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Pre-service teacher discourses: Authoring selves through multimodal compositions

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Abstract:

This article explores the use of digital and multimodal compositions among preservice elementary education students in a university language and literacy methods course. Furthermore, this piece argues for the inclusion of multimodal representation in our literacy courses given the changes in our digital landscape and the ever-increasing multimodality of our representational and communicational means online. This research aligns with a burgeoning collection of literature, namely New Literacies (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007) and multimodality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). In addition, this research merges with 'traditional' print-based literacy pedagogies that argue for models of teacher learning that foreground opportunities to 'do' digital composition in order to more effectively prepare students for 21st century literacy skills in epistemologically diverse digital environments. A combination of discourse and multimodal analysis provides a means to couple both linguistic and semiotic data to examine how multimodal design functions in the construction of teacher identities and how the flexibility of these identities in turn work to prepare new teachers for successful transitions into public school cultures. In other words, how might the practice of multimedia production, and reflection on those processes, foster a deeper self-awareness during a time when students are moving from university settings into public schools? This article argues that multimodal text design is dialogic and purposeful with regards to constructions of teacher identities and highlights two 'Digital Literacy Projects,' multimodal video compositions designed and produced by preservice teachers with video editing software. The two DLPs contrast the potential for authors to stabilize and/or improvise formations of identity, both which create opportunities to engage in praxis that merge university experiences with public school responsibilities.

Keywords

Digital video, discourse, identity, improvisation, moving image, multimodality, preservice teachers, self-fashioning

Introduction

> *The space of authoring, of self-fashioning, remains a social and cultural space, no matter how intimately held it may become. And, it remains, more often than not, a contested space, a space of struggle.*
> Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain, 1998, p. 282.

In their work with preservice and practicing teachers, Alsup (2006) and Britzman (1999) offer complimentary arguments suggesting that the construction of 'a professional self'

is often complex and involves a melding of contradictory ideologies in order to contend with cultural norms that frequently position teachers in limited ways. A few examples of these normative forces include pressures to teach in scripted ways to prepare students for achievement on state and federally mandated standardized tests; to embrace school norms for 'classroom management,' following specific ways for how teaching and learning should look (i.e., quiet students in their seats equals a well-managed classroom); or to adopt curricular materials and pacing guides that dictate what and when and how content is covered. These examples are minute in scope considering a broader context of normative forces that new teachers often face early in their careers.

This research argues that multimodal design offers a compositional space for preservice teachers to prepare for the authoritative discourses they will likely encounter in schools by fostering increasing awareness about the cultural multiplicity they bring to the design and production of texts. In this piece, I contrast two case studies of multimodal design that function to represent authors in differing ways. The first text I argue worked predominantly to reinforce or 'stabilize' a particular *socially situated identity* (Gee, 1996; 1999)—that of an undergraduate college student at a large state-run university—by foregrounding intertextual components highly recognizable in the context of our undergraduate course. The second multimodal text, in comparison, I argue deviated from a more recognizable authorial position, resulting in playful 'improvisations' that created ambiguity in the readings of the text and in turn in the positioning of the author's socially situated identity. The juxtaposition of these two texts bring to bear the possibility for authorial agency, an awareness I argue can be transposed into other social contexts, namely school settings, preparing preservice teachers to face discursive and normative forces that run contrary to their own philosophical and pedagogical beliefs.

The origins of this project

Compelled by a growing body of literature that argues for expanding the notion of *literacy* in educational theory beyond reading, writing and speaking (Alvermann, 2002; Gee, 2003; Jewitt & Kress, 2003; Knobel & Lankshear, 2007), I designed a multimodal assignment while working with preservice elementary education majors to engage in what I tentatively called 'Digital Literacy Projects' (DLPs). I asked students to design 'personal narratives' using digital video editing software (iMovie), a tool affording them multiple modes of communication and representation—audio, video, still images and text (and various combinations of each).

The name *Digital Literacy Project* stuck over the course of five semesters; however, the ways they designed their DLPs shifted subtly as we explored a variety of multimodal genres, from digital storytelling and visual poetry to chronological photographic essays and more abstract visual responses to music selections. Yet throughout these shifts, generally speaking, their DLPs consistently took on the format of short digital movies approximately three to five minutes in length. I asked students to consider the exploration of different modes (text, audio, still and moving image and various combinations of each) as an opportunity to represent their thinking in ways not traditionally present in a literacy methodology course. Do these modes and the various modal combinations, for example, function differently regarding ways we represent ourselves and our thinking and if so, how? To 'assess' their thinking, I asked them to

self-evaluate using a form with criteria that ranged from their experiences learning new technology skills, their participation in a group effort, to their decisions to use or not to use multiple multimodal concepts—music as an emotional element, voice narration as an additional audio layer, mergers of still and moving images together, saturation and desaturation of visual imagery, etc. Furthermore, we created a rubric together—one that included the oral presentation of their project, the originality and thoughtfulness of the DLP, the effort or workload distribution (if working in a group), and the deliberate use of multiple modes to design their message—to help conceptualize the project for students as well as to loosely solidify my expectations of them during the creation of their Digital Literacy Projects.

In a class of approximately 30 undergraduate seniors, students typically established groups of three or four persons, though some chose to work individually, and shared the responsibility of deciding on a topic, brainstorming and scripting the project's design, collecting video footage, editing the footage in iMovie, giving and receiving feedback from peers and their instructor, and ultimately showcasing their final product during an end-of-the-semester 'film festival.' Yet, as Dewey (1938) argued, experience and learning are not synonymous, and over several semesters, discussion and written reflections served to further bring to the surface student thinking about the multiplicity of social identities and the various audiences and contexts in which we represent ourselves with the production of texts. Designing a text for an audience of peers in an undergraduate course, for example, will likely look different and serve different purposes than a text designed to share with family, or school faculty, or pen pals across the country.

