachers communicate what counts as good writing but rather in the languaging and language relations in which the writing sample is analyzed. Analysis of the instructional conversation also shows that although Ms. Hill attempted to bring the students into a dialogue about the ideas and later the claim in the writing sample, she was unable to do so—at least not during this event. The students focused on style aspects.

Amy: I think the explanations are made kinda informally. It just doesn’t sound as formal as ....

Ms. Hill: So just the word choice, right?

Amy: Like the sentence structure.

Ms. Hill: (Shaking her head.) The sentence structure.

In order to focus on ideas as a key criterion in defining a high-quality literary argument, a criterion reflective of her newly adopted view of argument as exploration and learning, Ms. Hill had to shift to authoritative languaging and languaging relations that allowed her to be explicit about what focus should be taken in assessing a literary argument. She also re-positioned students so that they were aligned with the stance she took. These moves seem necessary in light of her concerns for how the students might perform on the IB assessment that was “always on [her] mind.”

In summary, Ms. Hill’s use of entextualization brings contextual influences together in conversation. That is, as she took students through the challenge of breaking away from a structural focus (the five-paragraph essay) and toward an ideational focus through argumentation, Ms. Hill not only adhered to the academic discipline of literary studies and the constraints of the IB examinations but prioritized social interaction as part and parcel of how and what she is teaching. In doing so, she worked with her students to build relationships that led to support for one another as they work to craft literary arguments. In the next section, we will consider how Gary and Catherine took up Ms. Hill’s efforts to break from a preset essay format.

## Two Students, Two Modes of Participation: Learning to Write a Literary Argument

In this section we respond to our second research questions by describing the process of two case-study students participating in the classroom context described above. Note that before beginning our analyses we acquired the students' permission to include their writing as well as the content of the interviews we conducted with them. Specifically, we consider the students' shared experiences as well as writing moments in which we see each of their modes of participation diverge. For each student, we provide an illustration of how one excerpt from each of their essays traces across events, talk, and interactions, and we provide an extended depiction of each student writer, as made manifest across data: their interviews, written work, verbal participation (or lack thereof) in full class conversations and with their peer writing partner, assignment sheets, and the teacher's interview and informal conversations.

Both Catherine and Gary willingly applied themselves to the challenges of the IB English curriculum but with differing levels of confidence. Gary believed he would do well in IB because he "enjoyed the challenge of new ideas," while Catherine described herself as "a bit nervous about all of the reading and smart students [in the classroom]." We chose to focus on Gary and Catherine because they approached the writing assignment with very different modes of participation: procedural display and deep participation (Prior). Recall that we are less interested in a single idealized pathway or trajectory of expertise. Rather we include Gary's and Catherine's efforts to write a literary argument each as a telling case of participation in communities of practice that are diverse, multiple, always peripheral, and without a single (or simple) core to be reached at the end of an instructional unit, a semester, or a school year (Prior).

### *Catherine: Participation as Procedural Display*

After weeks of preparation, part of which we describe above, Ms. Hill gave the students just over a week to write their literary arguments. Catherine explained to us that she "waited till the last minute to get started and then had to work fast." She had done so because "last [school] year I learned to write a five-paragraph essay and I got good grade [in English language arts] because I knew it. So, I did not take a lot of time. . . . I wait[ed] until the last minute [to write the essay] and then realized how difficult it was [to compare two different stories from differing historical periods and places]." This may explain, in part, why Catherine participated procedurally to display "all the parts of a good essay." (See Table 1 for an illustration of Catherine's mode of participation.)

One feature of the writing assignment that confused and frustrated Catherine was that Ms. Hill did not offer a specific question or prompt, though Catherine knew what texts she wanted to write about. When we asked how she composed her essay, she traced the practice back to sixth grade: "I made a T-chart with the titles at the top ('Snows of Kilimanjaro' in one column and *The Aeneid* in the other). This is something I learned to do in sixth grade. Then I thought about three ideas for each story. They (teachers) made us develop three ideas in freshman year (ninth grade) —I think Ms. Hill wanted us to do that too." Based on her success with writing in ninth and tenth grade, she assumed

Table 1: Illustration of Catherine's mode of participation.

Essay Excerpt (Initial Draft)	Originating Event/Text	Type of tracing	How tracing used	Affordance of the trace	Mode of Participation.
Literature often portrays how a culture deals with certain archetypes. Although "Snows of Kilimanjaro" by Hemingway probably was not based on <i>The Aeneid</i> , they are both written about the same general subjects. <i>The Aeneid</i> was written in 29-19 BCE in Rome, Northern Italy, and possibly Greece. It was based on ancient Roman culture, while Hemingway writes of the same topics from the view of a well-traveled American in the 1930s. <i>The Aeneid</i> and "Snows of Kilimanjaro" both portray the writer's own cultural belief surrounding death, regret and hell.	<p><i>Class Session 10 (10/23/14)</i> Small group work: Reference to opening sentence: "Literature often portrays how a culture deal with certain archetypes."</p> <p><i>Interview</i> Catherine said: "I was just writing about certain aspects and then comparing the two stories ... I was trying to show the similarities in the two stories. They deal with the same thing—dying and whatever comes with it."</p> <p><i>T-Chart practice from 6<sup>th</sup> grade</i> Catherine said, "I made a T-chart with the titles at the top and made a list. This is something I learned to do in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Then I thought about three ideas for each story. They (teachers) made us develop three ideas in freshman year—I think Ms. Hill wanted us to do that too."</p>	Thematic	Repeating	Catherine relied on writing practices she participated in during previous school years that she assumed that Ms. Hill required: (1) form first with five paragraphs and a three-part thesis statement; (2) prioritize performance for a grade: "I'm not sure what [Ms. Hill] wants me to write."	<p>Catherine's participation during the unit was shaped by her concern with form over content: she reported, "not really knowing what I mean but I know she [teacher] wanted us to make some sort of comparison." This is procedural display.</p> <p>She also admitted to "waiting until the last minute [to write the essay] and then realizing how difficult it was [to compare two different stories from differing historical periods and places]."</p>

that Ms. Hill "would want to see three ideas." When Ms. Hill gave the students time to work in pairs to develop ideas, Catherine wrote the following at the top of her notes: "*The Aeneid* and *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* both have themes involving regrets, death and hell." The list of notes that Catherine



sketched suggests that she is listing ideas but not developing an argument.

Catherine's essay included four paragraphs with a total of 872 words—within the limit of 800-900 words prescribed by the assignment. In general, Catherine's essay introduces her focus on the two literary narratives and concludes the first paragraph (below) with what she described as a "thesis statement": "*The Aeneid* and "Snows of Kilimanjaro" both portray the writer's own cultural belief surrounding death, regret, and hell."

Literature often portrays how a culture deals with certain archetypes. Although "Snows of Kilimanjaro" by Hemingway probably was not based on *The Aeneid*, they are both written about the same general subjects. The *Aeneid* was written in 29-19 BCE in Rome, Northern Italy, and possibly Greece. It was based on ancient Roman culture, while Hemingway writes of the same topics from the view of a well-traveled American in the 1930s. The *Aeneid* and "Snows of Kilimanjaro" both portray the writer's own cultural belief surrounding death, regret and hell.

Catherine's participation during the unit was shaped by her concern with form over content: she reported, "I know she [teacher] wanted us to make some sort of comparison." We regard this as an instance of procedural display. We use Prior's extension of David Bloome, Pamela Puro, and Erine Theordrou's notion of procedural display from "doing a lesson" to "literacy events" that involve talking and text. Catherine's interpretation and enactment of the writing assignment was procedural in that she decided to use a format (five-paragraph essay) to present three themes—a practice that she had learned in previous school years that Ms. Hill's approach was attempting to change. Prior, in reference to Lave and Wegner's terms, might describe Catherine's practices as "relatively sequestered from participation" as Ms. Hill defined the goals of IB English.

In addition, rather than an argument or an analysis, Catherine's essay repeats, in summary fashion, ideas that she accumulated across the instructional unit. During an interview, Catherine stated that she was "frustrated with [Ms. Hill] as I don't know what I have to do to get a good grade." Put another way, when we traced Catherine's sources back to the instructional conversations (see event 1 and event 2 above), it was clear that the moves she made, that is, her participation, made it quite difficult to approximate the kind of literary argument that Ms. Hill had in mind: "When I read [Catherine's] essay, it was a rather simple five-paragraph theme, and I did not understand if she was making an argument. She seemed to write an essay like she would've in ninth or tenth grade. I want her to get beyond using the same form all of the time" (interview, 6 Dec. 2014).

In summary, although Ms. Hill approached literary argumentation as an exploration of ideas and experiences that emerged out of reading and discussing literary texts, Catherine relied on a pre-set formula that she assumed would lead to a "good" grade. We employ Catherine's case to stress that students need time to understand and appropriate the complexities of argumentation as a way of writing about and knowing literature. In English language arts classrooms in the US, argumentative writing is often taught in a single instructional unit (Newell, Bloome, et al.); however, Catherine's case illustrates why argumentative practices (in writing and discussion) are more likely to be appropriated across an entire academic year or longer. We also believe that Ms. Hill's approach to literary argumentation (as described above) early in the academic year illustrates the value and challenges of



pedagogical moves that proffer and support students' writing practices that push against formulaic and pre-set structures. Of significance (but not presented in this article) was Ms. Hill's responsiveness to students' evolving argumentative writing practices over the course of the academic year that included one-on-one conferencing with her students to provide individualized feedback as well as challenges to their conception of what counts as good argumentative writing.

#### *Gary: Deep Participation*

Prior defines "deep participation" as not only "open[ing] paths toward full participation, that is, taking up some mature role in a community of practice, but also increase[ing] opportunities to assume privileged roles in a community. Deep participation may be displayed in the roles a person assumes, in her relations to other participants, and qualitative aspects of her engagement in practices" (103). For instance, Gary chose to write on a topic quite different from his peers, relying not only on content from instructional conversation led by Ms. Hill, but "ideas I got from a class that I took in ninth grade." He developed his ideas for his essay from "Carl Jung 's theory . . . that all humans share basic ideas of archetypes." However, we traced his developing ideas from event 2 during the small group discussion of a thematic analysis that considered connections between "Indian Camp" and Book VI of Virgil's *Aeneid* (see Table 2).

As we discussed above, during a small-group discussion, Gary positioned himself as a kind of expert in archetypal analysis, especially when challenged by Ms. Hill to explain his claim that, "[w]e think that the comparison is there but the authors did not make the connections explicitly. They were inspired by archetypes." We considered this as an instance of relatively "deep participation" in the IB English classroom community of practice not by assuming that he has a contribution to make the field of literary studies (cf., Hamilton's examination of Frye's criticism) but by recognizing how Gary has positioned himself relative to his peers and how he engages in discussion with them and with Ms. Hill.

Essay Excerpt (First paragraph of Initial Draft)	Originating Event/Text	Type of tracing	How tracing used	Affordance of the trace	Mode of Participation
<p>Carl Jung was a Swiss psychiatrist who founded analytical psychology. Throughout his work he introduced and developed the ideas of the collective unconscious and archetypes. He states that “This collective unconscious does not develop individually but is inherited. It consists of pre-existent forms, the archetypes . . .” Carl Jung ‘s theory states that all humans share basic ideas of archetypes. Jungian Archetypes are underlying forms that appear as images and motifs. They include ideas such as the mother, child, and the elder to name a few popular ones. All in all, the theory states simply that all humans share basic ideas and images that connect us.</p>	<p><i>Class Session 10 (10/23/14)</i> Small group work: Gary: We think that types of literature have similarities but we don’t think he (Hemingway) was inspired by <i>the Aeneid</i>. Ms. Hill: Then give me an example. Gary: So, in Dora constantly has to cross a river....</p> <p><i>Interview</i> Gary reported that in 9<sup>th</sup> grade he learned about Jungian psychology and uses of archetypes across cultures.</p>	Thematic	Responding	<p>For Gary’s first draft, he developed an introduction by relying on his response to Ms. Hill question’s that asked Gary (during small group activity) to explain why he thinks an archetypal analysis is more valid that a comparison of two texts. Gary was not concerned with a certain form for his essay as Ms. Hill has encouraged them to find new forms.</p> <p>Gary also generated many intertextual connections to make his argument by alluding to both other Hemingway short stories that he read outside of class and to narratives and characters from popular cultural such as “Dora, the Explorer.”</p>	<p>With his initial draft, Gary positions himself as something of an expert (relative to his peers) in that he deliberately frames his argument using Jungian notions of archetypes as thematic analysis across two texts. However, in doing so he moves beyond comparison of two texts to argue that all literary texts include archetypes.</p>

Essay Excerpt (First paragraph of Initial Draft)	Originating Event/Text	Type of tracing	How tracing used	Affordance of the trace	Mode of Participation
<i>According to Carl Jung's theory of the collective unconscious, Ernest Hemingway writes his short stories with such archetypes in mind as to appeal to his readers.</i> This is found to be true when examining writing or screenplay of other time periods and finding the same archetypes in each. These archetypes allow readers and viewers to connect to what they are viewing.	<i>Interview</i> Described how he "framed" his essay about the two stories using Jung's theory of the unconscious: "Authors use certain images to appeal to all reading."	Thematic	Responding and Extending	Gary and Ms. Hill both pointed to this statement as the essay's general claim. He continues to write in response to Ms. Hill's questions about an archetypal analysis. He introduces notion of "screenplay" to extend the archetypal to popular culture.	
Gary's Essay (First paragraph of second draft)	Originating Event/Text	Type of tracing	How tracing used	Affordance of the trace	Mode of Participation
"This collective unconscious does not develop individually but is inherited. It consists of pre-existent forms, the archetypes . . ." Carl Jung's theory states that all humans share basic ideas of archetypes.	<i>Conference with Ms. Hill</i>  She expressed concern with length of the essay as well as references to popular culture that extended the essay beyond the 800-word limit.	Thematic	Responding	Gary's introduction removes general references to Carl Jung and begins with a direct quote.	With his second draft, Gary's participation shifts to procedural display after he realizes he will lose points for going beyond word length, being too general with his evidence, and, including works from popular culture that Ms. Hill does not approve of.

Table 2: Illustration of Gary's mode of participation.

The first paragraph of Gary's literary argument includes what he described as "a framework for the analysis that I want to do:"

Carl Jung was a Swiss psychiatrist who founded analytical psychology. Throughout his work he introduced and developed the ideas of the collective unconscious and archetypes. He states that, "This collective unconscious does not develop individually but is inherited. It consists of pre-existent forms, the archetypes . . ." Carl Jung's theory states that all humans share basic ideas of archetypes. Jungian Archetypes are underlying forms that appear as images and motifs. They include ideas such as the mother, child, and the elder to name a few popular ones. All in all, the theory states simply that all humans share basic ideas and images that connect us.

Rather than considering one or two pieces of literature, as Ms. Hill had recommended when she made the writing assignment, Gary assumed that he would make a much broader claim (italicized) that he states at the end of his introductory paragraph:

*According to Carl Jung's theory of the collective unconscious, Ernest Hemingway writes his short stories with such archetypes in mind as to appeal to his readers.* This is found to be true when examining writing or screenplay of other time periods and finding the same archetypes in each. These archetypes allow readers and viewers to connect to what they are viewing.

Using interview data and observational field notes, we traced the content and argumentative moves of Gary's introduction directly to both event 1 and event 2, which we describe above. During event 1, Gary noticed that, "she [Ms. Hill] gave a choice in how to write our papers . . . I like this so that I can try something new and less boring." Within event 2, Gary took advantage of his small group discussion as an opportunity to try out his ideas about "Carl Jung's theory of the collective unconscious" first with his three peers and then with Ms. Hill when she entered the small group to monitor progress.

