Miller, S. M. (2010).Reframing multimodal composing for student learning: Lessons on purpose from the Buffalo DV project. *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education*, *10*(2)., 197- 219.

Reframing Multimodal Composing for Student Learning: Lessons on Purpose From the Buffalo DV Project

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Abstract

In a study of urban secondary teachers moving out of professional development and into their classrooms, the research team documented the learning processes of teachers and student groups during their digital video composing to make sense of the curriculum. Taken together, these ethnographic case studies provide evidence that digital video composing can be a potent literacy tool that leads to increased student engagement and learning. Important to English educators is this finding: Learning to use and to teach digital composing can induce changes in teachers' epistemology and social practices that promote changes in their teaching and student learning. In this article, a framework for a multimodal literacy pedagogy is elaborated, generated from these analyses of teachers changing over time. Teachers who have transformed themselves and their classrooms to enact student multimodal composing on curricular concepts have these transacting principles in common: They (a) design social spaces for mediating students' multimodal composing activities; (b) co-construct with students authentic purposes for these composing activities about curricular concepts; (c) focus explicit attention to multimodal design and critique of multimodal texts; and (d) persistently open opportunities for students to draw on their identities and "lifeworlds" (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 2001).

In the 21st-century world, global literacy practices are changing. Using digital tools that provide multiple modes (i.e., visual, auditory, and kinesthetic) for easily representing meaning has led to new ways of using and creating texts (Kress, 1999, 2003; New London Group, 1996). In this new landscape of communication, print texts are often mixed with images, music, voiceovers, and dynamic movement. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) has highlighted these shifts in literacy as moving from the conventional sense of reading and writing *only* print text to an expanded sense of reading and writing multiple forms of nonprint and print-mixed texts, as well (NCTE, 2005, 2008).

As a "once in several centuries" innovation (diSessa, 2000), the computer has been transforming our world and shaping these new textual and social practices. During the technological and cultural contexts of the past two decades, the movement toward nonprint and print-mixed texts has accelerated due to accessible digital affordances for creating and mixing print, images, sounds, video, and music. This underlying trend toward multimodality is not local and adolescent, but global and multigenerational. The most pressing issue in English education, however, is the fact that millennial students (born after 1982) carry these new literacies—learned in creating vlogs and mashups, wikis and Nings for Web 2.0 environments—into school but often have to leave them outside the classroom door (Gee, 2004).

Increasingly in digital practices outside of school, adolescent youth actively compose meaning through new kinds of digital texts in their social worlds (Lenhart, Madden, & Hitlin, 2005). In school, a declining percentage of graduating high school seniors (nationally only 28%) find what they do in classrooms meaningful and useful to their lives or futures (Bachman, Johnston, & O'Malley, 2008). In 2008 the U.S. had its highest national high school graduation rate *ever*—only 69% of students graduated, with some schools and demographic groups dipping below 50%. Not only is it likely that these trends are connected, but English educators must act to reframe what we do in our 21st-century classrooms. To that end, noting the underpinnings of these new multimodal literacies is important: They are purposeful literacy practices that are meaningful to users as social communication.

Providing teachers with opportunities to learn emerging social literacies and use them as digital learning tools in the classroom is an obvious but complex solution (e.g., see Coiro, 2005; Leu, 2002; Miller, 2007, 2008b, 2010; Miller & Borowicz, 2005). Traditional school contexts, fixed curricula, time constraints, high-stakes testing, and teacher beliefs about what counts as text, literacy, and knowing—all can serve as impediments to such integrations. Even teacher professional development can be a hindrance. Too much of the professional development provided to teachers focuses only on technological knowledge, excluding experiences with authentic literacy practices and failing to provide opportunities for teachers to learn how to support students' authentic uses of these new literacies for learning school subjects (e.g., see Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Miller, 2008a).