In this particular writing pedagogy course, engaging in the creation of DLPs as a class presumed an underlying argument: *literacy* is a contested term, particularly in light of the ever-changing digital landscapes in which we communicate, an era that's been termed 'the new communicative order' (Street, 1998; Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996; Lankshear and Knobel, 1997; Snyder, 2004). Within this new communicative order, modes of communication and representation traditionally privileged in academia—writing, reading and speaking—are joined by an increasingly multimodal landscape, one that readily incorporates audio, video and still images. As Kress (2003: 3) explained, 'The combined effects on writing of the dominance of the mode of image and of the medium of the screen will produce deep changes in the forms and the functions of writing . . . *The world told* is a different world to *the world shown*'. In praxis then, creating DLPs in a preservice course represented a literacy practice that supplemented the print-based academic work students engaged in to represent their thinking and attempted to bridge their personal experiences with both traditional and multimodal composition *with* their developing ideas about how personal learning and future classroom instruction might be approached.

To further describe Digital Literacy Projects, I offer Hull and Nelson's (2005: 231) description of *digital stories*, which are 'multimodal and digital' and 'typically privilege a personal voice and allow participants to draw on pop culture and local knowledge'. Further, multimodal compositional processes can function, as LeCourt (1998: 283) wrote of different writing technologies, 'to denaturalize the forms and genres that seem so normal within an academic context'. Using this thinking, I assigned Digital Literacy Projects in an effort to expand and challenge longstanding academic norms for communication, namely those that value the academic essay as the premiere genre to represent thinking.

From August to December 2007, I interviewed 15 DLP authors, all previous elementary education students in my *Language and Literacy* course, about their experiences composing multimodal texts in a university classroom. For this study, I viewed interview transcript data, obtained through audio-recorded conversations with participants, with an analytical lens informed by Gee's (1999) approach to discourse analysis and with a theoretical frame rooted strongly in Bakhtin's (1981; 1986) writings about linguistic communication. More specifically, I used Holland et al's (1998) notion of *improvisation* to argue that authors designed multimodal texts in purposeful, intertextual and dialogic ways. Though primarily a study of preservice teacher discourse, I frequently reference the participants' multimodal Digital Literacy Projects themselves and suggest both a methodological and theoretical complementarity with Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996; 2001) social semiotic framework for addressing multimodality. Through this combinatory methodology, I explore various ways preservice teachers authored selves through the design of multimodal texts that:

1) Reinforced and stabilized *socially situated identities* (Gee, 1996; 1999), particularly that of 'undergraduate college student' within a literacy course in the field of elementary education; and

2) *Improvised* (Holland et al, 1998) individually nuanced representations of self, an 'authoring of self' that follows Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) dialogic conception of *self-fashioning.*

Conceptualizing how students produced texts in various ways, in this case to either stabilize or improvise on the socially situated identities of college student and future educator, proved productive for eliciting talk both about literacy as a ever-broadening notion and about the ability of persons to bring to light the ideological multiplicity to the multitude of social contexts they encounter. Polarizing texts into either stabilizing or improvising products is immediately flawed, as texts will function unpredictably; however, in the context of an undergraduate classroom, this distinction proved a productive tool with which to investigate design decisions made by multimodal authors.

Improvisation and the authoring of selves

The possibility for individual agency has remained a contentious topic highly disputed between theories of social- and self-determinism. Acknowledging strong leanings in favor of the former, the potential for individual agentive practices has however been argued by a number of researchers (Blommaert, 2005; Holland et al, 1998; Hull & Katz, 2006; LeCourt, 1998), namely situating agency *within* sociocultural and historically contingent structurings. Giroux (1996: 63), in theoretical reference to Judith Butler regarding agency and postmodernism, articulated well the notion of situating the term agency *within* and always in relation to broader discursive forces: 'The subject is constituted is not [the same as claiming] that it is determined; on the contrary, the constituted character of the subject is the very precondition of its agency'. In other words, an individual's own awareness of the forces acting upon her or his production as

a human subject is the very means by which she or he might in turn manipulate that production through various acts of agency.

Similarly, LeCourt (1998: 285) wrote of a multifarious human subject capable of 'mobilizing the multiplicity they bring to any cultural production'. LeCourt's concept of subject ideology hinges on diversity and the existence of multiple selves; therefore, the subject's ability to act with agency relies on her/his role as an 'active interpreter of ideology, a site of cultural negotiation herself, individuated in her relationship with ideology herself' (1998: 285).

Multiplicity itself doesn't guarantee agency, as LeCourt noted, but the theory of individual subjects as multiple and diverse allows critical theorists to consider specific discursive acts as agentive acts. The theoretical framework for notions of agency and identity in this study rests on the acknowledgement that individual acts of *self-authoring* are indeed bound intensely by broad sociocultural and discursive forces, yet are also performed through subtle (though potentially powerful) ways given the available linguistic and semiotic resources available. I borrow from Holland and her colleagues (1998: 127) this notion of self-authoring, a term grounded in Bakhtin's sociolinguistics, bringing to their conversation Gee's (1996; 1999) distinction between linguistic discourse and Discourses (with 'a big D') that include 'nonlinguistic' forms of communication and the possible combinations of '*saying-(writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing*'.

From a Bakhtinian stance, the potential for self-authoring exists through an incalculable *heteroglossia*—the simultaneous existence of multiple social languages and sets of values inherent in all communicative spaces. Thus, it's the diversity, and often contentious intensity, of the social world that require persons to orchestrate, through available cultural resources, ever-changing constructions of individual and collective identities. In this sense, I pursue an analytical focus in my data highlighting Holland et al's (1998) *improvisation*, a means through which humans are always in the process of shifting their representations of self towards others in dialogically purposeful ways, contingent on the sociocultural- and historically-constructed contexts of interaction. These improvisations are related to 'the processes whereby human collectives and individuals often move themselves—led by hope, desperation, or even playfulness, but certainly by no rational plan—from one set of socially and culturally formed subjectivities to another' (Holland et al, 1998: 7).