Despite the fact that we describe Gary's participation as "deep," Ms. Hill was not convinced that Gary's writing was successful, especially his first draft, which not only exceeded the word limit (1064 words) but from her perspective "he included ideas and references to literature (a list of Hemingway short stories and a children's television program, "Dora, the Explorer") that seemed irrelevant to me. He also—you can see my written feedback—was way too general and lost focus." These are the things Ms. Hill said to Gary when they had met for a writing conference after he had composed an initial draft. In a second draft, Gary's participation shifted more to procedural display after he realized he would lose points for going beyond word length, being too general with his evidence, and including works from popular culture of which Ms. Hill did not approve as appropriate given the demands of IB writing assessment.

## Conclusions

For too long, the teaching of English language arts and written composition in US secondary schools has been dominated by an ideology of literacy with a narrow notion of what counts as legitimate uses of written language and of how written language might be understood and interpreted. Street's critiques of school literacy are more specific in that he points to an autonomous model of literacy that has provided deficit models that alienate and exclude particular populations of students. However, our work with Ms. Hill and her students offers an alternative ideology grounded in a conceptualization of literacy in general and argumentation and argumentative writing in particular as social. Teachers like Ms. Hill create a classroom climate open to diverse perspectives, and with their students they "fashion" (Bloome, Kalman, and Seymour) literacy practices that students value as part and parcel of their personal, social, and cultural lives both in and out of schooling. Yet, as we have tried to demonstrate here, this way of teaching and learning is complicated by the diverse experiences, ideologies, and histories of both teacher and students.

We began with the question, "how does a teacher's approach to instructional conversations and instructional activities shape students' modes of participation in learning how to compose a literary argument in a high-level IB English classroom?" As the study progressed, however, rather than offering a description of a single approach, our study considered what became shifts in the teacher's epistemology—sometimes emerging spontaneously during instructional conversations. Our analyses also reveal how diverse influences, especially the teacher's beliefs and understandings of argumentation, were involved in how the teacher and students interactionally constructed processes of entextualization (extracting bits of text from the writing sample) and recontextualization (adapting the bit of writing extracted from writing samples to the texts students were writing). To be specific, a key finding is that it is not just the writing sample *per se* but how that sample is taken up in the instructional conversation that becomes central to what counts as good argumentative writing and, in turn, what counts is shaped by the teacher's epistemological beliefs.

Perhaps one of the more obvious ways to make this case is to point out that Ms. Hill, the teacher whose classroom we observed during the autumn 2014 semester, took several weeks to teach literature-related argumentative writing. And this fostered a complex and dynamic process of assessing not just texts but students' growth and understanding as writers. Our first implication is that the process of entextualization is not a matter of simply directing students to use (or avoid) text structures to improve their writing but creating new understandings about argumentative writing and about the social practice of sharing ideas. As Raed, one of the case study students in Ms. Hill's

***“Entextualization may also provide a powerful means for engaging students in shifting students’ modes of participation from procedural display to deep participation a may offer English language arts teachers an alternative discourse for talking about assessment and about what counts as good writing.”***

classroom commented during an interview, “I can see that [Ms. Hill] wants us to see what is on everybody’s mind.”

“Test prep” and getting an “A” are perpetual concerns in English language arts classrooms, and to an extent these concerns were present in Ms. Hill’s IB English classroom. Such a discourse that includes not only specific forms for writing but also an autonomous ideology may undercut the benefits of teaching and learning extended, complex written literary argumentation (Applebee and Langer). How then is change possible? Our second implication is that entextualization may also provide a powerful means for engaging students in shifting their modes of participation from procedural display to deep participation, possibly offering English language arts teachers an alternative discourse for talking about assessment and about what counts as good writing. In Ms. Hill’s classroom, we observed instructional conversations not only about “test prep” or how to ensure an “A” performance but also an emergence of a metalanguage about how various writers understand a multitude of ideas about good argumentative writing. But even more importantly, we observed a teacher and students complexify argumentation and literary understanding as they wondered about the content and form of sample essays. Entextualizing samples of good argumentative writing as part of instructional conversations seemed to create a metalanguage (Geoghegan, O’Neill, and Petersen) that enabled Ms. Hill to address her expectations about a particular writing assignment rather than introducing a decontextualized notion of “correct” form and/or content. This approach may be especially valuable to students such as Catherine who clearly want to learn new content and genres for writing about literature but found their repertoires and ranges of ideas rather limited to the five-paragraph theme (Johnson, Star, Thompson, Smagorinsky, and Fry).

A general finding from the discourse analysis of the literacy events is that rather than making the writerly moves for argumentation and analysis explicit and mandatory, Ms. Hill offered “possible” moves for her students’ arguing to learn. Consequently, her students enacted their writerly moves in a variety of patterns suggestive of disciplinary ways of knowing in English language arts rather than in a preset formula that they had learned in previous grade levels. Analysis of the writing also suggested their efforts to develop “provisional genres” (Dixon) to capture their tentative understandings of the stories they analyzed. This approach, Hillocks argues, is a deeply contested issue in English language arts (cf., “At Last”). At a theoretical level, what the analysis of the instructional conversations demonstrated is that the selection of the writing sample or an instructional activity *per se* is not the primary concern but the instructional conversation in which the writing sample or activity is used. In Ms. Hill’s instructional conversations, argumentation became dialogic inquiry (Newell, Bloome, and Hirvela) asking students to keep an open mind and allow claims to evolve as they engaged with others in dialogue and exploration of a topic, identification and examination of data, and consideration of alternative theses in seeking an understanding of the complexity of human lives as mirrored by literature.

Finally, deep participation in a community means something quite different in a high school IB contexts as compared to Prior’s studies of graduate school students. However, we think it is important to consider that students may participate in many different communities of practice differently across time—participation is a social construction that shifts according to the social situation in which

participants may interact with one another. For future studies, we think this framework offers a new set of possibilities for a rich and robust understanding of writing development over time in a range of social and cultural contexts, some in school and some out of school.

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# Making Sense of Researcher Positionality in Foundational Literacy Studies Research

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Carmen Kynard, in this journal's first issue, describes how when we as a field have studied literacy, language, and discourse, "we have done so mostly from the spaces of methodological considerations (either borrowing from history or from anthropology/ethnography); we have not done so from the perspectives of interrogating deep political and ideological shifts that have left structured inequalities and violence firmly in place, especially in reference to, but not solely based on, race" ("Literacy/Literacies" 64).

Kynard pays particular attention to the impact of race, while also giving recognition to the "perspectives of interrogating deep political and ideological shifts that have left structured inequalities and violence firmly in place" (64). The implication of what Kynard is arguing is that our methodological considerations cannot be separated from our political contexts, that our researcher positionalities are part of the social contexts in which literacy, language, and discourse are being studied. This attention to researcher positionality has often been implicit, part of what Brian Street might refer to as the larger social contexts of literacy.

Given the recognition of the importance of positionality and its influence on methodology in education and ethnography (Gómez-Barris; Harrison; Kovach; Mignolo; Mutua and Swadener; Weis and Fine; Patel; Sefa Dei; Watson and Huntington; Wilson) and in rhetoric and composition (Agboka; Cedillo; García and Baca; Inoue; Kynard; Martinez; Powell), what might literacy studies now make of a foundational scholar like Brian Street, someone whose groundbreaking work helped expand notions of literacy beyond white Western norms but who did so as a white British researcher working in Iran in the 1970s? How do we move *with* Street in our thinking as we continue to interrogate and find ways to do research in ways that reduce harm to the people who are being studied? Street's scholarly contributions have been foundational in the understanding of how literacy works within social contexts, but how does one acknowledge "foundational" without dominance and erasure? How can research be more than harm reduction and make space for answerability rather than ownership, as Lisa (Leigh) Patel argues? What I attempt to do here is understand the social contexts of the research itself, to explore these critiques of researcher positionality with Street in mind, while also thinking forward to how his body of work can continue to be used alongside anti-racist and decolonial approaches to literacy studies.

A key text in New Literacy Studies, Street's first most significant work, *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, was, in the most basic of terms, about literacy in Iran. Through an ethnographic approach, he studied the social construction of literacy, that context helped define what literacy is and how it was being used in complex ways. But while Street acknowledges his experience teaching in Mashhad and the "upheaval in the political order culminating in the fall of the Shah and the coming to power

of Ayatollah Khomeini,” he does not connect these contexts to how he conducts his research beyond these few sentences (129). Published in 1984, he doesn’t share with us in the text about how he has entered the community in what he later identified as the village of Cheshmeh near the city of Mashhad (Street, Pishghadam, and Zeinali), nor his relationship with the people he is studying. But their voices and experiences are absolutely filtered through him.<sup>1</sup> While he uses “I” in reference to his observations and interactions, the “I” is never interrogated. The closest Street comes to recognizing his own positionality as a researcher is when he describes a disagreement about whether he, as a Westerner, should be able to use a bathhouse, but that anecdote becomes more about how the situation was negotiated in terms of “rational argumentation” rather than his own status as researcher (148-152). The content of the research, that his goals to legitimize and understand the way literacy worked in Iran, a seemingly “illiterate” society, seemed to be revolutionary enough.

Yet in the years since, more scholars have used decolonial and anti-racist framings to ask what assumptions and ideologies a researcher might be bringing to a research project. The methodological expectations for critical ethnographic work have shifted, with ethnographic researchers needing to “acknowledge the privilege and power that come with assuming the Western academic’s authoritative stance” (Alonso Bejarano, et al. 8). If I were to say, for instance, that Brian Street, a white scholar from Great Britain, did fieldwork in Iranian villages in the 1970s, our current day frameworks about anti-racist and decolonial research methods might raise a few questions about this work. In *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith describes the intrusion of outside researchers as “travellers’ stories,” noting how they were “generally the experiences and observations of white men whose interactions with indigenous ‘societies’ or ‘peoples’ were constructed around their own cultural views of gender and sexuality” (8). While Street’s book is making explicit moves to resist this kind of research, to resist ethnocentric and autonomous understandings of literacy and instead understand how literacy works within a particular social context, rather than understood through a Western one, he also does not explicitly bring his own positionality into his research or consider how his positionality might affect the way he’s understanding the literacy at work. As much as a researcher can attempt to construct the social contexts, if one is not part of that community, the effects of such a reading must be acknowledged and actively engaged with.

Does this mean that the work isn’t good anymore? This is, in some ways, not the right question to ask because Street’s study opened up multiple lines of literacy research that, in part, lead to the moment that we are in now. Street has influenced my own work, not just directly through his scholarship but also indirectly through other scholars he influenced who have, in turn, influenced me. But his sphere of influence is shaped by what kinds of knowledges have been deemed worthy within literacy studies and the academy more generally. And so I believe that alongside the foundational influences that Street has had on the field of literacy studies, these methodological and researcher positionality questions must also be acknowledged, as well as a recognition of how his knowledge was able to circulate in place of the knowledge of others.

I need to be clear about the scope of this article as well as its limits. I did not talk to Street before his passing in 2017 or to his collaborators. What I did do is look at his later work and his discussion of methodology to see if I could glean any insights into how he shaped his research over the course

of his career, to construct historiographically out of the empty spaces, and to give meaning not just to what he wrote about but to who he wrote with. And my goal here is not to create an apologist's reconstruction of Street and his research, nor is it a cancellation of Street; rather I seek to find ways to move forward that acknowledge the significant impact he has had on literacy scholars with his arguments for understanding social constructions of literacy, while also recognizing the colonial context of how he conducted his research. Drawing from scholarship on decolonial and anti-racist methodologies, this piece is an attempt to focus on these methodological concerns by revisiting Street and by crafting a quasi-autoethnographic account of his influence on my own work to think through how we might continue to take up his research.

## Street: A Long View

Like many in literacy studies, my first introduction to Brian Street was in a graduate seminar. At the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, during my first year of graduate school in 2003, Cathy Prendergast assigned *Literacy in Theory and Practice* as part of her class on literacy, an eye-opening and far-reaching introduction to literacy studies. We worked our way through Street, Harvey Graff, Shirley Brice Heath, Deborah Brandt, and Eugene R Kintgen, Barry M. Kroll, and Mike Rose's *Perspectives on Literacy*, among others. In particular, we talked about the way Street's research acted as a kind of intervention against Great Divide scholarship and the importance of social values in the construction of literacy. Street became the touchstone for thinking about how literacy was embedded in social systems. What we did not seem to talk about, until we got to Heath later in the semester (or at least this is what my decades-old notes would have me believe), is the relationship between the studied communities and the researcher and the ways that a researcher decides what is seen. In "Race: The Absent Presence in Composition Studies," Prendergast describes the erasure of race in the field's scholarship and shows, through Heath and through Min-Zhan Lu's critique of Mina Shaughnessy's "formulation of students as strangers and foreigners," how "internalized colonial sensibilities might be congruent with a discussion of linguistic strategies" (47). She asks researchers and teachers to recognize the signals "where our colonizing impulses lie" (46). The recognition of these signals is crucial to understanding not just how your own positionality can get in the way, but also to understanding how your research design might account for it.

As part of the class, Cathy gave us the option for a semester project that had us tutoring within the local community and keeping a journal about our experiences and the connections we might be making with the literacy theories we were reading for class. Such an assignment set us up to start thinking about what it would be like to design a research project in community settings, allowing us to consider the concerns and contexts without inflicting a graduate student's clumsy first attempts at "research" onto a community group. I chose to tutor high school students at the local Urban League office as part of a broader effort to increase the low number of African American students graduating from city high schools. Students from town, often Black and Brown, came in because they were encouraged by teachers, guidance counselors, and other mentors. But more often than not, I spent tutoring time talking to my (white) friend and classmate who was also volunteering

because students were not flooding in to be tutored.

As I look back at my tutoring field notes, unearthed from the bottom drawer of a file cabinet in my office, I remember the depressing tale of a program that was given funding at the last minute and seemed to flounder, with only a handful of students coming in for tutoring. I also read my own rudimentary observations about students' non-school literacy practices, the wondering about the factors, or sponsors, if I were to apply then new-ish work by Deborah Brandt, that were part of the story of how minoritized students got so close to the edge of not graduating. As I leafed through these old notes, I feared that I would come across a cringey or insensitive observation, one made before I "knew better," but I should have had more faith in myself. What I read is a young graduate student who is earnestly trying to make sense of this situation, wanting to "do something" but not sure how.

I questioned the structure of the program, the relationships between tutors and students, and, specifically, my own racialized and classed positionality as an Asian American graduate student who was not from the local community. This disconnect between my practice, as a graduate student who was trying to get an assignment done, and the community itself was stark. There was an understandable distance, but it was one I was not sure how to bridge. It's not that there was open hostility between the program and the students, at least from my perspective—the students simply didn't come. And the ones who did come did so sporadically. There was not meaningful co-learning going on, as much as that was my naive expectation. Whether students' actions were active resistance, dependent on some past history with the sponsoring organization, structural constraints, or something else—I'll never know because I didn't ask them, nor did my own rudimentary approach question the logic of the tutoring program itself, embedded in the histories, funding, spaces, and structures of the program or the educational system.

To ask such questions might have allowed for an approach that would acknowledge what Walter Mignolo calls pluriversality, "the name and the horizon of all decolonial trajectories today, on the planet, arising from the awareness of repressive forces of coloniality" (94). This term "names the visions of hundreds of thousands of organizations arising from the moment people realize they cannot expect much if anything from either the states or the corporations" (95). While he speaks specifically about pluriversality in relation to a delinking from global political society (what might traditionally be understood as social movements and resistance among the structures of the governments), what pluriversality describes is the equal recognition of the overlapping and multiple systems that people develop to sustain themselves, both resisting and working beyond frameworks of colonialism and the state. For researching literacy programs, like the tutoring program where I volunteered in graduate school, scholars like Ellen Cushman have advocated understanding "pluriversal contexts, values, and purposes for meaning making" as a way to incorporate how language and sign system hierarchies "index the social hierarchies implicit in, indeed necessary for, imperialism" (240). Such an approach, similar to Michael T. MacDonald's decolonial approaches to sponsorship in his research on an after-school program for refugee youth, would give space to incorporate an analysis of a variety of power structures that include the researcher and acknowledge the possibilities for supporting students that already existed outside of the program itself, a way to understand the many potential systems that

could be at work in a district with low graduation rates of Black students and recognize the likely limited possibility of a tutoring program to solve these issues with graduation rates.