The Conference on English Education (CEE) policy statement, *Beliefs About Technology and the Preparation of English Teachers* (2005), helpfully took up these issues. (See also Swenson, Rozema, Young, McGrail, & Whitin, 2006.) It argued that multimodal literacies (including digital video composing) yield products that are "legitimate and effective" with the potential to be "more dynamic, interactive, generative, exploratory, visual and collaborative." This English education consensus document emphasized the importance of providing opportunities for *students* to engage in these composing activities in school. For one reason, the expanded notion of text can provide them with the chance "to reinvent and enhance notions of audience, purpose, genre, form, and context"—mainstays of the English language arts curriculum. To engage students in such possibilities, however, teachers "need to minimally understand" the ongoing expansion of digital literacies and their authentic practices in schools.

Preparing teachers for the 21st-century digital world, then, requires teacher educators to take up the pressing issue of effective pedagogical frameworks for multimodal composing. The design of the pedagogy needs to be central if it is to guide teachers and teacher educators in creating 21st-century classrooms to engage millennial students in school.

Teaching and Learning in Classrooms Reframed by Digital Video Composing

Engaging Teachers in DV Composing in the Buffalo Project

Five years before YouTube brought easy access to videos around the world, the City Voices City Visions (CVCV) urban partnership in Buffalo was focusing on bringing multimodal composing into schools as a learning tool. Since 2000, the CVCV project has provided professional development institutes (28 hours over eight Saturdays) for over 230 Buffalo Public School (BPS)[a] teachers on using digital video (DV) as a high-interest means of composing and representing understanding of concepts in content-area classes such as English, literacy, social studies, science, and English as a second language (ESL).

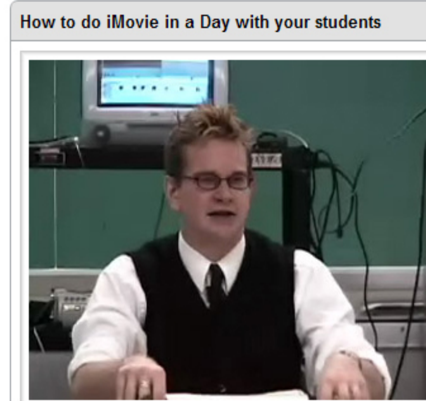
These grade 6-12 teachers have learned how to create DV composing projects as part of their curriculum, and the University at Buffalo team (five research assistants who were experienced teachers and I) provided ongoing in-classroom support for teachers as they introduced DV composing projects to their students. (See Video 1 for the introduction to a documentary on the project for a brief multimodal overview.)

Click to view Video 1

What makes DV composing a promising 21st-century literacy strategy? Capturing, editing, and distributing video is widely and cheaply accessible, leading educational researchers and forecasters to now cite DV as an emerging technology that will "significantly impact the choices of learning-focused organizations" (Horizon Report, 2008, p. 3). YouTube and other websites have made video content easy to share online to a worldwide audience. During one month, December 2007, Internet users in the U.S. watched over 10 billion videos online (Lipsman, 2007).

Further, the dramatic change from knowing information to "knowing as an ability to perform" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, p. 173) reflects the rethinking of knowing in the digital age, where emergent social practices are aimed at garnering attention to one's point of view on collected resources. These "practices of knowing….reflect a range of strategies for assembling, editing, processing, receiving, sending, and working on information and data to transform diverse resources of 'digitalia' into 'things that work'" (p. 173)—that is, into new digital resources and multimodal texts with representational meaning and communicative purpose. In all, DV composing provides students with multimodal learning in an authentic, high-status, social and media practice with powerful attention-getting qualities and expert models in the real world.

In the early years of the CVCV project, all of us—University at Buffalo researchers and BPS teachers—were learning together how to integrate DV tools into the curriculum. In classroom sites, the university team learned from Keith Hughes and other Generation X teachers (born between 1965 and 1980) how to draw on the power of the visual genres that students already knew (e.g., movie trailers, ads, and music videos) and how to create DV on a curriculum concept in one class period. (For example, see Video 2 at the CVCV website: http://gse.buffalo.edu/org/cityvoices/teach_v2.html)



Click to view Video 2.