So even in highly specific contextual spaces, a university classroom for preservice teachers for example, there exists discourses between and among persons who author themselves towards multiple identities, often simultaneously and contradictory, in an ever-changing arrangement of resources that become available from a vast diversity of historical and cultural experiences and discourses, both public and private.

Furthermore, this performance of identity is always in an active state of movement, of *doing* rather than *being*, or in Gee's (1999: 24) words, '*doing being-or-becoming*,' and is also always contingent on the recognition by other participants. In this way, Gee likened his notion of Discourse to a dance, coordinated by authors in complex and often contentious ways or, to invoke a musical metaphor and highlight another frequently used term, 'orchestrated' (Bakhtin, 1981; Holland et al, 1998; Hull & Katz, 2006; Kress, 2003) by authors both within and against a set of sociocultural, historical and political constraints.

To illustrate this sense of audience, or what Bakhtin (1986: 94) called 'addressivity'—the notion that every individual utterance 'is constructed in anticipation of encountering response' —during their Digital Literacy Projects, I share a brief introductory segment of interview transcript from Sidney, an author who, along with another student, chose to create a tribute in response to the Virginia Tech shootings, a tragic event that occurred during that particular semester.

> *Sidney*: We were kind of worried that it was almost too serious . . . I think we're both pretty bubbly and just happy and it just kind of surprised us that we both picked an event that was so devastating . . . it was the type of seriousness, it was something devastating and gruesome and we chose to do that . . . We didn't want people to think we had this inner torment going on. (Interview, October 23, 2007).

Sidney's comments point to a conscious awareness of her audience, an awareness which ultimately created some anxiety about how the DLP would be received and what it might say about the authors (i.e., Do they have some sort of 'inner torment going on'?).

Sidney's anxiety about the reception of her DLP by her peers is indicative of a Bakhtinian addressivity, a theoretical notion that shares complementarity with the dynamic and interactive quality of Gee's Discourse and with the notion that performance of identity is always a practice of *becoming*. Utterances (and the possibilities for individual human expression) are always dialogic, requiring the participation of others, and occur within spaces that for Bakhtin (1981; 1986) contain multiple and contradictory social languages (heteroglossia), and for Gee include also all the other nonlinguistic 'stuff' that collide and make up his 'Big D' Discourses—*saying(writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing* combinations. For both, historical and political contexts determine social positions, but the flexibility, and I argue the fragile possibility for human agency, is located in our *doing*, our *performance*, our *becoming* of those social identities. These are dynamic spaces where struggles for expression, voice and identity spill out into our interactions with the world.

This has implications for new teachers seeking to establish themselves within cultural norms of school settings within which they begin to teach. To be recognized as a teacher requires *doing* specific teacher things; for example, wearing the 'right' clothes, saying the appropriate things to colleagues and administrators, interacting with students in specific ways. These performances often operate somewhat in contrast with teacher ideologies outside of school settings. Navigating an established discipline system in place at a particular school might, for example, run contrary to a young teacher's philosophy about classroom and behavior management. The potential for anxiety regarding prevailing Discourses in schools and the ability to articulate and act in dissimilarity to these institutions runs parallel, with a pedagogy that emphasizes reflective practices, to the design of digital texts that represent university students in certain ways among their peers.

Sidney's anxiety to create something 'too serious' is reasonably attributable to a prevailing Discourse in our classroom regarding what undergraduate life should look like—i.e., 'having the time of your life' or 'Girls just want to have fun' (written descriptions in our DLP film festival program, Spring, 2007)—a Discourse also supported by the predominance of playful, hopeful and light-hearted Digital Literacy

Projects. This noticing led me to question how authors assess the potential for 'successful' individual expression, particularly when they anticipate expressions to clash in some ways with prevailing Discourses.

Bakhtin (1981) wrote of a dialogic tension between *centripetal* forces (those discursive forces that work to centralize, unify and nucleate a maximum of mutual understanding) and *centrifugal* forces (those that stratify, decentralize and de-unify communication). Centrifugal forces emerge often from what Bakhtin (1981: 345) called our *internally persuasive discourses* and associated utterances that challenge *authoritative discourses*:

> When someone else's ideological discourse is internally persuasive for us and acknowledged by us, entirely different possibilities open up. Such discourse is of decisive significance in the evolution of an individual consciousness: consciousness awakens to independent ideological life precisely in a world of alien discourse surrounding it.

Sidney and her coauthor's decision to author a 'serious' response to a 'gruesome' massacre reflects, in various subtle ways, an internally persuasive discourse amidst sociocultural, historical and political forces that constrained their Digital Literacy Project design within a limited range of social performances recognizable as *doing being-or-becoming* undergraduate students at the end of their college career.

Holland et al (1998: 191) wrote that our 'space for authoring' selves is indeed defined by the sociocultural and political forces at play, yet not completely predetermined. In this sense, the Holland's space for authoring suggests that persons are not capable of choosing whatever subjective stance they want at any given time; rather, humans are bound by our 'history-in-person,' our past experiences upon which we may improvise using the cultural resources at hand. This improvising is furthermore limited to the subject positions available at any given moment, 'The constraints are overpowering, yet not hermetically sealed. Improvisation can become the basis for a reformed subjectivity' (Holland et al, 1998: 18). It is through this art of improvisation that Holland and her colleagues (1998) argued individual authorial agency can occur, an improvisation that occurs always within the available space of authoring where multiple *social languages* (Bakhtin, 1981; Gee, 1996) collide in heteroglossia and where identity constructions ceaselessly oscillate between spheres both private and public. I build on Holland et al's (1998) idea of improvisation in this study, suggesting that preservice teachers authored multimodal representations of self in ways that both reinforced existing identities (i.e., undergraduate college student) *and* improvised more personally-nuanced individual authorings towards multiple other, often contradictory, identities.