Brian Street himself recognizes the dominance of certain systems and the erasure of others in chapter seven of *Literacy in Theory and Practice* about United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) literacy work when he questions concepts of “functional literacy” across UNESCO programs and the way the literacy promoted is born out of economic systems. Street argues that these programs operated without “any reference to the material and political conditions in which those particular ‘functions’ operated” (183), making these ideological definitions appear to be neutral (186). In ways that must have been eye-opening at the time, earning him the status of being a foundational scholar within literacy studies, he questions how UNESCO’s programs and its developmentalists use stereotypes and “romantic primitivism” (189) to promote the need for functional literacy, making literacy programs a project of modernization and colonization. In this part of the book, he provides context for how these programs forward definitions of literacy that erase the literacies he describes earlier. While providing an astute critique of power being held in organizations like UNESCO and within broader economic systems, he shines a light on UNESCO workers’ ideologies and how these ideologies might be cultivated and maintained. As in the argument about the social contexts of literacy, Street questioned deeply held assumptions about the benefits of such literacy programs. Yet, while Street’s research works to uncover the stereotypes and ideologies of a dominant system of modernization and colonization that affect understandings of literacy and could be seen as doing decolonial work in one sense, he does not address his own role in these systems or explicitly ask questions about how these dominant systems and coloniality have influenced his own context as a researcher and his research practices within Western academic knowledge-making.

Conversations about methodology have become much more prominent since 1984, when Street’s first book was published. In particular, scholarship about decolonial and anti-racist research methods has pushed an understanding of methods beyond a singular, narrow, and definable set of practices. Questions about this process of who is speaking, who is studying whom, as well as how and why, is a prominent strain of methodological inquiry in literacy studies, writing studies, and composition and rhetoric (Agboka; Gilyard; King, Gubele, and Anderson.; Martinez; Powell; Royster; Vieira, to name just a few). This isn’t to say that these questions were not concerns among academics in 1984. Postcolonial scholar Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, a foundational text in its own right that examined how the East was shaped by the Western gaze and representation, was published in 1978, six years before Street’s first book, while he was doing his fieldwork; it seems fair to acknowledge the ways that Street’s work could be seen as orientalist.<sup>2</sup> In the introduction to their collection, *Rhetorics Elsewhere and Otherwise: Contested Modernities, Decolonial Visions* (2019), Romeo García and Damián Baca track how postcolonial and decolonial scholars have addressed what it means to study other people and cultures since Said, describing the necessity of changing “the terms as well as the contents of knowledge production, thus changing the epistemes in which politics occurs” (15). This shift in thinking about the terms of knowledge production asks the researcher to consider and make explicit how they might shape or be implicated in the terms that already exist and how dominant colonial ideologies continue to frame the research being done.



Street would agree with this point. In an interview with Street and Harvey Graff, published in *LiCS* in 2014, Street describes “an ethnographic perspective as being epistemological recognition of how we understand images of local people’s meanings and practices. We apply that to literacy then, and so you say to policy makers and people in school contexts ‘ok, let’s find out what people themselves make of reading and writing’” (de Oliveira Galvão, et al. 56). In terms of the consequences of his kind of approach to literacy studies, he explains that “we go back to square one to ask who said the word ‘literacy.’ You have to say ‘what do you mean by it,’ not assume we’ll know where we’re going. And that’s just the word literacy. Start doing that with other words, like class, gender, ethnicity...” (de Oliveira Galvão, et al. 61). While this is not necessarily evident in his early work, Street does seem to recognize the importance of these factors and how his own positionality influences the contexts of interpretation in the later part of his career.

In some of Street’s later work, he looks at his most immediate community—that of higher education, to turn his analytical lens toward the cultural context in which he had the most knowledge and where autonomous models of literacy are still built. His writing on institutions of higher education shows how he focused his valuable critical lens on the space that he inhabited most directly. In “Revisiting the Question of Transformation in Academic Literacies: The Ethnographic Imperative,” he talks about how “an ethnographic perspective forces you to suspend your own assumptions as to what counts as literacy and to listen to and observe what people are actually doing” (384) and “that was the basis for looking inside our own systems, in universities and saying let’s apply these ideas here” (384). And I think that this move is a good reminder to all of us who work in literacy and in university spaces, that our knowledge and frameworks can be most useful in our everyday contexts and that our insights, as literacy researchers, can be used to influence the policies and the structures that surround the way literacy is being used in relation to our students every day in our institutions.

In reading Street’s last published article from 2016, “Learning to Read from a Social Practice View: Ethnography, Schooling and Adult Learning,” I was struck by his discussion about the autonomous model as the still dominant way of understanding literacy, particularly in educational contexts. But, of course, he’s right. While those of us in literacy studies might see the argument about autonomous versus ideological approaches to literacy as quaint, we see this logic still at work most discussions about schooling and literacy, such as in the model immigration rationales that require DACA recipients to be high school graduates, GED earners or veterans to justify their staying in the country, as if school success were somehow going to make someone more valuable than others; and the way that literacy is being conflated or combined with economic success and personal value. So many of our policies enact this logic.

For instance, in my own current research project, I study rhetorics of global citizenship and the global university in relation to policies that use literacy as a measurement of belonging for minoritized multilingual students. The judgments about the readiness, language abilities, and sense of belonging of international and multilingual students, the ways they are determined to be literate in the context of higher education, contradicts the larger discourses about diversity and global citizenship that intend to create access to institutions of higher education. Universities love to tout the production of global citizenship among their students, yet their policies and practices often exclude those who



are already “global,” placing students into different categories that marginalize them from the general student population.

In emails that went viral in January 2019, the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) of a master’s program in biostatistics at Duke University asked Chinese international students to stop speaking Chinese in the common areas of the building, saying that professors were judging this choice and that future research and internships might be affected by that judgment (Blum). In *Social Literacies: Critical Approaches to Literacy in Development, Ethnography and Education*, Street writes, “[W]e are particularly concerned with the processes that help construct an ‘autonomous’ model of literacy—in which many individuals, often against their own experience, come to conceptualize literacy as a separate, reified set of ‘neutral’ competencies” (114) and describes how

[p]rocedures for organizing classroom time, work practices, and literacy materials dominate the classroom and form a major part of the pedagogic voice. One teacher told her students explicitly that they had to speak differently in class: ‘Now you are in school, use your inside school voice’. Thereby school is separated from other times and places, and familiar everyday processes of speaking, reading and writing are given a distinct character and a special authority. (121)

Street was talking about K-12, but there are obviously similarities with the Duke situation and in US higher education more generally, where multilingual students are invited in but the atmosphere becomes hostile because of their language use.

The logic of a situation like this becomes complicated when an institution is trying to acculturate people to a particular educational situation, a kind of assimilation model of transnational writing in which US classrooms are seen as the norm. But if we understand that US universities are truly supposed to be establishing themselves as global universities/spaces, then there’s a contradiction here that needs to be investigated. And not just a contradiction as an object of study but as an active participant in these structures, ones to which we bring our own positionalities and ideologies and also knowledge. As the gatekeepers of literacies on our campuses, we need to recognize our own power and role in this process. As with the social contexts we bring to our research, we must also be vigilant about how our potentially colonial practices inhabit the classrooms we teach, the programs we administer, and the institutions who employ us.

In “At Last: Recent Applications of New Literacy Studies in Educational Contexts,” from 2005, Street pointedly asks about the power relationship among participants in any kind of literacy program, connecting that power relationship to resources, different ways of defining literacy, and how students can challenge dominant conceptions. And he connects those questions that we as scholars ask about literacy to our practices and to the policies we make and enforce when he says, “Academics have, however, often failed to make explicit the implications of such theory for practical work. In the present conditions of world change, such ivory-tower distancing is no longer legitimate” (419). Street reminds us that literacy often gets reduced to mechanistic skills and that curricula and assessments need to be rich and complex (420). As literacy educators who want to acknowledge and build upon the “richness and complexity of learners’ prior knowledge,” we are asked by Street to “treat ‘home background’ not as a deficit but as affecting deep levels of identity and epistemology, and thereby the

stance that learners take with respect to the ‘new’ literacy practices of the educational setting” (420). And in a conversation with Mary R. Lea and Theresa Lillis, Street talks about how “[n]one of this can be decoupled from institutional decision making about where and how to locate work around writing and the values and beliefs which underpin this” (“Revisiting” 388).

Street’s later career work on universities and literacy reminds us about the continued importance of understanding larger contexts in which literacy is being used and judgments about literacy are being made. In higher educational, this can often mean practices and histories that lay in the policies that shape individual classroom spaces to the writing programs we might administer to university and national policies to the everyday practices of administrators like the Director of Graduate Studies at Duke. As a result, there is urgency in bringing our knowledge about literacy practices—that higher education and the literacy it cultivates has its own colonial contexts—and recognizing the influence of our positionalities to the practices and policies at our own institutions. In many ways, the people who make the institutional decisions are us. Is Street crucial to this work? Perhaps not. And perhaps the question isn’t how do we move with Street but rather, how does he move with us?

## Changing the Terms of Foundational Research

I didn’t know Professor Street personally, so perhaps he or others who knew him would contradict what I’m about to say. But I think, either purposefully or not, his later work reflects a kind of evolution for dominant figures doing research in what Western academia would call marginalized communities. Rather than be a sole researcher who sought out groups that are traditionally “othered” by mainstream academia to show the ways that literacy was at work in those spaces, he instead collaborated with others and amplified voices. For instance, in his revisiting of Iran in 2013, he worked with Reza Pishghadam, who is a faculty member at Ferdowsi University in Mashhad, although their shared work doesn’t explicitly take up decolonial questions about researcher positionality or a move toward critical ethnography. In “Changes and Challenges of Literacy Practices: A Case of a Village in Iran,” their article with Shiva Zeinaili, the discussion of methods and researchers’ roles, while characterized as “open” and “led by what participants mentioned,” still constructs an objective sense of the researchers and their analysis and does so without any reference to researcher positionality (20).

But these kinds of collaborations with other scholars and the number of book review essays that Professor Street wrote in the later part of his career represent his continuous engagement with other scholars and younger scholars. He made an effort to avoid privileging solely his own voice. These reviews, collaborations, and edited collections also demonstrate to me that it was important to him to engage with new voices and recognize that he had the power to amplify them, as well as show how new scholarship could help him rethink his own ideas, even when he was long into a very successful career.

The contradiction of Street comes from his efforts to do humanizing research that questions ethnocentric and colonial definitions of literacy within the colonial context of Western-dominant academia. Perhaps having an outsider like Street try to humanize, make meaning, and communicate

those contexts on behalf of the people he's studying was a radical step in his particular moment, but as scholars right now, we have to acknowledge that such an approach, without critical reflection of who gets to do the humanizing and meaning making, is thorny. This doesn't necessarily mean an erasure of foundational scholarship like his but rather a recognition of the other stories that were happening at the time, that the people who are described in his book might be interpreting these moments in a different way, that their voices could be more present, and that despite the efforts to do otherwise, the definitions and understandings of literacy within a higher educational context, of the colonizers and the colonized, are still seeping in. Even in Street's goal to show the meaning of literacy in social contexts, the meanings are still filtered through him.

In *The Extractive Zone*, Macarena Gómez-Barris describes the importance of looking for "*submerged perspectives*" that "pierce through the entanglements of power to differently organize the meanings of social and political life" (11, emphasis in original). She argues that a decolonial approach must "rais[e] the submerged perspectives" and study the multiple in order to "decenter a singular eye" (12). For Gómez-Barris, this means a "queer decolonial femme method [that] recognizes a plurality of meaning systems, interpretations, and selections to reconsider what we thought we had known by challenging its disciplinary foundation" (11). She argues for the need to study and make space for the "multiplicity that is submerged perspectives" (12). It is in this multiplicity where researchers must reckon with their foundational scholars.

The content of Street's research was groundbreaking within the context of academic literacy studies, but that tension about his methodology still exists. The expectation to address researcher positionality and to give space to the voices of those who are the objects of study helps make clear how the researcher and their own ideological assumptions might be informing the analysis. Even when researcher positionality is not part of the conversation, there should be more clarity about who is being asked and how, as a way for readers to be able to draw their own conclusions about what brought this information to the page and what might have influenced it along the way.

And with the growing awareness of citation politics (Ahmed; Delgado; Mott and Cockayne; Ray; Wallis), the practice of thinking about the ways that one's citations reflect the dominance of gender and race in the way knowledge gets made, there is a growing expectation for a more critical approach to who we cite as literacy scholars. As Kynard argues in *Vernacular Insurrections: Race, Black Protest, and the New Century in Composition-Literacy Studies*, a history of literacy's contexts and literacy as a social practice can be drawn, for instance, from grassroots Black-centered education and arts movements. But that branch of literacy scholarship isn't necessarily seen to be as much a part of the New Literacy Studies world as is Street.<sup>3</sup>

So much of what Street is doing is demonstrating modernity and literacy in a culture that was othered and exoticized, but the more traditional social science writing genres that he often adheres to mean that he doesn't explicitly acknowledge the ways his positionality also plays a role, even when he is making that critique of others. The context of white Western researcher; of British colonial relationships with Iran (including the oil wars of the 1970s); of the whiteness of academic discourse; of the objectifying, exoticizing and Orientalizing of non-European spaces is also all part of this story, even when or perhaps *because* Street's critiques and arguments captures much of this in how literacy

in these spaces should be understood through local contexts. Yet his analysis is still absent of his own positionality as a researcher. And all of these things can be true concurrently, which illustrates the complexity of this work, of building on knowledge in these multiple ways. And so rather than reconciling these seemingly unresolvable positions, what we can do as researchers is develop a kind of recognition of the way these multiple interpretations are at work (Martinez; Watson and Huntington). To that end, it's important to do the work in terms of our own research design, and this includes considering what is missing and why that's the case, creating spaces and opportunities to amplify voices. Additionally, we must consider the ways that our own concepts and research frames are emerging from colonial contexts (MacDonald).

The asterisk that we individually put on Street's work because of its history and how it was conducted is a choice we must make as researchers, and these are important considerations when thinking about citations and the way that literacy researchers situate foundational work in general. What were the circumstances under which this research was conducted? What were the terms? And how were these contexts created out of colonial, political, and institutional situations? The relationship between Great Britain and Iran that was rife with colonialism and oil, the colonial impulses of anthropology and knowledge making in higher education—these are all factors to consider when considering what brings a researcher to that space. Street's situated and localized qualitative research in Iran was groundbreaking in literacy studies within that context of a Western academic recognizing Iranian people and literacy within communities as having value in its own right, yet it doesn't mean that we can't still question where the "submerged perspectives" are.

I asked earlier how we can move forward with Street, and I want to acknowledge that some of us can't, that being able to hold him as foundational is a kind of privilege and that I, of course, am speaking from my own privilege and positionalities and am waiting and wanting to hear from others. What we can do, as a scholarly community, is commit to making space for these questions about methodology as part of our continuing conversation, to create opportunities for those who can say that this foundational work did harm, to be answerable to and recognize one another, to revisit foundational research—to build on it or to tear it down or to be clear about how these stories were told and why we have listened to them—and this is how we need to carry on.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In *Decolonizing Ethnography: Undocumented Immigrants and New Directions in Social Science*, Alonso Bejarano, Juárez, García, and Goldstein describe how early anthropology was born out of the “broader Enlightenment project of discovering the unknown” with early anthropologists studying “the peoples of the lands then colonized by Europe and the United States” (2). The result was an anthropology that acted as a science. And while Street’s arguments about the importance of social context moves away from this dominant “colonial anthropology” (3), he does not explicitly argue against it.