In all, the professional development process begins with point-of-need support for English and other content area teachers as they learn to make DV as part of the curriculum and then continues in their classrooms to help them critically reframe their pedagogical practices. (More information on the project may be found at www.CityVoicesCityVisions.org)

As a result of hearing news of the project, teachers outside of BPS wanted access to the CVCV professional development. What started in 2005 as a special topic course in the University at Buffalo master's program became a required course for all English education preservice and in-service students. The course was patterned on the CVCV Institute, with additional readings (e.g., Alvermann, 2002; Goodman, 2003).

Teacher-designed videos were similarly focused on the curriculum and on familiar media genres. Teachers learned by doing, drawing on their lifeworlds, designing with mediation of peers and instructor, and camera and editing software (see Miller, 2007, for details about the class). Only through composing videos for their felt purposes were the teachers able to move beyond the print-only view of English that prevailed in their own education.

Examples of videos teachers produced can best illustrate the power of this multimodal form of representation in the English curriculum. A DV interpretation of a poem by Billy Collins demonstrates how the process of designing sound, image, movement, and dramatic reading both requires and creates a deep understanding of the print text. (View Video 3, *Introduction to Poetry* from the CVCV website: http://gse.buffalo.edu/org/cityvoices/festmov/featured.php#poetry)

A teacher-made music video provides a multimodal critique of cultural texts, orchestrating representations in advertisements, music, toys, a print poem, and factual information—in a devastating indictment of media images of women. (See Video 4, *Barbie World* from the CVCV website: http://gse.buffalo.edu/org/cityvoices/festmov/featured.php#barbieworld)

Beyond the professional development and teacher education class, the question we pursued in schools was, what would teachers do with DV composing when they returned to their classrooms?

Research in DV Composing Classrooms: Multimodal Literacy Pedagogy

When teachers in the teacher education class and the professional development workshop were faced with the contexts of their schools, impediments arose. Barriers to teacher integration of DV composing in the urban schools ranged from scripted-lesson classes to test-prep-only mandates for the state graduation exam. One quarter of the teachers left teaching—some to teach in suburban schools, others to move to administrative positions in the district. Still, a majority of teachers who completed the workshop worked to bring DV composing experiences to their students.

The impact of student DV composing as a learning tool became evident through a series of case studies of classrooms that involved following teacher and student learning. In this school-based research, the CVCV university team and colleagues have examined the situated learning through DV composing in 20 urban classrooms (e.g., Arora, 2009; Blondell, 2009; Borowicz, 2005; Cercone, 2009; Costello, 2006; Goss, 2009; Knips, 2008; Lauricella, 2006; Miller, 2008c; Miller & Borowicz, 2005, 2006, 2007).

These studies conducted by the CVCV research team employed grounded theory, ethnographic, and case-study methods and, taken together, provide evidence that DV composing can be a potent literacy tool that leads to increased student engagement and learning. Overviews of this research have been elaborated elsewhere (e.g., Miller, 2007, 2008b, 2010; Miller & Borowicz, 2005, 2006, 2007). Important to English educators is this finding: Learning to use and to teach DV composing can induce changes in teachers' epistemology and social practices that promote changes in their pedagogies (Miller, 2007, 2008b; Miller & Borowicz, 2006). In short, research provides evidence that DV composing can be a powerful tool for transforming learning *and* teaching in English classrooms.

From these ongoing analyses of enactments of DV composing as a student learning tool in the classrooms of project teachers, my colleagues and I have elaborated a research-based model of multimodal literacy pedagogy (MLP) that has four major interactive principles (Miller, 2007; also, Miller, 2010; Miller, Thompson, Boyd, & McVee, 2008). Teachers who have transformed themselves and their classrooms to enact student multimodal composing on curricular concepts have the following transacting principles in common: they (a) design social spaces for mediating students' multimodal composing activities; (b) co-construct with students authentic purposes for these composing activities about curricular concepts; (c) focus explicit attention to multimodal design and critique of multimodal texts; and (d) persistently open opportunities for students to draw on their identities and "lifeworlds" (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 2001). All of these principles appear regularly in classrooms of English, literacy, social studies, and ESL teachers who have successfully integrated DV composing into their classrooms. (See Figure 1 for a representation of the MLP framework.)