In turn, questions arose as we talked together about their DLPs—What type of learning about literacy instruction is occurring, if any? How might they draw on student interest and creative self-expression in appropriate and instructionally productive ways? What pedagogical and ethical responsibilities will they face as new teachers when students create multimedia pieces from popular culture that exhibit values in conflict with the values of teachers, administration, or family?—questions that fueled discussions aimed beyond the confines of their university course and more towards future classroom teaching.

Participant selection

My research focused on preservice teachers willing to discuss their experiences producing multimodal texts in an undergraduate level course I instructed in the field of literacy education. To recruit participants, I emailed approximately 100 former undergraduate students who had previously engaged in the creation of DLPs with me as their instructor. Seventeen participants agreed, two who no longer worked in the field of education for various reasons. *Purposeful sampling* (Patton, 2002) provided a suitable strategy for selecting participants who met a certain criteria (former DLP author presently in the field of education) and a sample size (15 participants) small enough to study research questions with considerable qualitative depth. Data were collected primarily through interviews using multimedia elicitations of participant-produced work as entryways into open-ended interviews.

Qualitative interviewing

I utilized in-depth semi-structured interviews as my primary method of data collection, using an interview guide with predetermined questions, though allowing flexibility within this approach consistent with that of informal conversational interviews. This strategy pursues open-ended discussions that emerge from talking with participants in settings that allowed me to actively engage and follow relevant topics of discussion, as well as unexpected issues that deviated from the interview and research question guide. This flexibility was advantageous for several reasons: it opened the research to possibilities for new questions, interpretations, and understandings; it foregrounded the co-construction of knowledge between researcher/participant during the interview; and it highlighted the contextual and social contingencies of the interview process.

Multimedia elicitation

I also employed *multimedia elicitation* within the interview process, asking each participant to view and respond to her own Digital Literacy Project. Patton (2002: 394) described this technique as a category of 'creative qualitative modes of inquiry,' particularly as a 'projection technique', one in which participants react to something other than a question. This proved particularly useful as it elicited conversations specific to the making and viewing of multimedia pieces. Second, it offered a 'mutual visual context' (Taylor, 2002) that both researcher and participant could respond to, providing specific points for further clarification.

Discourse analysis

Informed by Gee's (1999) approach to discourse analysis, I examined linguistic data through a lens that questioned what and how preservice teachers made relevant (i.e., objects, places, values, beliefs) through the composition of their multimodal DLPs. Gee's conception of Discourse also includes nonlinguistic 'stuff,' and I found it productive to couple his 'tools of inquiry,' namely *intertextuality* as it relates to Discourse, with analytic tools that examine the semiotic work being done by specific modes (i.e., still imagery, moving images, sound and text). Both, a linguistic and semiotic view, allowed me to study various ways authors combined resources in purposeful and individually authorial ways. In turn, how these purposeful designs functioned to position

authors in specific ways is at the heart of this study; it can be transposed onto how young teachers might become increasingly self-cognizant of their role in the ongoing, dynamic construction of self in school settings.

Procedurally, I gathered, transcribed and analyzed interview data in efforts to expound on and theorize how students conceptualized the DLPs in relation to previous experiences in and out of academic contexts, and in turn how they perceived digital compositions working to construct their sense of selves as *undergraduate college students*, *elementary school teachers*, other less prominent identities and/or composites of multiple identities. More specifically, my analysis took root in Gee's (1999) discourse analysis, emphasizing research questions that foreground how individuals and groups build identities (sometimes stabilizing and other times transforming them within contexts of specific Discourses). This polarity, however, between stabilization and transformation, is not as reductive a dichotomy as it may sound. Rather, self-authoring towards specific identities occurs on a complex spectrum, often in highly nuanced ways, and often simultaneously towards multiple identities that collide against one another. Among Gee's discourse analysis tools, *intertextuality*, and a companion term Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) called *provenance*, provided specific analytical lenses through which I examined collections of data.

Gee's (1999) discourse analysis also allowed for an initial inductive coding that paired common linguistic themes within interview transcript data (and DLP descriptions written by preservice teachers during the making of their multimodal texts). More specifically, I point to linguistic representations within the data that offer insight into the individually authorial *work* being done both discursively and semiotically by preservice teachers in ways both stabilizing for and improvising upon various identities within the social context of our literacy education classroom.

Stabilizing social identities of 'college student': An example DLP

U.H.: University of Harrisburg[1]
Who Let the Hawks Out observes the atmosphere, environment, and residents of Harrisburg, home of the Harrisburg Hawks, and shows how the two simple words that express the sentiments of the entire Hawk Nation are evident in all that you encounter on any given day through art, photography, fashion, and structures on campus and downtown Harrisburg. Those two words…GO HAWKS!
DLP 'Film festival' program description, Spring, 2006.

Consider this segment of transcript data involving a Digital Literacy Project author named Leslie who created a piece entitled 'U.H.' to highlight what she believed are 'the great things' about her university, a piece she stated 'encompassed everything I love about this university.'

John: If you were to try to sort of summarize what your message or your story is in this piece, how would you do that?

Leslie: I would say it's, you know, I guess it's about going to college and stuff and things that are important but it's not one thing about a place that makes it special, it's a combination of many different

elements, whether that is education or friends or family or places, there's a lot of things that make one thing special to a person.

John: Do you think that message that you were trying to send was received or interpreted by other people in the cohort?

Leslie: I think so, probably because they were in it and they got to share things that they love cause I didn't prompt them at all to say what they said. To see, you know, that a lot of them maybe thought football, but also said the McCall Education Building cause I would cut and paste what they said and break it up cause I just let them talk as much as they wanted to. They could see that a lot of people had the same feelings that they did, and to be able to tape what one person said and they might say McCall or the school of education or football and another person said the same thing it kind of shows across the board that everybody feels the same way.