<sup>2</sup> Jordan Clarke Hayes raises a similar question in his dissertation, *Trajectories of Belonging: Literacies and Intersectionality in the Mobile Phone and Home Building Practices of Syrian Refugees in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq* (30-34).

<sup>3</sup> Anna Zeemont made this point during the course of her orals exam at the CUNY Graduate Center on January 25, 2020.

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# What Counts as Literacy in Health Literacy: Applying the Autonomous and Ideological Models of Literacy

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**T**his essay is part of a five-year, cross-sector journey. I am an educator and consultant in health care. Prior to this, I was a literacy and education professor and classroom teacher. Brian Street was my professor at University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education in the Language, Literacy and Education program.

Street's approaches and methods matter to my understandings of literacy—as well as to how I explore others' understandings of literacy. When I first started to work in the health sector, I was struck (as many others have been) by formal definitions of health literacy because they seemed to invite deficit views of patients (Liebel) and equate literacy with reading. Using some of the ethnographic tools and orientations I learned from Street, I began to understand health literacy as a field of study and also a health topic that many people care about, work on, and work with in various ways and in a range of contexts. In reading research and observing and communicating with people in the fields of medicine and public health, I learned that they know more (and care more) about literacy, composition, and education than is reflected in the dominant conceptions of health literacy.

In this essay, I show how health literacy definitions currently reflect an autonomous model of literacy and its drawbacks. I share some of what I have learned from reading, observation, and participation in the health literacy field that suggests health literacy in practice is more complex than definitions reflect or support. I explore the contributions that perspectives from New Literacy Studies (NLS) have made to the field of health literacy by summarizing health literacy writing that is grounded in the ideological model of literacy and utilizes NLS concepts. I then argue an ideological approach to health literacy can support positive health outcomes by increasing available empirical tools and data, and by providing clarity in correctly identifying factors that contribute to health outcomes.

## Current Definitions of Health Literacy

The conceptualization of literacy in health literacy has implications for research, practice, and policy. There are many definitions of health literacy—nearly two dozen. Two representative examples come from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO). The CDC website page “What is Health Literacy?” offers a definition of what they call “personal health literacy” (which they define separately from “organizational health literacy,” a concept I take up later in this essay): “Personal health literacy is the degree to which individuals have the ability to find, understand, and use information and services to inform

health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). This definition, released in August 2020, has several similarities to the widely-cited definition from the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010: health literacy is “the degree to which an individual has the capacity to obtain, communicate, process, and understand basic health information and services to make appropriate health decisions” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). Some version of this definition is cited at the start of many professional and popular articles about health literacy. The World Health Organization definition of health literacy is the basis for much national and international policy. Their website states that health literacy refers, broadly, to the ability of individuals to “gain access to, understand and use information in ways which promote and maintain good health” for themselves, their families and their communities (World Health Organization).

### *Limitations of Dominant Conceptions of Health Literacy*

Several researchers have drawn attention to limitations in the dominant conception of health literacy reflected in most definitions, including that it encourages a deficit perspective on patients and clients (Hunter and Franken; McCormack et al.; Pleasant et al., *Considerations*), it has an overly limited scope (Peerson and Saunders), and it relies on tenuous or problematic relationships between literacy and health (Opel; Santos, Handley, Omark, and Schillinger.). I suggest these and other limitations relate to the model of literacy implicit in these definitions. Street encouraged those working in literacy “to see more clearly the underlying theoretical assumptions in writing on literacy, to recognize cleavages in the field, to expose hidden contradictions...” (*Literacy in Theory and Practice* 8). To enable this process, he offered two models of literacy: the autonomous and the ideological.

### *The Autonomous Model of Literacy*

The autonomous model attempts to essentialize the technical components of language. It has been called the autonomous model for its implicit claim that literacy is a set of generic skills that, once learned, individuals can perform in any context. Focused primarily on individuals’ reading skills, this view of literacy still underlies much formal literacy instruction for children and adults worldwide. Evident in such practices as vocabulary quizzes, reading comprehension tests, and texts written at a specific reading level, this is also the model beneath most large-scale assessments of literacy.

### *Limitations and Consequences of the Autonomous Model in Health Literacy*

Those familiar with Street’s work will see that the CDC and WHO definitions reflect the autonomous view of literacy. Perhaps most obvious is the focus on the individual. From Street’s perspective, “The concept of the individual actor itself is a political construction, highly charged and central to much western political practice” (*Literacy in Theory and Practice* 33). In naming the individual as the unit of analysis, these definitions in effect locate health literacy as a “capacity” that exists within an individual. All three definitions above include a list of actions that the individual must perform. These signal an autonomous view because they place the focus on cognitive abilities,

and they specify the performance of these specific skills as evidence that one's health literacy is adequate.

The use of the term "health information" in these and other definitions of health literacy also reflects an autonomous view of literacy. *Health information* refers to texts with which, owing to COVID-19, we are all now very familiar. These are texts written for the general public, by health professionals, on topics such as biological processes, disease states, procedures, and medications, as well as what might be called healthy living and disease prevention guidance. We might all be able to imagine examples from COVID-19 for every one of these categories! Yet health information texts may also include pamphlets or discharge instructions handed to patients in the medical context, or the labels on medication bottles.

Preferred or correct ways of reading and understanding health information texts are implied in health literacy definitions, again reflecting an autonomous view. The autonomous model includes "claims for the objectivity and neutrality" (*Literacy in Theory and Practice* 4) of the meanings of texts. Such claims, Street points out, "should not be taken at face value since they serve more often to privilege the users' own beliefs than as rigorous standards of 'truth'" (*Literacy in Theory and Practice* 4). That is to say, health information texts tend to take for granted the perspectives of the health-professional-authors, treating their intended meaning as objective, correct, and self-evident. Perhaps unintentionally, the dominant conception of health literacy "reduces role of reader to passive recipient rather than active negotiator of meaning" (*Literacy in Theory and Practice* 117). Furthermore, if people read or interpret information differently than health professionals expect them to, they may seem to have low levels of health literacy, a topic I return to later with examples from research.

Dominant conceptions of health literacy also tacitly assume a directional relationship between literacy and health. This is another trait of the autonomous model, which "assumes a single direction in which literacy development can be traced, and associates it with 'progress,' 'civilisation,' individual liberty and social mobility" (*Literacy in Theory and Practice* 2) and—in this case—better health outcomes. These definitions suggest a straightforward linear process of inputs toward the goal of better health. Improved health is certainly an important goal. There are many factors and inputs that could improve a person's health, but the place of literacy or health literacy in this is far from clear. However, these definitions suggest a clear process: a person with high health literacy finds the right health information, reads and interprets it in the correct way, includes it in their decision-making, acts as any reasonable, well-informed person should, and then . . . there is *health*. Street shows the assumptions behind this kind of thinking:

Such a view starts from the premise of 'normality'—that there are certain attributes of a "developed" (modern) society, and that some nations and people are seen to lack these attributes. In literacy terms, many people are seen to lack the formal literacy required of them to engage in education, training and the formal economy; inputs in the form of training are needed. (Rogers and Street 40)

There are many problems inherent in such a view. One is the tacit assumption that in order to be healthy, one must have high levels of health literacy. People who score "low" on health literacy assessments therefore are somehow not *being healthy*, or not *doing health properly* (Liebel).

The importance of so-called “low” levels of health literacy to many in the health sector cannot be overstated. The health literacy field has been dominated by research that identifies groups of people with “low” health literacy (Pleasant et. al, “Health Literacy”), and a person’s lack of adequate health literacy is taken to have consequences or implications of a far-reaching kind. A person or group’s “low” health literacy is sometimes implicated in their poor health outcomes. Statistics about “low” health literacy rates among specific social groups have also been suggested as contributing to the high cost of health care, as “low health literacy is seen to add significantly to a wide range of health care costs” (Hunter and Franken 25).

Literacy in this sense becomes a symbolic key to many of the society’s gravest problems: issues of ethnic poverty and unemployment can be turned into questions about why individuals failed to learn literacy at school, or continue to refuse remedial attention as adults, thus diverting blame from institutions to individuals, from power structures to personal morality...All of these issues become focused within a single, overdetermined sign – that of literacy. (Street, *Social Literacies* 125)

Perhaps the most damaging aspect of the autonomous model is that it hides the assumptions that lead to such conclusions (see Street, “Literacy Inequalities”).

Before I turn to the ideological model of literacy, I look beyond these definitions and contextualize health literacy with what I have seen in practice as an educator and consultant in the health sector. There is evidence of the autonomous view of literacy in health literacy practice and research, but there are also indications that health professionals understand more about literacy than is reflected in the current definitions.

## Health Literacy In Practice

Taking an ethnographic approach to health literacy means observing and talking with people. I have had many conversations about health literacy with health professionals--not only researchers, but people who are directly dealing with patients or clients. Though this process has not taught me why the health literacy field has been built upon the autonomous model of literacy, I have come to see that current conceptions of health literacy are somewhat circumscribed by the accountability pressures of the healthcare market and larger political forces. Here I give a brief overview of the most common ways I have observed and heard about health literacy in practice, in both medical and public health contexts.

### *Medical Contexts*

When a person seeks medical care at a doctor’s office or hospital, they are asked a series of questions. The answers are meant to inform the diagnosis and/or the treatment. Some of these questions are referred to as *screening* questions. Such questions as “do you live alone,” “do you smoke or have you ever smoked,” are designed to help clinicians “screen” patients along various social, emotional, or cultural factors. The answers can inform the care plan the patient will be asked to follow. Health literacy became a focus for screening because clinicians were concerned about whether

or not people would need assistance following a care plan. This is because care plans typically involve reading different complex texts, such as written instructions for managing an illness or injury, the label on a medication bottle, or the consent form for a procedure.

Health literacy tests can be useful when they are determining whether someone's level of a needed literacy skill matches that of the tasks required. This is where health literacy research meets practice: much of current health literacy research involves developing validated screening tools for different populations (Weiss). There are many health literacy screening tools that clinicians can use, and new ones are constantly being developed. Screening tools are necessarily short, as they are given during a medical encounter and typically are brief surveys or questionnaires. However, sometimes a patient's performance on a health literacy assessment can be tacitly interpreted by professionals as a comment on a person's educational level or supposed intelligence.

### *Public Health Contexts*

Because of COVID-19, public health has certainly come to the forefront of global conversations about health. If medicine is primarily concerned with helping people with illness or disease, public health is primarily concerned with helping people lead healthy lives in general, often through *health promotion* and *disease prevention*. *Health promotion* and *disease prevention* involve educating the public, and informing local, state, and federal policy, on a wide range of social/cultural and environmental issues related to health. Literacy and health literacy come into this work most directly through the informational texts that public health professionals communicate. The composing of health-related communication is one of the primary responsibilities of many public health professionals. These health information texts might include materials for a community health worker to share with clients, public service posters hung around mass transit, or a state department of health's social media feed or website. We all have seen these and many other modalities in use by public health agencies around the world regarding COVID-19 and the coronavirus. Public health professionals' primary concern is composing and disseminating these materials so audiences can read them and understand the information being shared.

For many public health professionals, making a text comprehensible by its intended audience is a health equity issue; if a text is not understood, people are prevented from accessing the information within it. All people should be able to have equal access to the information in a text. Therefore, significant attention is given to the composition process. In the US, several federal agencies provide guidelines for how public health professionals can create materials with health literacy in mind. The guidelines tend to focus on textual features such as sentence length, text complexity, and word choice. They also provide guidance on font, layout, and use of graphics. Several guidelines include suggestions for digital formats as well as print-based texts.

Significant effort is made to tailor health information texts to their intended audiences whenever possible. Understanding the audience for a specific communication is therefore important. Public health professionals reference or collect different kinds of data about audience characteristics and demographics, sometimes including health literacy. Professionals sometimes conduct surveys or questionnaires, or reference large data sets such as the National Assessment of Adult Literacy

(NAAL), to learn about audiences' health literacy. In 2003, the NAAL added three questions about health literacy (Pleasant, "Second Look"), and the data from this are widely cited. The so-called "readability" of health information is often mentioned. Measures such as "Lexile scores" are easy to calculate, and professionals can use them as evidence that efforts to tailor the text have been made. This is important, as health professionals can be responsible for a high volume of texts. The largely unchallenged reason for calculating the so-called "reading levels" of a text is to make sure it is at or below a certain grade or age level, a level arrived at by consulting the most recent data from large-scale literacy assessments of the intended audience. There are many layers of interest here for literacy researchers working from the ideological model.

Two developments in public health intersect frequently with health literacy in my reading and observation. "Social determinants of health" (SDOH) is a public health concept concerned with different contextual factors that impact (and are impacted by) health in order to inform policy and practice (Mikkonen and Raphael). Additionally, place- and space- based approaches to education and research in public health have gained in popularity. These place-based movements challenge purely global orientations to understanding health and wellness. They resonate with Barton and Hamilton's (1998) work on what they call "local literacies," and Street's literacy education work in various global contexts, where he argues "against the 'mass' campaign favoured in many agency circles and in favour of rooting campaign work in local cultures and local definitions of 'need'" (*Social Literacies* 16).

Health literacy in practice is more complex than definitions would make it seem. The medical and public health professionals I have met understand that their work involves literacy, composition and education, in many modalities; sometimes at an interpersonal, local level and sometimes at a mass media, global level. The introduction of the term *literacy* into medicine and public health fields years ago was met with some optimism. Many people have embraced the term *health literacy*—even as practitioners and researchers are concerned with the adequacy of the public definitions of health literacy and continue to struggle with its meaning. The ideological model of literacy may be helpful here.

## The Ideological Model of Literacy

Street's ideological model of literacy is one of the touchstones of NLS approaches. This model is called ideological because it asserts that "literacy can only be known to us in forms which already have political and ideological significance" (*Literacy in Theory and Practice* 8) and therefore cannot be meaningfully isolated from context. It stresses that every use of literacy is embedded in social contexts which give it meaning. This shifts the understanding of literacy from a universal, generic set of technical skills to a set of social, contextualized processes. Importantly, the ideological model "does not attempt to deny technical skill or the cognitive aspects of reading and writing, but rather understand 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* 161).

### *Ideological Approaches to Health Literacy*

Ideological approaches to health literacy have been forwarded for more than 20 years by multiple researchers, working mainly in adult education contexts (e.g., adult ESL programs, adult literacy programs, and literacy programs in Global South contexts). Street himself was involved for years in what might now be called health literacy work. He applied NLS theories of literacy and learning to program design, policy, measurement, and evaluation of many national and international adult education programs in the US, UK, South Africa, Ghana, and Nepal. Street observed and participated in teaching health topics alongside literacy, or in the use of health topics as the content for teaching literacy (see Rogers and Street; Street, *Literacy and Development*).

Some of Street's contemporaries and students have also applied NLS concepts in adult education contexts. I chose the authors in this section because they specifically apply ideological models of literacy to their health literacy work, illustrating multiple concepts that can enrich health literacy research and practice. In this section, "The overall argument is that a view of literacy as everyday communicative practices, necessarily embedded in the relationships and politics of everyday social life, offer us new orders of interest and ways of thinking about literacy and health" (Freebody and Freiberg 5). These "new orders of interest and ways of thinking" are possible because of the ideological model. Specifically, the ideological model makes adequate conceptual space for researchers, educators and practitioners to apply multiple tools to notice, document, and analyze "the contextual factors that explain people's behaviour or performance" (Papen 17) in health situations where literacy is involved. In this way might be generated a clearer sense of the relationships between literacy and health, including what contributes to positive or negative health outcomes—all of which is obscured by the autonomous model of literacy.