Taken together, these principles in action have signaled teachers' critical reframing of their classrooms to transform teaching and learning. Each teacher developed these approaches over time through experience, reflection, and professional collaboration. In the following section, the framework for MLP is elaborated, generated from these analyses of teachers changing over time, with particular focus on teachers and students learning to co-construct a sense of purpose for multimodal composing in urban classrooms.

Figure 1. Multimodal literacy pedagogy framework.

Enacting DV Composing as a Student Tool in School

The university support team documented the learning processes of teachers and student groups in their classroom video productions and often saw an almost total engagement in meaning making that arguably is the heart of literacy. A recurring image from these videos is a group of diverse students, heads together, intently focused on the storyboard, the script, the camera LCD playback, or the computer screen. Seeing such intensity of activity in classrooms led teachers to different conclusions, however.

Molly taught the immigration unit to her English language learner seventh graders by having them make a DV on their stories of immigrating to the U.S. Her perceptions of their engagement led her to change her teaching “for the better.” Other teachers could not at first see the significance of this student agency. Some teachers, instead, saw such engagement as the “hook” to the *real* work of print literacy or as a “reward” for students who behaved themselves. The research-based stories from ethnographic research conducted by the university support team demonstrate the variety of perspectives and changes in teachers over time. In reading across these studies, a key finding emerged: The leading activity in teacher pedagogical change and subsequent student literacy learning seems to be the ability to co-construct a meaningful purpose for multimodal composing.

Learning the Power of Student Purpose

The story of Darrius and his teacher Nate. In her ethnographic case study of an 11th-grade English class, Borowicz (2005) found that student engagement changed dramatically when the teacher introduced DV composing. One focal student, Darrius, who was perceived in school as nonresponsive and a troublemaker, created a DV story in

response to a novel to depict his vision of the importance of loyalty among friends, based on his own experiences. **[b]**

In an impressive change, he came to class early and often stayed late, sometimes giving up his lunch period to work on his movie. He orchestrated a tragic scene, demonstrating to the actor her language and movements before filming, then edited the footage using quick cuts and dramatic music to amplify the shock. He watched his movie over and over, sometimes talking to himself, sometimes singing along with the music he had imported, sometimes turning to a fellow student for assistance. On one occasion, he announced, “Man, I love this. I could stay here and work on this all day.”

Much like the adolescent artists Heath (2004) studied, Darrius called this intensive work “fun,” a stance Heath explained by the concept of “flow” (Csikzentmihalyi, 1990), a state “when action and awareness merge, consciousness narrows to focus attention on what is most relevant for the role of participation one is intending” (Heath, 2004, p. 340) and time slips by (“Class is over already?”). The shift in role and stance, like Heath’s artists, seems to come from a similar focus on creation: “The arts encircle learning with meaning and thereby make comprehension and engagement fundamental for participation” (p. 339). For the first time in high school, Darrius felt what it was like to feel purpose in school activities, “being connected in a social space with resources for expressive productivity” (Borowicz, 2005).

For the next video he wrote and performed a hip-hop lyric to memorialize his brother and cousin, young men who had died violently in the neighborhood. Darrius orchestrated this purposeful, literate performance in a music video by mixing print (his written lyric) with photographs, music, print artifacts (funeral announcements), enacted scenes with friends to communicate powerfully his sense of loss and love, of sadness and remembrance. As Gee (2004) noted, this connectedness to tools, peers, and the multimodal world of experience outside of school is key to purposeful, embodied literacy and learning through all the modes for representation.

In her case study Borowicz (2005) showed, however, that the teacher did not fully understand this purposeful literacy performance, instead viewing DV composing as a break from the “hard work” of school. Although he was glad to see his students engaged in DV composing on the meaning of literature, he saw it as a novelty, a break from the necessary tedium. Above the objections of his students, he moved into 6 weeks of English language arts test preparation with practice essay exam questions.