I discovered, with some enthusiasm, that Leslie herself had produced a sort of mini-qualitative study with her piece, interviewing all the members within her cohort regarding 'what they loved most' about the university and about being a student, then creating a representation of her findings through a DLP that blended her personal experiences with patterns she noticed in interview comments from peers. I focused initially on her phrase, 'everybody feels the same way,' namely because it presents a relatively hyperbolic and centripetal conception of what university life as an education major in our cohort looked like.

Applying Gee's (1999) discourse analysis, I took similar chunks of language (words and phrases) and asked what assumptions were being made about student life, and in turn what 'stuff' was excluded from this conception of *being* an undergraduate. Leslie's statement, 'It's a combination of many different elements, whether that is *education* or *friends* or *family* or *places*, there's a lot of things that make one thing special to a person' (italics added), contains general and nominally abstract terms that, though she considers them 'different elements,' are referenced in highly specific ideological ways through her Digital Literacy Project. Mentioning football repeatedly, for example, works to provide an ideological reference point, an intertextuality working on multiple levels to connect Leslie with a more localized social importance of the activity within her cohort, along with a broader solidarity celebrating a sense of belonging with the university and furthermore the national phenomenon of football fandom common at large state-run universities. These different elements belong to a similar discourse describing what university undergraduate student life looks like, and Leslie's process of associating herself in specific ways with education (and the university institution as a whole), with places (the college of education) and with activities (football) is purposeful, each of these for her possessing relevant, meaningful and significant commonality among the cohort.

This assertion is reinforced by a descriptive absence of experiences differing in appearance (i.e., higher education as culturally, monetarily or academically challenging for students), and in turn, by an exclusion of 'non-traditional' student activities (i.e.,

returning to school for degrees at various stages in life or working in a number of employment capacities to pay for school). It's no accident that Leslie didn't focus on other sports, riding horses or gymnastics for example, as they lacked the threads within the classroom to weave as strong a centripetal tone of solidarity in her piece. The absence of these specific components, coupled by making explicitly relevant other more centering activities (i.e., football), functioned to reproduce the Discourse for a particular type of university student by reinforcing what is easily recognizable among her cohort as culturally valuable. In this sense, Leslie was aligning her 'internally persuasive discourse' with already existing authoritative forces defining culturally central ideological values.

To elaborate on how the presence of certain intertextual elements (and the absence of others) work to centripetally center an authoring of self towards a particular identity of college student, I turn to Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001) term *provenance*, a term sharing with intertextuality the practice of recontextualizing materials and the inevitable referencing of other Discourses. Provenance elicits a complete discourse, though not explicitly, and therefore leaves room for ambiguity and subjective interpretation. 'Nevertheless, these ideas and values are usually important to the 'place' which has created the provenance sign, and they are associated with strong feelings' (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001: 73). To illustrate, consider again a segment from Leslie's transcript data.

John: In terms of the song that you used, did you know that you wanted to use it?

Leslie: I did, the Joe Maloy song, *Every Hawk has Its Day*, encompasses the great part of Harrisburg. It's a song that I think anybody who goes to Harrisburg University or went to Harrisburg could listen to without getting chill bumps, so I couldn't think of a better song. I thought about using a different song, one of his songs and I kind of immediately thought of Joe Maloy because he writes so many songs that pertain to Harrisburg and he has such a love for Harrisburg and I thought, well, he loves Harrisburg so much, I mean, why do I, why do you love U.H.? I have to put him in there because he's just like Mr. Harrisburg Man altogether. I went to one of his concerts one time and watching him talk about loving Harrisburg and it was the biggest concert he had ever done. It was in the Harrisburg Center, I mean he got so emotional talking about the place and then he performed that song last and I mean, you couldn't, you almost cried, it was so awesome to see him do that so there's not a better song that I could have chosen.

John: I think it was very fitting, too. You said something that's really interesting to me. What he produces, like his music and the way, what he talks about and what he chooses to say, kind of represents his interests and what he finds important, and you even called him, you know, Mr. Harrisburg Man. Do you think that what you produced in this text, um, influenced how people see you as a person?

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Leslie: The girls in the cluster, I mean of course immediately when they saw they were like Leslie had to do this one because I adore Harrisburg and I'm kind of crazy about it, but I think they saw, they got to see parts of things that I love, of course everybody loves football, but they'd have to see places on campus that they might not have realized or you know, friends that I have that they don't know, but they might have met, but I think they got to see different parts of why I love U.H. not just the football and the Blue and Grey {newspaper}, you know, it was all these things combined into one, but I think it was very, I think they had a good impression of who I was before they saw this, but they saw that this fit me really well.

John: So maybe it reinforced what they already knew?

Leslie: What they already knew, definitely. They know I'm kind of crazy about [Harrisburg]. I actually showed it to my parents for the first time a couple weekends ago and my dad just laughed he was like, 'Oh my gosh, this is so you. I totally expected all that.' But, you know, I think all of it combined with the music, and a lot of my friends that they know or girls from the cluster that they know, they got to see everything that I love combined into one, so it was a good opportunity, I guess it's gonna be nice for me to look back and for them to look back and for me to show my kids maybe one day, 'This is why I love Harrisburg and hopefully you'll have that experience one day too.'

Given the strong tone of solidarity within her piece, it's reasonable to assume that Leslie's production was designed dialogically in concert with the centripetal values and beliefs of the cohort as a group, or what Leslie believed to be the cultural norms that worked to define *being* a particular type of college student (a 'normal' undergraduate) within the context of our classroom. In this sense, Leslie's DLP worked to stabilize the identity of a university student, one situated within a particular Discourse. First, using Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001) provenance as an analytic tool, Leslie referenced a particular historical event in the past (the concert) in which a notable person ('Mr. U.H. Man') performed a specific activity (talked and sang a song about 'loving Harrisburg'), resulting in an emotional response ('you almost cried'). For Leslie, this experience contributed to her 'history-in-person' (Holland et al, 1998), in turn functioning also for Leslie to appropriate this sense of emotionality in her own DLP by choosing a song 'that I think anybody who goes to Harrisburg University or went to Harrisburg could listen to without getting chill bumps.' The provenance of the Mr. U.H. Man's song is one of pride for the institution and a strong, even emotional, sense of solidarity among those who attend. In this sense, Leslie intentionally, though implicitly, authored herself through recontextualizing and appropriating another text into her Digital Literacy Project.