### *Contributions and Benefits of Ideological Approaches to Health Literacy*

Unlike those operating under an autonomous model, researchers working from the ideological model of literacy explicitly state the theories of literacy in their work. I share two examples to ground the research in this section. Peter Freebody and Jill Freiburg see "literacy and health as sets of interrelated cultural practices, highly dependent on context, informed, and themselves informing our other sets of knowledge and assumptions" (5). Uta Papen and Sue Walters suggest that "[a]nother way of looking at health literacy—and literacy more generally—is to think of it as social practices: as activities which are always embedded in specific situations and contexts and whose actual shape and meaning can only be understood within these contexts" (11).

Collectively, the studies referenced here contribute an understanding of literacy in context. Existing health literacy research has struggled to connect language to its use in contexts beyond the clinical environment of hospitals, doctors offices, and health services. Studies working from an NLS perspective explicitly make context their central concern in understanding literacy. They regularly use ethnographic tools and methods to research literacy in specific social situations. Together, these writings allow us to see how health literacy is situated in multiple contexts, including the clinical context, the education context, the policy context, the technology context, the home/family contexts, and larger community/social group contexts.



### *Health Literacy in Use*

One of the weaknesses of literacy assessments—large-scale or small-scale—is that they test decontextualized, imagined, or hypothetical uses of literacy. Health literacy assessments are similarly limited. A major contribution of the ideological model is that researchers investigate actual uses of health literacy instead of hypothetical or potential uses. In Papen and Walters (2008), we learn about participants engaging in different ways with health information texts including leaflets, test results, forms, letters, medicine packaging and inserts, and signage in hospitals. People keep diaries and records and write down questions. In Santos, Handley, Omark, and Schillinger (2014), we learn about an adult ESL class where students discuss health information with classmates and consider how they might talk with their friends and family about what they are learning in class. One benefit of these concrete examples of health literacy in use is that they may help researchers see the range and variation in the ways different people engage with and make meaning from the same text—and that these ways and meanings are socially situated and locally significant.

### *Health Literacy in Structures of Power*

In health literacy research, there has been increased attention over the last several years to people's social networks as important parts of their health literacy. Sometimes, power differences in social relationships are mentioned, but studies do not often situate health literacy within these power relationships. Studies which reflect the ideological model of literacy, on the other hand, do situate health literacy in a dynamic relationship with power structures. They draw attention to the influence of power on literacy and also to "the ways in which literate practices actually shape not only relationships but differences in something so apparently standard and routinized as a consultation with a doctor" (Freebody and Freiberg 5).

The connections between health literacy and the significant power difference in the physician/patient relationship are addressed in three studies using the ideological model of literacy. Papen and Walters (2008) found that health literacy is embedded in social relationships, including "hierarchical" (28) ones, such as between patient and provider, which can disempower patients. Their study found that health literacy related to feelings of confidence for some of their ESOL students, specifically "the confidence to speak to health professionals, the confidence to ask questions or to take a leaflet back to a doctor with a request for clarification" (Papen and Walters 33). Santos, Handley, Omark, and Schillinger (2014) also acknowledge the effect of this power differential on adult ESL students. Importantly, they add that this effect may be incorrectly interpreted by the health professional as the patient having difficulty with literacy. As a result, the curriculum for their adult ESL class included role plays for students to practice conversations with a physician.

Health information texts are part of the institutional context of health literacy. In the ideological model, written texts (like oral texts) are situated within power relationships. The results from Hunter and Franken suggest that health information texts may have a complex relationship to patients' experiences in the clinical context. In an analysis of over one hundred health information documents about cardiovascular disease and diabetes, Hunter and Franken found "the discourse of patient responsibility for self-care" (35) permeated these texts. This discourse suggests a specific



subject position that patients should adopt in order to be seen as participating appropriately in the institutional context. The language of the texts “typically assumed educated readers,” and cultural or linguistic diversity was not a strong textual feature, normalizing the perspectives of the health-professional-authors, while communicating assumptions and expectations about the ideal reader/patient as educated and White. Hunter and Franken’s findings further suggest that patients who differed from this typical reader could have different experiences and engagement with the text.

Yet Hunter and Franken (2016) go further and join these findings with others from their study to suggest these texts may have the effect of doubly disadvantaging minoritized patients. Patients who were less likely to engage with these texts in the ways expected by their clinicians may appear to be less involved in following the care plan. This is problematic because, as the researchers found, “practitioners’ views of the extent to which patients were motivated to comply with self-management regimes appeared to influence their dispositions toward patients” (38). Therefore, minoritized patients could be doubly disadvantaged. First, patients may not engage with or interpret the text in the way they were expected, potentially missing important information. An unexpected way of handling the text or understanding its contents could then make patients appear less “motivated to comply” and therefore negatively impact the disposition of the medical practitioner toward them and their future care.

The clinical relationship is not the only power structure around health literacy. Santos, Handley, Omark, and Schillinger (2014) situate health literacy in power relationships, including people’s social groups. Their class activities included considering how students could talk about the potentially difficult topics of health risks, and being screened for health risk, with peers and family members.

Collectively, these authors give a sense of what ideological approaches to health literacy might involve, and what might be gained from them. In this way, practitioners and researchers who are not in public health or medicine have much to contribute current discussions about health literacy. While each study author offers suggestions for adult educators, their findings clearly hold implications beyond the education sector.

One implication regards conducting and interpreting research on health literacy and its relationships to health outcomes. If the goal is improved health, it would seem important to isolate variables that contribute to ill health. Current conceptions of health literacy, as I have pointed out, oversimplify literacy and its relationships to health. As the above studies show, there are many potential problems related to the enacting of literacy practices in the textually mediated, unequal power dynamics of the clinical context. This may lead health professionals to assume that a person or group’s health problem is attributable to literacy—a kind of misdiagnosis that might negatively impact health outcomes. For example, if a clinician believes the source of a health problem is in a patient’s literacy, they may refer a patient for literacy support, and miss the true source of the problem—along with the opportunity to give the proper treatment.

### *Health Literacy in Medical and Public Health Fields*

Street warned that “the dominant discourse of putting people into two categories of ‘literate’ and ‘illiterate’ means that there is a danger that only illiterates tend to be studied, and that the lack

of literacy becomes the focus” (Rogers and Street 19). Unfortunately, this has been the case in health literacy research. This may be one of the more serious limiting effects of the autonomous model of literacy assumed in current health literacy definitions. Much is lost when the focus is only on those who have so-called “low” health literacy, or in reading off the supposed ill-effects of “low” health literacy.

One group of people who is consistently *excluded* as subjects in health literacy research is health professionals. At this point, I turn to the newly released “organizational health literacy” definition from the CDC: “Organizational health literacy is the degree to which organizations equitably enable individuals to find, understand, and use information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). Though this definition is new, it reflects a long-standing view that clinicians are considered part of the organizational side of the health literacy process, opposite the patients. Their role, as members of the health care system, is to “enable” or help the patient develop health literacy. But clinicians’ own health literacy is rarely considered. I suggest medical and public health professionals have health literacy and engage in health literacy in their professional roles and in their everyday lives. It is true that as health professionals, they “face qualitatively different language and literacy tasks” (Freebody and Freiberg 5) than do patients or the public. Yet health professionals consistently engage in health activities—regarding other people’s health as well as their own. The cognitive and social processes they go through in enacting their professional roles, as well as those times when they negotiate their own or their family’s health, count as health literacy.

This is not a minor point. The ideological model of literacy invites us to examine assumptions about people, context, and literacy within any approach to literacy. This is especially important when it comes to health professionals. Current definitions of health literacy hide or normalize the health literacy practices of health professionals. With an ideological approach to health literacy, health professionals might reflect on their professional language use. They could question common practices, processes, phrases, and terminology for their underlying assumptions about patients, health, health care, and literacy. This kind of questioning may be particularly relevant to research about the role that health professionals play in contributing to health inequalities through “systematic though nondeliberate ways” (Hall et. al 12), some of which have been found to be related to their language use during the patient encounter; in other words, to clinicians’ health literacy.

## Implications of an Ideological Approach to Health Literacy

The autonomous and ideological models of literacy invite practitioners and researchers to question the construction of health literacy as a fixed standard against which people can be shown as in deficit. Research is needed into how literacy is used in the various meanings and activities of healthy living, and of what constitutes successful participation in the health care system, and processes developed to strengthen these activities for everyone—and not just those of “low” health literacy.

The global pandemic has sharpened attention to the ways health, safety, and wellness are talked

about, written about, interpreted, and enacted, and to how these ways intersect with culture and power. There are few more consequential interactions and decisions in our lives than those regarding our health. Medical and public health professionals are not the only people who hold better health outcomes as a goal. Each of us wants a good life for ourselves and those close to us. An ideological approach toward health literacy opens up other possibilities for action toward the goal of better health, through conceptual and empirical tools and clarity regarding the factors that contribute to the outcomes we seek.

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## Re/Engaging Street to Address Multiplicity in Composition Classrooms

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In this symposium piece, I consider how Brian Street's ideas have been picked up in the teaching of postsecondary writing in the Caribbean and suggest some aspects of his work that might still prove useful in the teaching of academic writing there and elsewhere in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Teaching and researching in academic writing in my natal space of the Caribbean but having studied rhetoric and composition and taught first-year composition in the US, I will be shuttling between the two spaces. I will begin with some context for my work and then examine past and potential engagements with Street's ideas.

### Street Matters

Street's ideas about what he terms and critiques as "autonomous" literacy and its "ideological" counterpart (*Literacy*) are enacted in the UK instantiation of the teaching of academic writing called "Academic Literacies." Proponents of *Academic Literacies* (as opposed to Study Skills and Academic Socialization models, which are both informed by a view of literacy as autonomous and ideologically-neutral) promote literacy as social action (Street, "Academic Literacies"), highlight differences in knowledge creation and in reading and writing practices and processes in varying discourse communities, and call for faculty members to engage in "critical reflexivity" (Street, "Academic Literacies") and make discourse practices visible to students. Given continuous expansions in higher education in the Caribbean and elsewhere—more students and more variation in literacies and in traditionally defined writing proficiency—Street's notions of critical reflexivity and an ideological (vs. autonomous) model of literacy as social practice will remain relevant to developing theories/principles and practices for academic writing education. At the same time, academic writing instructors, intent on the academic writing development of users of minoritized languages (and of other students), can also call on Street to help them address what may be perceived as perplexing practices of these same students.

### Research Matters

Theresa Lillis and Mary Scott have accurately noted what could easily be my research experience. They have written: "In exploring what is involved and at stake in student writing, teacher-researchers have drawn on the available and influential paradigms in their specific geo-historical contexts ... In the UK, until recently, student academic writing tended to remain invisible as an object both of pedagogy and research. The most visible frame of reference has been English for Academic Purposes (EAP) ..." (Lillis and Scott 9-10). I have been working to make student academic writing and its

instruction and study visible in the Caribbean context, and operating based on research practices aligned with literary (textual) study and applied linguistics. To produce the first full length book about academic writing education and attitudes to it in Jamaica, I did qualitative research involving analyses of archival materials and data gathered from questionnaires and interviews with past and current writing specialists (Milson-Whyte, *Academic*). Using observations, experiential data, and other textual analyses, I glean much about the workings of language in society and in formal educational institutions (Milson-Whyte, “Caribbean,” “Pedagogical”; Milson-Whyte, Oenbring, and Jaquette.). I include student perspectives in my work by doing phenomenological studies that provide data about students’ perceptions of and work with postsecondary writing (Milson-Whyte “Economies,” “Working”; Jones and Milson-Whyte), and I frequently make comparisons with the well-established tradition of teaching composition in the United States and with the more recent development of teaching academic writing/literacies in the United Kingdom (UK) because of my experiences in the US and on account of ideas I glean via disciplinary conferences and publications.

### Curriculum Matters: Past and Current Uses of Street’s Oeuvre in Course/Program Content

With regard to curriculum matters, based on my investigations, Street’s work, especially regarding literacy as social practice, was picked up by scholar-researchers in the Caribbean in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the point that his ideas were “flattened”—became axiomatic. One survey respondent, a retired professor of literacy studies/language education, expressed it this way: “I think the view of literacy as social practice is almost axiomatic now. I first encountered Street in the early 80s so anything I’ve written takes that orientation for granted” (Bryan). Also taken for granted for a long time in the Caribbean is the view that there are different kinds of literacies, one of which is *academic literacy* that is supposed to be taught in universities as different from what is required in secondary schools. Charles Bazerman’s observation is, therefore, applicable to the Caribbean: “The near universality of the first-year . . . writing requirement contains an implicit recognition that in higher education new levels of writing and expression are demanded” (2). However, the *singular* understanding of literacy manifested in the teaching of a single academic writing course for nearly half a century on the campuses of the premier institution of higher education in the Anglophone Caribbean and for many years in other institutions, the only difference being that a course might have changed name over the years—sometimes in response to specific institutional changes and sometimes on account of misunderstanding of a course based on the inclusion of terms such as English in the name in specific institutions (see Jones McKenzie and Campbell-Dawes; Milson-Whyte, *Academic*). Additionally, given the influence of the work of Street and others, emphasizing social practices around literacy, a process approach to writing is common in these courses. However, this has not been to the extent that focus on “product”/text has been minimized; in fact, the opposite is true to the extent that an investigator is likely to find “superficial elements of process writing grafted onto a product-driven system” (Milson-Whyte, *Academic* 152). There is, then, no great worry that in the turn to social processes, there was abandonment of “text” as Suresh Canagarajah has noted was generally the case

elsewhere (“Weaving” 11-12; see also Lillis and Scott 21).

More recently, there has been *expanding* uptake of Street’s ideas via Academic Literacies in the Caribbean in graduate and undergraduate academic writing curriculum, in proposals for program amendments (including changing names of programs), and in calls for advocacy and professionalization of academic writing instructors (see Jones McKenzie and Campbell-Dawes; Rose). These more recent inclusions of his work in Caribbean spaces suggest moves that could be beneficial to students and facilitators of writing courses in areas in which students’ vernaculars are minoritized; however, Street would probably judge these inclusions as being more “normative” than “transformative.” In the Caribbean, there is still a focus on academic literacy as singular and autonomous—as an entity needed for success in university studies and beyond. The study skills or academic socialization models present heavily even in places where courses are aligned with faculties/colleges. At the undergraduate level, since 2013, the premier university adopted faculty-specific (that is, college-specific) academic writing courses reflecting emphasis on social practices and acknowledgement of differences in knowledge and writing production. This change signalled a departure from one generic course (English for Academic Purposes) for all students on the institution’s campuses across the Caribbean region. However, in and across institutions, courses still seem to be about just a little more than the study skills model: that is, academic socialization. I have drawn on an Academic Literacies framework to demonstrate that although instances in which courses are aligned with faculties suggest a recognition of disparate discourse practices, one academic writing course per faculty/college seems to ignore the fact that colleges are not homogenous (Milson-Whyte, *Academic*). Moreover, course outlines do not suggest engagement with questioning power structures, for example, or for considering students’ “funds of knowledge” (Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg)—their linguistic currencies that are not valued in largely English-Only programs. In practice, students may be told that they should ask their professors about elements like meanings of instruction terms that differ depending not just on discipline but sometimes also on facilitator. Still, the academic writing courses do not seem to fully engage with matters of identity and epistemology—still seeming to privilege general skill and/or general socialization into a specific vein of academic discourse—and academic writing education occurs, as in other jurisdictions, with little to no explicit input from faculty in students’ core courses.

### Language Matters: Street’s Pull on Changing Cohorts and Linguistic Influences on Pedagogy

Beyond inclusion in curriculum matters, Street’s ideas have influenced—even if obliquely—some pedagogical responses to changing cohorts of students and by extension linguistic configurations in classrooms. In other words, when/where language matters, there always were “cracks” in the system, as Street noted in other places and expressed in a joint interview with Harvey Graff (de Oliveira Galvão, Soares de Gouvêa, and Rabelo Gomes 63, 64). In the Caribbean, simultaneous with academic writing education in standard(ized) languages, there have been calls to legitimize the Creole languages spoken by the majority in each country and that university students presented increasingly



after the 1960s. The kind of advocacy work in the US leading to the 1974 Conference on College Composition and Communication's position statement "Students' Right to Their Own Language" is, therefore, ongoing in the Caribbean (most recently in a 2019 global call for signatories to a petition to make Jamaican Creole an official language in Jamaica). Beyond the Caribbean, as "cracks" have widened *globally*, we have seen calls to make pedagogy respond to increasing "diversity" in student populations—from Writing Across the Curriculum/Writing in the Disciplines programs (Russell) and teaching of Academic Literacies (Lea and Street; Jones, Turner, and Street; Lillis; Lea) to explicit calls for various linguistic engagements such as code-meshing—blending languages and styles (Canagarajah, "Place," "Multilingual"; Young); cross-linguaging—working with, in and across more than one language (Horner, Lu, and Matsuda, *Cross-Language*); and translanguaging—which values difference in language and encourages negotiating in the available languages in a student's linguistic repertoire to arrive at meaning in interactions instead of relying on fixed forms or rules (Horner, Lu, Royster, and Trimbur, "Language Difference"). The support and critiques of these linguistic and pedagogical engagements have been many; most recently Bruce Horner and Sara Alvarez have tried to distance translanguaging from the others and the more recently used term translinguaging. In and outside of the Caribbean, in institutions where the strict focus in teaching is on helping students to develop some singular academic literacy, it is usually expected that multilingual students will engage in code-switching—using standard(ized) language in/for their academic writing courses and other forms for other purposes. Outside of the Caribbean, where programs/institutions allow for radical engagements, instructors allow students to engage in blending styles and languages; however, some approaches, as in Peter Elbow's suggestion to have students do drafting in their vernaculars and then edit these out in final drafts, are critiqued as half-measures (see Robinson, for example).

As some composition instructors in the US and elsewhere are aware, students of Caribbean heritage do/use language in interesting ways because of their experiences with two or more varieties of language. Instructors do not always understand these students' ways of languaging, and the students' perceptions of and declarations about their languaging tend to be different from instructors' perceptions—as Shondel Nero has documented regarding Caribbean students in the US who profess to be native English speakers/speakers of English, contradicting what instructors detect in their speech and writing. The similarities and differences in the varieties of language these students use suggest that they could benefit from proposals for code-meshing or translanguaging in their development of academic literacies. However, as outlined in various publications, there could be challenges for instructors who try to implement these proposals among Caribbean students. For starters, proposals regarding "inclusion" of students' languages in classrooms seem to assume (equal) valuing of the languages in a student's repertoire, orthography developed for the languages in a student's repertoire, and literacy in more than one of the languages in the student's repertoire (see Milson-Whyte, "Working"). These assumptions can be problematic for Caribbean students or students of Caribbean heritage, given their linguistic range.

For context, students from the Francophone (French-speaking) Caribbean have experience with (standardized) French language and a French Creole, and generally the language of instruction is French. The exception is Haiti, because Haitian Creole is also an official language. Students from

the Hispanophone (Spanish-speaking) areas have experience with (standardized) Spanish(es), indigenous languages, local Spanish-lexified vernaculars (and Englishes). The language of instruction is generally Standardized Spanish. In the Dutch-Speaking Caribbean, students have experience with (standardized) Dutch, Papiamentu/o (Portuguese-based Creole), and the language of instruction is Dutch (generally) but Papiamentu in Curaçao. In the Anglophone (English-speaking) Caribbean, (standardized) Englishes (referred to as Standard English or Caribbean Standard English or by island name such as Jamaican Standard English) and English-lexified Creoles obtain; French Creoles are also in place in English-speaking St. Lucia and Dominica. However, the language of instruction is English (see Milson-Whyte, “Caribbean”).

Admittedly, most Caribbean students in US composition classrooms are likely to be from the Anglophone Caribbean, and especially Jamaica, but multiplicity remains. The variety of practices amongst Jamaican students led me to define them as Creole-influenced:

Some Jamaicans are English-only speakers who understand Creole; some are English-dominant bilinguals; some are Creole-dominant bilinguals; some may be equally bilingual in Creole and English; some are Creole-only speakers who may or may not understand English; some slide between the shifting poles in ways yet to be named; some do not acknowledge their linguistic profiles and behaviours, but all encounter Jamaican Creole. Since all Jamaicans are influenced in one way or another by the Creole, but are not all Creole-speaking, I refer to Jamaican students as *Creole-influenced* students. (Milson-Whyte, *Academic* 6)

Needless to say, this is a challenging situation. Recall Braj Kachru and the challenge of placing Jamaica and other Caribbean islands in his concentric circles as he couldn’t determine if citizens could be considered native or non-native speakers of English (362). In the Caribbean context, Creoles are stigmatized and this stigma is internalized by some Creole-speakers; English-as-mother-tongue tradition is prevalent and there are high failure rates in a system steeped in high-stakes testing; and “*naturalized* double consciousness” is evident in those who naturally/automatically separate their languages and function (seemingly) without underlying tensions—those considered artful code-switchers who find strange written Creole, especially when it is combined with English (see Milson-Whyte, “Pedagogical”).

Reflecting on these “cracks” and attempts to address linguistic diversity in pedagogically sound ways would mean, in Street-like approaches, to consider the multiple linguistic groups represented in any one classroom and the multiple attitudes of Caribbean students toward Creoles in classrooms. Among students who could be invited to engage their various languages in an assignment would be those who experience difficulty writing in English (and could therefore not make up even “eye-dialect” written Creole words), those uncomfortable with the suggestion to use Creole in class, and those who have a neutral response to invitations to engage with their full linguistic repertoire/s and would attack the assignment as one given in English only (see Milson-Whyte, “Working”). Among the explanations for these varying attitudes are the facts that for a long time there was no developed orthographic system for Creoles (exceptions being Haitian Creole and Papiamentu); generally, Caribbean students still do not develop literacy in their Creoles; students are not taught

contrasts between the standardized language/s and the Creole languages; and weaker writers tend to confuse standardized English and their English-lexified Creole. To my mind, even though proponents of code-meshing and translanguaging do not have a stated or implied goal of students' being able to separate out their languages as they work on developing academic literacies, blending of elements from different languages (code-meshing) or negotiating meanings in or across languages (translanguaging) does suggest an understanding/knowledge of the different elements of each language—and this is a challenge for weaker writers who are like a study participant I've described elsewhere (Milson-Whyte, "Economies"). He is "challenged, like other male students, to transform his power to talk into proficiency in writing in the formal, structured classroom setting because he cannot produce the appropriate currency. For him, writing is 'swimming through some rough waters'" (Milson-Whyte, "Economies" 572). He acknowledged the following:

For me, most times to speak in English I will practice patois so much and block English so much that when I'm required to use it in strict formalities, it poses a problem. And I think that probably it is one of the main reason why I don't write well because I am thinking these thoughts . . . You can't say them in patois and write them in English. So that comes as a problem because to substitute the words is difficult to keep the same meaning. I can't speak very well so each time I try to translate my thoughts to written formality it's a burden. This formality that is required makes all my ideas turn into something else . . . it made me feel like a mad man because it [sic] can't write what I think. (Milson-Whyte, "Economies" 572-73)

Perhaps, then, it is not surprising that in the Caribbean, calling on some *social practices* can be rare in the composition classroom. One still has to make a case for including Creole in academic writing education (see Carmeneta Jones, "Teaching Literacy Skills"), and expatriates—not locals—seem most invested in calling on the oral penchant of Caribbean students in teaching English composition in Caribbean classrooms (see Dyer-Spiegel; Oenbring).

## Future Matters: More Potential In Street's Ideas

To date, in the Caribbean and elsewhere, we are still needing to treat with understandings of academic literacy as singular and with colonial attitudes that prevail regarding language matters (work in English and English only, or work involving other languages to be edited out before final drafts in standardized language are submitted, as per Peter Elbow, or work across languages in ways that—ironically—seem strange to people for whom work across languages is a quotidian activity). We still are needing to consider adjusting arrangements for teaching and attitudes to Caribbean and other minoritized students' languaging labors to yield more just, productive, and positively transforming teaching-learning postsecondary composition spaces. And added to the mix are technological developments and global challenges that are rendering increasingly complex students' usual "funds of knowledge" (Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg).

Three of Street's recommendations are particularly apt in this regard:

In order to build upon the richness and complexity of learners' prior knowledge, we need to treat 'home background' not as a deficit but as affecting deep levels of identity and epistemology, and thereby the stance that learners take with respect to the 'new' literacy practices of the educational setting. ("At Last" 420)

. . . there are of course context specific features to writing in the Academy, as in other contexts, even whilst these can also be defined as 'social.' But frequently these features may 'remain 'hidden.' ("Symposium Comments" 39)"

Very often, there are hidden literacies that people aren't aware of, and very often you can build on the literacies people bring with them and then extend them according to the context. (qtd. in de Oliveira Galvão, Soares de Gouvêa, and Rabelo Gomes 57)

All three recommendations indicate that explicit teaching is necessary for students' development. To some of us, this is a truism, but it is also true that far fewer content specialists (beyond writing studies) than academic writing educators would like are explicitly involved in contributing to students' academic writing development. This shortcoming is hinted at in the second recommendation that includes an important acknowledgement from Street: While he insists on the social nature of literacy and writing, he is careful to acknowledge "context specific features to writing"—but these have to be made visible to learners. Similarly, learners have experiences with literacy that put them in good stead in other contexts like an academic one, but some knowledgeable other has to help to bring such "hidden literacies" to conscious awareness from whence they can be expanded. The first recommendation suggests that these modes of extracting and expanding prior literacy knowledge are critical because of their emotional and intellectual weight. Rather than a hindrance to development, the known—with its connections to sense of self, knowledge-making, and outlook—influences comprehension and interpretation of new literacy contexts and development in them. All of these, then, seem applicable to not only Caribbean students or students who use minoritized languages but also students who might consider themselves monolingual, monocodal or monomodal.

Ultimately, engaging with Street's recommendations might help us to address curricular changes, occasioned in part by students' linguistic diversity and compounded by the challenges and opportunities presented by new technologies or situations, such as a persistent pandemic, to which educational responses could disenfranchise the already marginalised and magnify inequities (see Brabazon). Undoubtedly and increasingly, students—some probably deemed short on academic (English) language skills—will present not only with multiple other linguistic and cultural literacies but also with technological savviness or limitations that will demand that educators pluralize literacy curricula and academic writing pedagogy unendingly. In what might appear future matters, both present and future will matter as they are made to collide, silence or be silenced, or coexist cooperatively.

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## Misguided Expectations: The Ideological Framework of the Autonomous Model

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**B**rian Street reminds us that literacy practices—the “broader cultural conception of particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and writing in cultural contexts” (“What’s ‘New’” 79) —are always social acts and have to be defined in relation to the historical, economic, and political contexts in which they take place. As such, literacy is “always rooted in a particular world-view” and always “contested in relation to power” (“What’s ‘New’” 77-78). Our introduction to this understanding of literacy practices as graduate students in the early 1990s gave us confidence that our literacy experiences as a Latina and as an international student from Austria would be addressed and valued. However, more than 15 years later, we are not sure how our own literacy experiences are reflected in our academic environments, and whether our literacy practices, like the practices of so many of our students and faculty colleagues, are social acts that have continued to be “contested in relation to power.”

As researchers, teachers, and colleagues, we are from different countries and represent different ethnic backgrounds. One of us speaks Spanish de México; the other speaks Deutsch von Österreich. One grew up east of East Los Angeles; the other grew up in a small rural town of 900 in Austria. Nancy, with a long history of border crossing and family on both sides of the border, deportation of immediate family in the 1930s (what was at that time called Mexican-American “repatriation”), sweatshop labor in Los Angeles, and traveling blacksmiths in Arizona, attended her first high school assembly at 15 and learned that only 50% of her high school class would graduate. She finished high school, completed her undergraduate studies in California, and graduated with a PhD from Michigan Technological University. Sibylle, with roots in the indentured-servant class in the Austro-Hungarian empire, a grandfather imprisoned in a Russian internment camp during World War I, a grandmother praying that her husband would not be sent to a nearby concentration camp after being taken away for questioning during World War II, and family hoping that each of the six children would finish basic schooling at the age of 15 and then find a decent blue-collar job, was aware that continuing her schooling beyond the age of 15 was as unimaginable as a German saying *Schlagobers* instead of *Sahne*. She began her studies at the University of Vienna, finished her PhD in Illinois, and now works and lives in the United States. Our disparate long-ago histories are only connected—and interpreted very differently—through Maximilian I of Mexico, the Habsburg Austrian who served for a few unfortunate years in the 1860s as Mexico’s emperor.

Despite our different backgrounds, many of our literacy experiences in US academic institutions are similar. Working class, first-generation, and outside of the English-speaking Anglo mainstream academic community, we understand that Street’s discussion of literacy as ideological, where literacy



practices can be used to dominate or marginalize others (see Besnier and Street; Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice*; *Social Literacies*; “Literacy Events”; “What’s ‘New’”), has remained an essential lens for understanding the multiple literacy practices we bring to academic settings. We use Street’s contextual framework to highlight our own experiences as a Latina and as an Austrian faculty member in an Anglo mainstream academic community, a community that implicitly and complicitly engages in continuing and often promoting dominant hegemonic literacy practices without taking into account our transliterate, translingual, and transcultural identities, even though at the same time promoting our “Otherness” in order to highlight diversity efforts on campus. We include a narrative approach to provide examples of how our literacy practices as non-dominant faculty are steeped within an ontology that values diverse forms of meaning making. Our narratives show that the current autonomous literacy narrative promotes a hegemonic power structure that fails to value the work required to properly navigate among diverse ontologies and diverse ideological frameworks. We conclude that expanding how we define and teach literacy skills while locating ourselves simultaneously as communicators and listener-participants in academic settings disrupts current power structures and opens spaces for diverse ideologies that influence and complicate what we value and how we teach.

## The Mysteries of Implicit Expectations

Similar to most people, we grew up learning about what it meant to be a part of our social, cultural, economic, gender, and ethnic groups, and we also learned what it meant to be apart from other groups. We learned early on who we can share ideas with, who agrees with us, who makes fun of us, who dismisses us, and who challenges us to think beyond the group thinking that is easy to adapt. We also learned to question the implicit assumptions and rules about the literate behaviors that were accepted and encouraged. In graduate school, we read Shirley Brice Heath’s 1983 exploration of Roadville and Trackton residents whose literacy practices are largely outside of what is expected in a school setting. She concluded in a sentence about the writing done in both communities that “neither community’s ways with the written word prepares it for the school’s ways” (235). We also learned about the “mainstreamers” in town who were “strongly school-oriented, believing success in school, academically and socially, is a prerequisite to being successful as an adult” (236) because school, they were convinced, “helps instill values such as respectability, responsibility, and an acceptance of hard work” (237).

In 1983, we both finished high school, and we both would have fit the image of the Roadville and Trackton communities, not in terms of ethnicity or nationality, but in terms of being prepared for the “school’s way.” The “school’s way”—which is always connected to specific power brokers and mainstream understandings of what it means to be literate, was as abstract and distant to our families as it was for the Roadville and Trackton residents. Our families, too, subscribed to the belief that “language is power,” and even though they “may not articulate precisely their reasons for needing to learn to read, write, and speak in the ways the school teaches,” they believed “that such learning has something to do with moving up and out” of our respective neighborhoods (Heath 265).