Not only did Leslie author herself as student through intertextuality by referencing the past, she made relevant this identity by 'building connections' (Gee,

1999) to future interactions with Discourses outside the current situation ('to show my kids maybe one day, 'This is why I love Harrisburg and hopefully you'll have that experience one day, too''). Leslie's authoring of self then reinforces an identity that simultaneously coincides with future notions of self (i.e., as parent, as mother, as active alumni for the institution). In addition, Leslie's DLP design served to solidify her sense of self (in relation to others) in the present moment of its production both inside and outside of our classroom. 'The girls in the cluster, I mean of course immediately when they saw {it} they were like Leslie had to do this one . . . I think they had a good impression of who I was before they saw this, but they saw that this fit me really well.' Through Gee's conception of Discourse—*saying(writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing*—Leslie's ability to produce a DLP that 'fit' her is attributable to a successful coordination of elements, an orchestration of available cultural resources recognizable within and across multiple Discourses.

Improvising social identities through Digital Literacy Projects

The previous DLP example illustrated an authoring of self that reinforced certain specific perceptions of identity within a university teacher course, namely the role of 'undergraduate college student.' This particular self-authoring utilized certain sociocultural discourses and practices, analyzed through a Bakhtinian lens and with Gee's (1999) specific 'inquiry tool' of intertextuality, to *stabilize* specific representations of self in our classroom. Though the previous DLP text, from a Bakhtinian perspective, undoubtedly possessed complex 'multi-voiced' utterances orchestrated in purposeful ways, I argue in regards to identity building that it leans heavily towards more 'monologic' interactions between individual internally persuasive discourses and the authoritative discourses at play in our preservice classroom.

In other words, Leslie's particular 'authoring of self' aligned with what she perceived to be well-recognized versions of undergraduate student *doings*, the practices and discourses that are in turn recognizable as components of certain college student identities (Gee, 1999). In its design, Leslie's DLP both unconsciously aligned with preexisting cultural/Discourse models (Alsup, 2006; Britzman, 1991; Gee, 1996; 1999) about student and teacher identities and consciously and actively reinforced Discourses the authors found valuable and productive to establish these social positions (and likely a mixture of both).

I argue, in contrast, that this next example showcases a strikingly different use of available cultural resources within the Discourses and practices of our university classroom, seen comparably through this DLP's intertextuality—references to other 'texts' outside the classroom, and therefore the inevitable reference to other utterances, other voices and identities, and other discourses. This next DLP example shows evidence of a playfulness with the available cultural materials, a degree of risk-taking, and a willingness to composite multiple (and contradictory) identities into a singular utterance, all of which I argue open spaces for a resourceful, improvisational and ideologically complex authoring of self. In turn, the opportunity for discussion in class that addresses the multiplicity of selves exemplified through multimodal text production and how that multiplicity might come to play when making professional and pedagogical decisions in future classrooms allowed us to talk explicitly about various competing forces students experienced during their preservice field experiences. How do student teachers tactfully voice beliefs that oppose, for example, the use of popular competitive

reading programs that provide extrinsic rewards to students in a school setting where this practice is firmly established and practiced by their mentors?

E! True Hollywood Story: You Snooze, You Lose

This Digital Literacy Project, created by a preservice student in our classroom named Amy, contrasted the previous example most strikingly with its use of humor, a focus that included relatively esoteric comedic content intended for the appreciation by the two moviemakers themselves, as well as a complex layering of multiple humorous elements (some juxtaposing iconic images and politically sensitive social issues within an overall tone of parody). Arguably, Amy's approach to her Digital Literacy Project involved appropriating and combining 'social languages' from a variety of mainstream media sources, a 'hybridization' leaving considerable room for a wide range of interpretive responses regarding the authors' intentions, and in this way differing from the 'monologic' authoring performed with the previous pieces. Bakhtin (1981: 358) characterized hybridization as 'a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses', and through Amy's DLP there is evidence of a unique, individualized juxtaposition of elements.

Amy's DLP premise started with an Oprah Winfrey-like spoof and developed into a parody about the practice of alarm clock snoozing, a 'highly addictive' problem of 'epidemic' proportions facing our global society. As she continued to develop her idea, she soon dropped out of a collaborative group to fully pursue the project's design on her own. She expressed she didn't want to impose her ideas on others, and though we didn't talk specifically about this decision during the interview, she alluded to the potential for a different creative experience by working alone, one allowing her to pursue a more singular comedic vision in her design. In addition, she had the technical help of her brother, also an undergraduate at the university, whom she leaned on for software assistance outside of class, and whom she 'bonded with' during the making of the piece. This 'outside' relationship and collaboration becomes especially relevant as it adds an additional layer of complexity to the design and production of the text. Not only is the content for Amy's piece immediately more open to a variety of interpretive response, it is authored by an 'insider'/'outsider' team, at once heightening the potential for 'multi-voiced' combinations and a self-authoring 'replete with contradictions' by its simultaneous attention towards multiple audiences, or likewise, an attention to a singular audience perceived differently through insider/outsider statuses.

Again, Gee's (1999) approach to discourse analysis brought a certain complementarity to Bakhtin's (1981; 1986) notion of the *always* dialogic and appropriated utterance, and it allowed me to apply the same inquiry tool (intertextuality) when comparing and analyzing different DLPs and the linguistic discourses within my interview data. Intertextuality (in its linguistic and nonlinguistic forms) has an intimate connection with the art of improvisation. Amy's movie, for example, blended a wide range of media genres together—primetime news reporting, reality TV, straight documentary, realistic and absurd parody—to create a 'multi-voiced' mini-mockumentary reminiscent in ways to satirical Saturday Night Live skits. The design and production of the piece was, using Amy's words, 'highly scripted' and intentional, involving decisions about musical score selections and the use of dramatic effects (i.e., desaturating digital film into black and white segments to juxtapose ones in color).