Now we understand that we participated in an educational setting where literacy was seen as autonomous and where nobody would have questioned or understood what Bruce Horner pointed out in the inaugural 2013 issue of *Literacy in Composition Studies*. As he reminds us, “the autonomous model is powerful in claiming an autonomy for literacy that hides its ideological character, purporting to offer literacy as an ideologically neutral phenomenon—a gift to the unfortunate, who can thence be blamed for failing to make appropriate, grateful use of it to improve themselves” (“Ideologies” 2). Horner complicates the positionality of the “unfortunate” when he continues to tell us that “the set of actors and activities which that ideology does recognize as ‘literate’ is neither homogeneous, uniform, discrete, nor stable in character but rather a constantly shifting set of unstable, internally various, fluid, and heterogeneous practices” (“Ideologies” 2). The implicit understanding of what constitutes accepted “heterogeneous practices” in an autonomous system that is embraced by mainstream academic and professional institutions created an added hurdle for us when we entered academia. We could not claim membership in dominant mainstream discourse communities because we were not introduced to or encouraged to join these discourse communities. We learned to imitate accepted academic discourse by pretending that language was void of cultural nuances and daily realities. We removed personal value for most of our academic writing and wrote “correctly” or produced our best imitations of how we understood Anglo middle-class mainstream writing expectations.

The unacknowledged and hidden dominant ideologies within an autonomous literacy model made our participation in an academic setting even more challenging. For Sibylle, who came to the US as a graduate student, navigating US educational expectations—and navigating what were considered academic literacy practices in a culturally, politically, and socially different system that used English not in the ways studied in an Austrian education system—was not only intimidating but also alienating. Many of the pedagogical and methodological practices in rhetoric and writing classrooms, and communication practices used by faculty and fellow students, did not follow expected patterns Sibylle learned as an undergraduate at the University of Vienna, where interactions were limited to teacher-student conferences because of failing grades, and where much information was learned and reproduced through lectures and tests. Little focus was given to what James Paul Gee calls “Discourse,” which highlights the “socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and artifacts, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or ‘social network’” (*Social Linguistics* 131). Instead, teachers in Austria who were trained in grammar-based language learning as drill-and-kill practices did not mention that part of a successful experience in an American classroom included negotiating when and how to talk to a professor, how to ask for feedback, how to talk to classmates, and how to write the way that was acceptable for American professors. Once Sibylle started university in the US, the ELL lab set aside for “at-risk” international students focused on language not as a set of social practices but instead as a neutral set of reading and writing skills (see Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice*; *Social Literacies*) that needed to be mastered in a vacuum, with plastic headsets and a computer as a companion.

Interacting with teachers was similarly volatile. “Work on your sentence structure!” was a comment that Sibylle received again and again in her early years at a US university. Her German-

influenced complex sentences could rival any stream-of-consciousness novel, yet inevitably confused and annoyed instructors who evaluated her writing. None of them, however, pointed out strategies for adapting writing for the intended audience, and none of them mentioned that language practices were part of a larger social, cultural, and political system. Sibylle, as a result, was not aware in her undergraduate and early graduate career that her language background was anything but a hindrance to her education in the US. The ELL course she was required to take, and the language lab that was associated with it, emphasized the need to eliminate the “foreign” accent. An international graduate assistant training week in the late 1980s included sessions on speaking clearly and succinctly so that accents would not get in the way of US students’ understanding of the subject matter. International students’ previous experiences teaching, and their abilities and knowledge outside of an accented English, were not part of the discussion. Discussions also didn’t include cultural differences, US politics, race politics, or social and economic issues. Those were only addressed much later, during international graduate student meetings that provided a space for exploring, explaining, and figuring out what was often implied and never said. Participation in “socially meaningful groups” took many years, and even after Sibylle’s 20-plus year exposure to American educational settings, implicit rules about what is included and what is excluded from academic discourse conventions—whether communicating with colleagues, the administration, or students—can still lead to uncomfortable moments of outsider status.

For Nancy, learning was at first exciting and interesting. Nancy’s third-grade teacher dusted off a sixth-grade book and gave it to her. Pre-algebra was mysterious and fun. “Discard Day” from the library resulted in large books on geography, geology, and general science. Teachers from kindergarten through third grade encouraged home literacies as part of the learning process. Spanish was accepted, and English was practiced. However, fourth grade and higher became a different challenge. With teachers who lived their “back-up plan” and wanted to be working “anywhere but here,” school for Nancy became high stress and an obstacle to acquiring school literacy. Teachers were not community members, and parents were no longer encouraged to participate in their children’s education. Learning was not connected to the home environment, and expectations for graduating and moving on to college were low. For this reason, it took Nancy a few years to redo high school at a local community college and then transfer to a university in Orange County during Reagan’s Hands-Across-America administration, when racist comments and views were tolerated. It was during Nancy’s master’s program in downtown LA when her voice and discussions of personal experience were included in academic literacy practices. However, using individual voice and personal experience after hiding it for many years was not an easy task. Combining individual voice with critical reflection was even more difficult for Nancy. Learning about James Paul Gee’s differentiation between acquisition and learning in “What Is Literacy” provided Nancy with her initial understanding that academic literacy included both institutional requirements and ideological and personal literacies. In other words, Gee’s argument encouraged agency by enabling Nancy to decide when it was important to get through a lesson and when it was important to reflect on, interact with, and revise dominant academic practices and knowledge.

As a Latina in higher education, Nancy needed to decide what it meant to live as what Gloria

Anzaldúa defined as living in the borderlands. As Anzaldúa points out, *la mestiza*, the border crosser, “constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes” (101). When Nancy left East Los Angeles and moved to Michigan Technological University, she often heard that her sentences were choppy and awkward, and that writing for the classroom followed a prescribed pattern. At the same time, she was encouraged to bring in her personal voice in her writing to include her experiences growing up Latina. As a result, she continuously walked “out of one culture and into another” (Anzaldúa 99), with the dissertation as a site to present critical reflections on the ideologies accepted and not accepted in education. The format of Nancy’s dissertation, letters to specific audiences in English and Spanish, was familiar to Nancy and achieved what was required in an academic setting—a researched argument. Hegemonic truth no longer took precedence over the ambiguity that accompanies life in the borderlands. Before understanding the opportunities created by a broadening of academic literacy practices, Nancy’s experiences were similar to those described by Anzaldúa where “the ambivalence from the clash of voices results in mental and emotional states of perplexity” (100). These “states of perplexity” are still present in Nancy’s current-day interactions with students, faculty, and the administration. However, the knowledge that academic writing can include the unexpected has created new ways of moving forward and encouraging students to take agency over their writing.

## Making Implicit Expectations Explicit

When we reflect on our literate lives, we see that our school literacy practices were often in conflict with established mainstream academic literacy norms, and we were often unsure why our papers received low grades. Now, we see two individuals whose literacy behaviors and membership in non-dominant and dominant literate institutions went through many stages and underwent many changes. We learned and are still learning some of the implicit academic expectations through trial and error, while maintaining a sense of academic self. We adapted to some, ignored others, and brought in our own expectations. Certainly, our careers require us to participate in dominant literacy behaviors defined and sanctioned by our institutions. We recognize that we studied in mainstream institutions. We are teachers and researchers. We evaluate student writing based on academic conventions. We accept students to our graduate program based on criteria we agreed to uphold. However, our careers, we strongly believe, also require us to expand, redefine, and make explicit to ourselves and our students with similar backgrounds to ours what is considered acceptable academic literacy behavior. We do this because of our own experiences as outside and inside the accepted norm, and we do it because we strongly support literacy scholars whose discussions on the ideological nature of literacies have guided our interactions with fellow academics and students for many years. When Bruce Horner reminded us in 2013 that all literacy is ideological, we went back to Elsa Auerbach’s assertion that

all theories of literacy and all literacy pedagogies are framed in systems of values and beliefs

which imply particular views of the social order and use literacy to position people socially. Even those views which paint literacy as a neutral, objectively definable set of skills are in fact rooted in a particular ideological perspective, and it is precisely because they obscure this orientation that they are most insidious. (72)

Our roles as change agents did not come easy. Only when we moved forward in our studies and became faculty members in a rhetoric and writing program did we learn to appreciate the nuances of our positionalities as a Latina and an Austrian. We also learned that we were in prime positions to emphasize the ontological nature of rhetoric by questioning often unquestioned academic literacy practices, and by making explicit and adapting these practices to include daily literacy events of students for whom academic discourse is secondary and outside the implicit norms used in academic environments. We learned to leave the role of the victimized whose contributions were devalued and ignored and instead moved forward to address the question asked by a mentor when we complained about how unfair academia was: “You’re right. I agree. It’s not fair. What are you going to do about it?” Accepting our right and responsibility to participate in unmasking what is obscured and therefore “most insidious” in dominant literacy practices has encouraged us to address what might be intentional or unintentional biases in how non-dominant literacy practices and ideologies are interpreted and evaluated.

We are reminded, when we talk to colleagues and students whose primary D/discourse (see Gee, *Social Linguistics*) is close to the academic institution’s D/discourse conventions, that excluding those with different literacy practices is not always a conscious act. However, taking privilege for granted, and accepting traditional academic core values as universal and unbiased, limits an understanding of the values and practices brought to the table by those who cannot claim or are not interested in claiming unconditional membership and acceptance in a narrowly focused discourse community. We see that colleagues are evaluated according to different standards, not because their performance is different but because their gender, their nationality, or the color of their skin is different. We see that special privileges only happen to those who understand how to use their dominant literacy skills to negotiate with the administration. We also hear, when we point out inequalities, that everybody is treated—without a doubt—the same, and few recognize that privilege often connects with social, cultural, and socio-economic values. The administration insists that there is no preferential treatment, no matter who the faculty is. Faculty, at the same time, claim that all students are given the same opportunities in the classroom, take the same tests, and get the same instructions for writing papers. However, we also know that, as Lisa Delpit points out, “other people’s children” are not invited to sit at the table of the dominant group if they don’t adapt the dominant group’s behaviors. They are not encouraged to bring to the table their own literate lives, or change the literate behaviors accepted by the dominant group. According to Delpit, this has led us to give up “the rich meaningful education of our children in favor of narrow, decontextualized, meaningless procedures that leave unopened hearts, unformed character, and unchallenged minds” (xiv).

To make sure that we can take back “the rich meaningful education” that Delpit discusses, our teaching has become an effort to expand what dominant discourse includes; discuss when, how, and why code-switching can be powerful; and encourage awareness of and participation in multiple

literacy practices by embracing the fluidity of literacy ideologies. As Juan Guerra mentions in his piece on transcultural repositioning, it is by

invoking the power and authority inherent in our literacy practices, and especially in the strategic rhetorical ability that more and more members of our community are developing as we learn to navigate our way through the perilous social and political waters of a nation in upheaval, we may yet chart our own destiny and ensure that everyone among us is granted the right to personal agency and self-determination. (“Emerging Representations” 8)

We want this power and authority to include the literacy practices of students who have accepted that they don’t fit the A-student profile, whose home literacies remind us of ourselves and of Heath’s Trackton and Roadville children, and whose languages complement, enrich, and expand academic Englishes. Language ideologies and literacy ideologies, we want students to know, are part of a larger system that, once we can decode it, allows us to move in and out of that system. Whether we call it code-switching, using multiple databases, repertoire expansion, signifying, or code-meshing, we provide students with tools to participate in multiple systems without seeing any system as superior or inferior. Instead, we point to the “disjunctures, contradictions, and clashes in the ideologies of language” (Bou Ayash 7) and in the various literacy ideologies that students experience, especially the ideologies of the autonomous model. These situated and fluid literacies, then, are part of “dynamic social practices that broker, shape, react to, and redistribute linguistic power in local communities” (Alvarez 44).

## Moving On: Transliterate, Translingual, Transcultural

We are both exploring research that expands the notion of academic US literacy by valorizing and legitimizing that we are transliterate, translingual, and transcultural. However, such focus in current research does not always translate to day-to-day practices for students and for teachers. Even though scholars such as Bruce Horner, Min-Zhan Lu, Jacquelyn Jones Royster, and John Trimbur argue that a translingual approach “sees difference in language not as a barrier to overcome or as a problem to manage, but as a resource for producing meaning in writing, speaking, reading, and listening” (303), the reality of teaching undergraduates and graduates in a university setting established by and for an Anglo mainstream often erases such approaches when not addressed explicitly. In such a setting, communicative acts, instead of following the tenets of translingualism, continue to embrace largely monolingual ideologies where anything different is dismissed and devalued.

To disrupt traditional dominant ideological and pedagogical approaches to writing instruction, we understand that we need to foreground our experiences as members of a community of transnational, translingual, and transcultural academics who constantly shift language practices depending on who their audience is and what the various purposes of the literacy interactions are. Instead of marginalizing these experiences and normalizing what is marginal, we advocate for spaces that encourage the diverse and sometimes contradictory ideological approaches to language and literacy learning and teaching at US academic institutions. Like Nancy Bou Ayash, we want to “identify, question, modify, and alter” (11) the dominant approach and bring in our own complex

and fluid ideologies and our own literacy and language experiences to make sure that our students' experiences and their literacy and language practices are not located, as Bruce Horner and Laura Tetreault remind us when they discuss translingual writing pedagogies, "outside material social history, as timeless, discrete universals against which language practices are to be measured, but in the material social realm as the always-emerging outcome of those practices" (5).

Being transliterate, and understanding the "varied patterns that transnational literacy practices take" (Guerra, "Trans-ing" 132), requires us to look closely at our own practices and how those practices can be integrated into higher education. As Latina and Austrian faculty in a US academic system, we have much practice with researching and addressing the need for a more inclusive discussion on language and literacy pedagogies (see Barrón; Barrón and Gruber; Barrón, Gruber, and Grimm; Gruber; Gruber and Barrón). As teachers and researchers, we continue to work with Street's concept of "literacy and the social practices with which it becomes associated" ("What's 'New'" 77) to make sure that discussions on the fluidity of literacy and language practices lead to changes in how writing is taught. We want to make sure that literacy is understood as the "broader cultural conception of particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and writing in cultural contexts" ("What's 'New'" 79), where our diverse communicative abilities are acknowledged and valued, and where we can actively participate in nurturing and promoting the many literacies of non-dominant students and faculty. For us, this means providing mentoring support, discussing strategies for learning and applying multiple discourse conventions, and creating professional learning communities focused on approaching writing as fluid and situational and on seeing literacy as ideological and ontological.



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Book Review *Dreads and Open Mouths:  
Living/Teaching/Writing Queerly* by Aneil Rallin

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Aneil Rallin's *Dreads and Open Mouths: Living/Teaching/Writing Queerly* is a bracing work of scholarship and personal witness. Rallin's genre-blurring approach combines interventions in rhetoric and composition and queer and postcolonial theories with fragments of autobiography and critiques of state violence in the US and abroad. The text enacts and exposes the author's grief and pain, pleasures and desires, both formally and in terms of content. Taken as a whole, the project functions as a persuasive argument for the value of scholarly and personal writing that defies White, cis-heteropatriarchal, US-centric, corporatist and traditional academic standards, while bearing witness to the violence endured by queer people of color in the American academy and beyond. Yet though Rallin clearly conveys the personal and political hazards of overly rigid approaches to writing and writing instruction, they offer few concrete prescriptions for how the field of rhetoric and composition might better center queer, postcolonial, and anti-racist content and forms of expression while maintaining a commitment to the practical needs of first-year writers. This is a conscious choice on Rallin's part, but it limits the pedagogical purchase of their project, and the book's most sustained pedagogical argument—that "rhetorical risk-taking" ought to be a central feature of student writing and composition instruction (55)—is underdeveloped. Yet the queer power of the work is undeniable. *Dreads and Open Mouths* disrupts traditionalist assumptions about writing instruction and demands that rhetoric and composition do more to meet the needs of its queer and immigrant students and instructors, its students and instructors of color, and all of those whose bodies, pleasures, and literacies deviate from normative assumptions.