Again, it's noteworthy to attend to the 'outside' collaboration Amy enlisted, one bringing a new set of technology skills to her multimodal production that contrasted the general level of familiarity with this new composing software in our classroom. This is no small contribution, particularly as it brings to light a specific set of skills, a 'literacy' that arguably afforded these authors greater openings in which to 'play,' a Vygotskian concept Holland et al (1998) borrowed to underscore their notion of improvisation.

Holland et al (1998: 270), considering the development of identity, highlighted 'the dense interconnections between the intimate and public venues of social practice'. In addition, they referenced Vygotsky in two important ways. First, they argued that the 'space for authoring' (the social context in which authors orchestrate or 'improvise' available cultural elements for their dialogic utterances) is connected to Vygotsky's zone of proximal development: 'The 'voices' that make up a space of authoring are to an 'author' as Vygotsky's instructing adults are to the neophyte: they do not so much compel rote action as extend, through their support, the competencies, the 'answerability,' of persons to operate in such a diverse yet powerful social universe' (Holland et al, 1998: 272). In this way, they defined identity as a spectral movement between the private and the public spheres, in which personal authorship, always dialogic and attending to others, can be performed through 'play' (the second important reference to Vygotsky's work), or the art of *improvisation*, 'compulsory and liberatory, in degrees that vary greatly' (1998: 272) and through which Holland and her colleagues situated their definition for human agency.

Amy's particular use of *intertextuality*, how she shifted between authored-selves in a highly 'multi-voiced' text, and how she saw herself and her text in relation specifically to the others in the cohort (the situated 'responsivity' of her text) all set it apart from the previous two examples. For example, I asked Amy about the song selections they chose and if they had made those decisions to reinforce certain messages. She laughed and recalled the moment she decided to sync Bob Dylan's 'Everybody Must Get Stoned' with footage of an interviewee saying, 'I just have to hit it,' drawing deliberately on a clichéd drug reference. Responding to whether she thought her audiences picked up on her intended comedic nuances during the single showing of the film, she again laughed and told a story of her parents' neighbor expressing uncertainty about how to interpret the piece: 'My dad took the video to our next door neighbor and said, 'I think you really need to watch this.' And he, our next door neighbor was like, 'Are you serious?' I mean, cause it was just very realistic I guess.' Her neighbor's interpretive ambiguity, in some ways, pays homage to a successful orchestration of elements within the movie and its ability to leave under question the intentions behind the deliberate appropriations of other mainstream media sources. In this way, Amy and her brother draw on various modal 'affordances' within a culturally common multimodal discourse (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001), primarily referencing mainstream television media.

This improvisation utilizes the various material and cultural resources at hand and is consistent with both Gee's (1996; 1999) and Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001) notion of discourses involving multiple, often nonlinguistic, modes of expression. To highlight the multimodal work being done within this DLP, and ultimately to bridge it with Bakhtin's sociolinguistics and Gee's Discourse, I depart briefly from a linguistic focus into a multimodal discourse analysis (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001) and draw attention to elements of design that provide evidence for internally persuasive discourses that functioned in ways different from the previous example, ways that challenged centripetal forces of an authoritarian discourse.

For example, when asked what she gained from creating black and white segments in her piece, Amy answered, 'Kind of the feeling of realistic dream. If that makes sense. Something very serious that happened, and I guess that's why I was thinking black and white, and it's so dramatic I feel like sometimes it's so much more dramatic than color and a little more depressing. So I think that's why I chose to do it, to set the mood.' This answer aligns with what Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) refer to as part of a general (though contextually contingent) 'grammar of visual design.' For example, saturation affects an image's 'modality,' or its perceived 'realness,' and the participant's articulation for choosing to desaturate footage fits Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996:233) description of saturation as an element of visual design grammar:

> Its key affordance lies in its ability to express emotive 'temperatures', kinds of affect. It is a scale that runs from maximum intensity of feeling to maximally subdued, maximally toned-down, indeed neutralized feeling. In context this allows many different more precise and strongly value-laden meanings. High saturation may be positive, exuberant, adventurous, but also vulgar or garish. Low saturation may be subtle and tender, but also cold and repressed, or brooding and moody.

However, it is important to understand that semiotic concepts and terms such as saturation, modality, or salience, when applied to an analysis of moving image, are productive only when that analysis also accounts for the social and cultural contexts through which the videotext is produced and viewed. For this I combine a multimodal approach (Kress, 2003; Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996; van Leeuwen, 1996) with a New Literacy Study focus (Gee, 1996) on local and global sociocultural forces at play. As Street (2006) suggests, these two approaches to literacy studies are well-suited to inform each other in productive ways—the multimodal work of Kress (Kress, 2003; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996) calling for a 'grammar' with which to linguistically describe and analyze multimodality, and New Literacy Studies seeking a language that builds on the tradition of ethnography and foregrounds the ever-changing social practices of literacy. About bridging the two approaches, Pahl and Rowsell (2006: 8) write:

> What the New Literacy Studies brings to multimodality is that it avoids the essentializing of visual and linguistic forms. It sees them as in-process. Texts are constantly moving and changing . . . We need the multimodal in the New Literacy Studies in order to understand texts as material objects. Multimodality gives an analytic tool to understand artifacts'.

Further complementarity resides in a mutual acknowledgement that changes in information and communication technologies continue to fuel literacy practices towards more multimodal forms of representation.

Amy's 'play' is performed through her DLP text, a singular representational utterance, orchestrated by combining various modes used to both reinforce specific intended meanings within perceived Discourses and to improvise how those modes might be pushed and manipulated to juxtapose meanings. The improvisation, specifically, increased the risk of presenting obscure and challenging ideas and values, and worked to express an internally persuasive discourse that embraced a multiplicity of voices, of various social identities. It challenged an authoritative discourse defining

preexisting singular and highly recognizable social positions within our preservice course.

The multimodal nature of the piece afforded a visually- and audially-driven intertextuality within her piece, but also created a certain *risk* for self-authoring within the specific social space of our teacher ed classroom. When I asked Amy what she thought the project said to other people about who she was as a person, she responded generally that 'humor' and 'creativity' were what came to mind; in other words, she believed her piece reinforced the ways her cohort peers had already come to see her 'personality.' At the same time however, while Amy expressed a strong sense of pride in her final project, she also recalled an intense feeling of anxiety when showing the piece for the first time. 'I felt kind of bad because it was taking a very serious issue and making light of it. I mean, addictions in general. I felt a little bad about that, but I think we went totally so much with humor that I don't think anyone took offense to it really.'

When pressed to elaborate on why she felt 'bad,' she explained, 'Well, because you always hear about, you know, cocaine addicts and crack addicts, and I've had friends who have gone through rehab and everything. It's a very serious issue, and you know, we had some images in there of some guys shooting up heroin on the street and we're treating snoozing as a serious addiction that causes family break-ups and dropping out of school and it's not.' Amy also juxtaposed 'the addiction of snoozing' voice-over narrative with iconic images of malnourished third-world children. Her anxiety is no surprise, though it speaks to her awareness of the multiple voices she blended together in her design.

In this sense, an awareness of tension, of the juxtaposition between iconic images and the hope for 'using humor strong enough that it didn't offend people' legitimated her satire with a personal justification of appropriateness. We might look to current comparisons regarding this genre, namely television comedy shows, in which politically sensitive topics are recontextualized in 'spaces of authoring' that elevate the use of humor to legitimate a sense of ironic parody, often with issues taboo in other contexts. In this way, Amy's DLP can be seen as much an improvised authoring of self shifting her from a position superficially inhabiting a student with a 'really funny personality,' a 'cut-up' within the cohort, to that of an author possessing abilities to weld sophisticated and multi-dimensional comedic texts that challenged the superficiality of her position. Her parody on addiction is in fact a parody on the discourses of mainstream media, and her skillful representation with a collection of media strategies used frequently to guide viewers created a powerful satirical message about the very making of media itself, regardless of how consciously Amy intended that 'critical media' message to be.

Yet it's in this resourceful accessing of other medias, other social languages, that Amy's piece becomes a representation filled with the 'echoes of others' and replete with contradictions between multiple voices of self—simultaneously building on the fun-loving, witty personality and yet inevitably brushing up against other voices and identities, including those of a serious college student, an intimately connected family member, a future elementary school teacher with sophisticated technology prowess, and an author balancing 'creative expression' with an awareness and sensitivity to multiple audiences. Bakhtin's addressivity makes complicated the production of text for more than one audience simultaneously; yet, as Britzman (1991: 21)) wrote, it is through the utterances of internally persuasive discourse that a person 'pulls away from the norms and admits a variety of contradictory social discourses,' and internally persuasive

discourse 'is opened during times of spontaneity, improvisation, interpretive risks, crises and when one reflects upon taken-for-granted ways of knowing'.

Concluding thoughts

In many ways it is a dangerous representation of data to interpretively create dichotomizing categories of 'stabilizing' and 'improvising' performances of identity with these DLP examples and the authors' interview responses. For example, though I argue that Amy's piece presents a text in which her internally persuasive discourse is expressed through acts of improvisation with the design and production of her DLP (one which challenged discursive and authoritative norms), she also reinforced her own pre-existing 'personality,' described as witty and humorous, through the use of parody in her piece. Likewise, though the first DLP example offered evidence of self-authorings that functioned primarily to reinforce specific culturally scripted identities of student, it also demonstrated an awareness of future audiences outside our classroom, *building connections* (Gee, 1999) to future Discourses by acknowledging for example the transition from the role of college student to that of mother and supporting alumni. Indeed there are complexities that become reduced in analysis, much like the inevitable incompleteness of any communicative event (Bakhtin, 1981; Kress, 2003), regardless of an author's skillful orchestration of linguistic or semiotic materiality. Our utterances, our voices and our construction of identity are always dialogic and contingent on the interaction and interpretation of others within specific social settings.

However, Gee (1996: 102) wrote that it is 'by stressing the inevitable multiplicity and indeterminacy of interpretation that the rest of us can resist domination' and the constraints of authoritative discourses that through cultural models work to define certain identities and marginalize others. In her work, Alsup (2006: 6) suggested that preservice teachers must 'negotiate conflicting subject positions and ideologies while creating a professional self' to counter what Britzman (1999) considered the 'myth of normalcy' positioning teachers into limited ways of being.

Discourse, with its many components and social practices has a reciprocal relationship with self-authoring and in turn with the construction of various identities. Considering academic discourses in university settings often work to normalize certain forms of ideology (LeCourt, 1998), Digital Literacy Projects, like other multimodal communication practices, offer a compositional space 'for juxtaposing, recentering and recontextualizing' (Hull & Katz, 2006: 42) multiple modes—written texts, images, music and video footage—and allow authors the possibility to 'investigate how the possibility of seemingly intractable institutional norms and the identities they produce are in fact fragile, and subject to semiotic messing with' (Parmentier, 1994). If we bring this focus into educational settings then, as we examine ways preservice teachers construct various identities and composites of multiple identities, to conjure the writing of Britzman (1991: 27) again, 'we can find cultures of silence and voice and discourses that are authoritative and internally persuasive. And if we look even more closely, we can uncover how personal social practices legitimate and contest both forms of discourse as they shape theories about what it means to become a teacher'. It is in these spaces that we, as teacher educators, might foster possibilities for self-authorings that deviate from culturally scripted norms regarding identity formation.

Notes:

[1] Pseudonyms are used throughout data for all participant names and places.

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