Like its argument, the form of Rallin's hybrid project is thoroughly anti-normative. Rallin's narration eschews traditional paragraphing and spacing in favor of fragmentary and often non-linear entries, "notes" (9) that are presented flush left and set off from each other with white space. The breaks between entries enact "ruptures that have been imposed by the law, the nation, global geopolitics, institutional structures, disciplines, genres, languages, authors, selves" (3). In so doing, these breaks represent the author's sense of dislocation and vulnerability as a queer immigrant of color in the United States. Each chapter begins with an epigraph—a quotation from a noted queer, postcolonial, or composition theorist. Similar quotations frame and punctuate each chapter's subsections, so that Rallin's memories and ruminations flow out of and into those of the many theorists who inspire them, in particular Gloria Anzaldúa, June Jordan, Eve Sedgwick, and Ian Barnard. This approach effectively contests the normative assumption that "good" writing is autonomous, the product of a single subject.

Chapter one, "Immigrant Crossings," explores, among other important themes, how fluency in American standard English is used to police the borders of the English classroom and the neoliberal

university, whose rigid standards of exclusion mirror those of the United States. Chapter two, “Taming Queer,” juxtaposes the forced apology of an NBC News reporter during the US invasion of Iraq against a campaign of harassment an anonymous critic mounted against Rallin’s queer and postcolonial theory-informed writing program pedagogy. Rallin’s supervisors support them, but because they do so by insisting that Rallin’s courses focus on writing rather than on race, gender, and sexuality, Rallin argues that their defense of their methods perpetuates a dominant discourse that surveils and regulates queer people of color (31).

Chapter three, “Queer Is Not A Substitute for Gay/Lesbian,” situates queerness as anti-normativity within Rallin’s experience on the academic job market. In one bracing anecdote, they inform a job committee that their course on queer film and video is going “disastrously” and are met with alarm (36). Another note recounts Rallin’s participation on a CCCC panel entitled “How Queer Can Writing Administration Be?” in which the other panelists elide anti-normative queerness with (often quite normative) gay, lesbian, bisexual, and trans experiences. Queer, for Rallin, is “oppositional, fragmentary, transgressive, multiply perverse” (44), and the form of the chapter, like that of the monograph, vividly enacts those anti-assimilationist, disruptive values. In chapter four, “Dreads and Open Mouths,” the narrative shifts perspectives, tracing an unnamed, third-person male narrator’s anguished relationship to writing in English to his sense of “diasporic displacement” (51), his implication in and fury about US state violence, and his frustration with the normalizing standards of traditionalist composition instruction, as exemplified by Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg’s *Negotiating Difference: Cultural Case Studies for Composition* (64).

Chapter five, “Desiring Queer Brown Boy,” offers a series of autobiographical sketches of a male narrator’s queer coming of age as a child in Bombay, and includes a wrenching allusion to his sexual abuse by a male teacher. Chapter 6, “Queer Unsettlings,” is an account of a second-person narrator’s dialogs with a boy—seemingly a stand-in for a part of Rallin, or perhaps Rallin’s unconscious—who quotes Sedgwick, expresses a desire for queer forms of linguistic and embodied expression, and shares in that desire with the chapter’s narrator (85). In chapter seven, “Dreads And Open Mouths II,” the narrator, variously employing the pronouns *he*, *she*, *they*, *you*, *I*, and *we*, returns to the theme of writing as a form of rupture that can mirror global catastrophes and state violence that too often go unacknowledged in the dominant discourses of North America. The chapter trenchantly exposes the ways the liberal academy’s transactional embrace of “multiculturalism” sustains the sociopolitical status quo (99), and argues that teachers of English must “open ourselves to our students’ manifold voices” (107) to better embrace students’ grammatical and syntactical differences, which reflect valuable linguistic fluencies and literacies.

In chapter eight, “Love Letters To Adrienne Rich,” the narrator continues to enact identarian and artistic fluidity by employing multiple pronouns, drawing on fragments of Rich’s poetry, and centering Rich’s insistence that “socially conscious citizens/thinkers/teachers/writers” must . . . monitor the centers of power, not . . . seek acceptance from them” (122). Chapter nine, “Can I Get A Witness?: Writing With June Jordan,” situates Rallin’s remembered attraction to a boy in Bombay who is ultimately murdered for being Muslim in relation to Jordan’s account of a neighbor boy who was beaten by the NYPD and another whose brother is murdered by the police. Rallin’s despair at the

ethnic violence that seems to be intensifying in India joins with their anguish at the violence being perpetuated against Palestinians by the Israeli state and against African-Americans and other people of color in the United States.

Chapter ten, “Rejecting Quietism /Acting Up,” details the objections of a narrator known as X to the 2013 decision on the part of the Conference on College Composition and Communication to hold its annual meeting in Indianapolis, despite Indiana’s efforts to pass anti-gay legislation. The narrator’s fury at the CCCC’s decision to go forward with the Indianapolis meeting in spite of these concerns leads them to wonder if “perhaps queer is invariably, always already . . . incompatible with all institutions?” (162). Chapter eleven, “(Anti)Climax,” extends the narrator’s concerns about marginalized humans to the plight of animals. The chapter ends with a provocative question: what if the suicides of LGBTQIA+ youth are caused not by “a fear of not fitting in, but the fear of being forced to fit in?” (173). Perhaps because of the capaciousness of its optic, this chapter lacks the rhetorical energy of the chapters that precede it—but then, as the title of the chapter suggests, and a body of work in queer theory argues, there is something quintessentially queer about failed or anticlimactic conclusions, conclusions that refuse to conform to normative expectations of completion. The book ends with a suitably anti-normative epilogue, a multiple-choice quiz whose rigid standards and wide range of possible answers throw into relief the absurdity of standardized testing regimes.

*Dreads and Open Mouths* has many rhetorical strengths, but it functions most powerfully as a work of queer rage, one that bears witness to the indignities experienced by a queer immigrant of color laboring within the neoliberal North American academy while contending with multiple forms of marginalization. Yet the polemical qualities that make the book such a vital and urgent read—its queer embrace of transgression, violation, disruption, and incompleteness—prevent it from offering more detailed pedagogical suggestions.

Rallin’s pedagogical claims are couched in general terms, but they remain vitally important. *Dreads and Open Mouths* calls attention to rhetoric and composition’s overinvestment in neoliberal values, its Whiteness, its traditional privileging of American standard English and concomitant lack of openness to vernacular forms of English and alternative literacies. Rallin contends, albeit implicitly at times, that it is a mistake to suppose that cultural analysis can ever be separated from writing instruction, and that all composition instruction ought to seek to upend the dominant discourses that secure White, neoliberal power. This is a compelling claim, one that every instructor of composition needs to take seriously, and Rallin’s depictions of their own use of cultural studies by queer theorists, many of whom are also theorists of color, point to how instructors might make readings in composition courses more representative of different experiences and abilities. Yet the complaints Rallin received as a writing teacher and administrator suggest that there are limits to how much cultural critique can be incorporated into composition instruction, especially first-year writing instruction.

Rallin’s most specific pedagogical claim is that teachers must encourage their students to indulge in rhetorical risk-taking. The claim appears as part of their teaching “manifesto” and reappears throughout the text: “He wants to teach in a way that will let his students take risks. He wants to encourage them to take risks. Risk excites him and he wants to dispel the myth often invoked into

enforcing conformity—only those with privilege can afford to take risks in/with writing” (55-56). Marginalized students, Rallin contends, are often not given the opportunity to experiment in their writing, and their intellectual explorations are frequently ignored, or worse, contested, by instructors.

Rallin is right to suggest that queer students, immigrant students, students of color, and *all* marginalized students ought to be encouraged to experiment formally and intellectually. Yet their argument on behalf of risk-taking fails to attend to the ways marginalized students can be endangered by instructors who take cavalier attitudes toward pain and trauma. I hasten to add that this not the sort of attitude Rallin evinces. Still, an example they cite approvingly points to the hazards of trauma *un*-informed pedagogy. “In class, the teacher asks all the students to list the one thing they are most afraid of. The list includes death, the loss of parents, fear of drowning, fear of being killed in car accidents, in plane crashes. He offers language” (58). As Janice Carello and Lisa D. Butler note, writing prompts that casually ask students to engage with painful episodes can be retraumatizing. In one study cited by the authors, “14% of his 105 students who self-disclosed personal traumatic experiences reported ‘feeling anxious, panicky, depressed, or suicidal—feelings serious enough to warrant clinical attention’” (158). Formal and critical experimentation in composition can and should be encouraged for all students, but it needs to be done so safely, through a trauma-informed pedagogy, the way that Rallin surely incorporates it into their instruction.

Ultimately, Rallin’s hybrid project is not a pedagogy manual, and it is unfair to suggest that it should be. Rallin’s work reminds us of the importance of queer and decolonial pedagogies and epistemologies at a moment when the North American, and especially the American, status quo has never seemed more intolerable. Rhetoric and composition needs more voices like Rallin’s—voices that are willing to challenge authority, to transgress and disrupt, to demand that the field do more to meet the needs of marginalized students and instructors. Readers should heed Rallin’s critiques, while attending to the work of scholars of rhetoric and composition like Adam Banks and Asao B. Inoue, whose work Rallin cites, for more information on how to balance the priorities of composition instruction and assessment and discursive critique.

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Book Review   *Writing for Love and Money: How Migration  
Drives Literacy Learning in Transnational Families*  
by Kate Vieira

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**W***riting for Love and Money* is a nuanced account of how increased global migration affects literacy learning in transnational families as they write for both economic survival and emotional connection from miles away. Kate Vieira explores how “migration-driven literacy learning” appears in the lives of transnational families in three contexts: Latvia, Brazil, and the United States. This is an account of the literacy practices not just of those who migrate, but also of the family members they leave behind. Vieira examines how print and digital technologies act as “writing remittances,” or “the communication hardware, software, writing practices, and literacy knowledge that migrant family members often circulate across borders” (4). How do those migrants’ family members take up these remittances in pursuit of both money and love? This book explores that question. Through her three ethnographic case studies, which make up three of the book’s chapters, Vieira finds that homeland residents experience digital literacy learning because of the remittances that their migrated loved ones send home, together forming a well of literacy resources. By tracing the way writing remittances travel across borders, Vieira outlines a complicated view of literacy. *Writing for Love and Money* suggests that literacy for transnational families is both something that is converted into economic growth and something that cannot be quantified: an emotional act between loved ones.

The traveling of the texts, technologies, and knowledge among transnational family members creates circuits across geopolitical borders. Transnational families do not build these circuits only as a response to injustice and pursuit of economic advancement. Yes, the motivation to migrate can involve the pursuit of economic mobility. However, the families that Vieira worked with also created these circuits for love—to provide support for migrated family members and to maintain kinship bonds across distance. In this way, Vieira powerfully shows how the literacy of migrants operates both outside of and in response to the economy: human connection and intimacy. Vieira presents three case studies: the first describes how migrated families members send technology home (Brazil), the second explains how writing remittances create political activism (Latvia), and the third shows how these transnational communications provide support in the physically and emotionally difficult act of migration. Together, these studies bring Vieira to a theory that writing remittances are one example of how familial motivations drive transnational literacy practices in both economic and intimate ways, contributing to collective digital literacy learning for homeland family members.

The first case study describes her interviews with transnational family members in Jaú, Brazil, a place marked by moderate out-migration. Ultimately, Vieira finds that “literacy and social class do not determine each other. Rather . . . class-based ideologies of literacy and the material realities

of stratified access to literacy often interact, texturing people's experience of learning (or not) to write in new ways to negotiate transnational family life" (79). Maria's experience illustrates this point. Maria's son, who had migrated from Brazil to Japan, sent her a laptop for them to use to communicate. Her local children helped her learn to use Skype. Together, this family, by way of sending, learning, and using digital literacy technology, formed a transnational circuit of literacy learning. The laptop represents both love and money, as her son's ability to buy it showed the economic pay-off for his migration, while it also represented a way for them to maintain their bond as mother and son. While remittances aided in migration-driven-literacy learning in this instance, Vieira is careful to note that these technologies did not transform homeland resident's material circumstances wholesale. Remittances functioned as one practice in a larger critical literacy about inequality that Vieira saw in the families she interviewed, noting how this circuit meant something different depending on the socioeconomic class of the family and the reason for their loved ones migration.

In the next case study, we turn to Vieira's time in Daugavpils, Latvia, a place marked by mass out-migration. In addition to writing remittances ability to "unite transnational families in an economic and emotional exchange," as the last case study showed, she argues that "the pedagogical experiences promoted by such exchanges often gain force, meaning, and urgency from the historical and contemporary political challenges that people use literacy to meet" (95). Drawing from several literacy history interviews, Vieira describes three ways that literacy experiences shifted historically and contemporarily based on Latvia's political shifts: 1) letter-writing during the Soviet regime to maintain contact with family members, 2) digital literacy practices that resulted from Latvia joining the European Union and subsequent migration to Western member states, and 3) anticipatory literacy learning, in which migrants "stockpiled" languages and literacies to prepare for seeming inevitable migration westward due to a post-2009 recession economy (95-96). Complicating the idea that homelands experience a loss of literate resources, Vieira argues that the transnational circulation of writing remittances that her participants discussed can "be viewed as one grassroots answer to unjust political economic policies" (126). This chapter shows the way that transnational families based in Latvia respond to political shifts: by finding new technologies and practices to make literacy a resource for them to pursue love and money.

The final case study turns from examining migrants' loved one's literacies to demonstrating the complexity of migrant's own literate lives in the US. Vieira's story of the way migration-driven-literacy-learning formed transnational circuits between family members continues. She explains,

The act of sending literacy remittances seemed to order the otherwise potentially chaotic trauma of separation, especially separation undertaken under circumstances of economic injustice, persecution, and fear. Literacy remittances appeared to form a connective tissue to homelands, a kind of reparative suture that aided in constructing a viable U.S. existence under state repression. (154)

Vieira reveals that the value of literacy was bidirectional in this chapter. For example, she observes how Oksana, one of her participants, both remitted and received literacy as she participated in her distant grandchildren's language education (151). She explains, "the act of sending literacy remittances seemed to order the otherwise potentially chaotic trauma of separation" by forming



a collective wealth of literacy resources from which all family members drew in their economic pursuits (Vieira 155).

Vieira ends by posing important questions for researchers, such as how the rise in technology since the time of her fieldwork might affect the use of remittances in Latvia, or how Brexit has affected Latvians learning of English (163). These questions show Vieira's commitment to putting individual and family literacies in their nation-state's political moments, such as war and economic decline, as well as contextualizing them through history. I add that future projects might question the relationship between transnational economic values that circulate across nation-states, such as neoliberalism, and families literacy practices. Vieira's contribution—that mass migration contributes to digital literacy learning by family connections—presents a way for literacy scholars to see the adaptive power of these families' literacies amid not only mass migration, but also all too frequent anti-immigration rhetoric and marginalizing policies. Vieira ends by writing directly to social-justice oriented educators, calling for them to draw on the love that already runs through students' out-of-school writing practices for cultivating "political subjectivities, critical awareness, and dialogic practices of literacy" (165). These calls make *Writing for Love and Money* a particularly useful piece for social-justice educators and those interested in transnational literacy practices to read. More than that, the at once beautiful and painful portraits of these families' literacies is a story that audiences who may not be familiar with the complexities of migrant families' material and literate lives would benefit from reading.

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