Darrius and other students began, again, to cut the class or take up a passive position at their desks, staring out the window. Even with active support, this teacher did not reframe his view of what counted as literacy. The high-stakes exam was a graduation test; he felt compelled to drill students in a writing formula so they could pass. He could not see a literacy experience in Darrius’s engagement in representing meaning—selecting a music video genre to express his feelings and explain what the deaths of these young men meant to their families and friends.

For other teachers, though, the experience of seeing their students deeply engaged in DV composing prompted them to expand their notions of what counts as literacy.

Mr. Hughes learns the power of student purpose. After his summer DV professional development workshop as the 2001 school year began, Keith Hughes was “anxious to find a way to bring the digital video experience to kids in a powerful and meaningful way” (Hughes, 2008). Then, on September 11, he and his students spent the first few hours

after the attacks in New York City, watching what happened on TV together, "soaking up the images and sounds."

Days later, distraught students came to Keith, and together they came up with the idea of producing a video in response to the attacks. Eventually, 20 students became involved, as Keith describes:

> Meeting before school, during lunch times and after school, the gang of us worked on what we would call "Wings of Hope" for almost three months. The cinematography skills that I learned through my own CVCV embodied experience now became part of my students' visual grammar. Using angles, lighting, and creative filming ideas, as well as advanced editing techniques, such as the use of fast motion, transitions and special effects, the students poured themselves into the project. The final product is truly amazing, reflecting an authentic expression of how students viewed the tragedy. (Hughes, 2008)

Keith's experience with student intensity about their felt purpose seemed to mark him in the best possible way. He saw that students' authentic desires to express themselves and communicate to an audience animated them in a manner that nothing else could. This new insight into what students needed to engage deeply in learning and activity became a key aspect of Keith's understanding of DV composing about the curriculum. This experience prompted him to look for strategies to develop such a strong sense of purpose in his classroom.

Keith could clearly see that students wanted their video to look good, to make people feel what they felt, and to express their heartfelt gratitude to the workers at Ground Zero. With the help of Keith, each other, and available resources, they did just that. In the final scene, they involved the whole student body in the auditorium from a high-angle shot, saying "Thank you!" in unison. They sent the DV to the fire fighters in New York City, and we posted it on the CVCV website. (See Video 5, *Wings of Hope*: http://gse.buffalo.edu/org/cityvoices/favorite.php)

Click to view Video 5

This experience and Keith's reflections on it solidified his stance about teaching and propelled him into a search for bringing DV composing into the curriculum: "After *Wings of Hope* I devoted myself to the idea that DV was not a far away idea but something that I needed to implement. If I were to take myself seriously as a professional, then I required myself to make it work." Keith called this whole experience, "finding my wings." He embarked on a search for ways to integrate DV composing into his curriculum to draw on students' passions in the service of content learning.

Ms. Mora Green learns the power of student lifeworlds. In the study of Mora Green's 12th-grade English class Goss (2009) recalled that Mora had created one of the most famous teacher-made DVs in the workshops. In it, her students personified story elements—plot, character, setting, conflict, point of view, and theme—as they were interviewed in an expose patterned after the *20/20* news magazine program to uncover

an answer to the question, Do the literary elements get along? She wrote the script, but the students enacted the elements with enthusiasm, dramatizing why each felt it was a more significant element than the rest. Theme, shot in profile in front of a window, was portrayed backlit because, the narrator explained, she is a bit shy. A literary expert in big glasses interviewed from behind her desk interpreted the statements in a broader perspective of integration. (See Video 6, Literary Element Characters from the CVCV website: http://gse.buffalo.edu/org/cityvoices/festmov/featured.php#literaryelement)

Surprisingly, then, the first video assignment that this creative teacher wrote for her own class was a constrained task called "The Story of Buffalo" (Goss, 2009). The sheet had a list of 15 must-do scenes that sent students to the Internet for still images. Students did not engage as she had hoped. A quarter of the class never finished the video. In the screening for those who did, it became obvious that each was very similar to the others—with a scene on weather, on sports, on politics, and so forth, following the listed requirements exactly.

Mora was disappointed. She had adapted this assignment from a previous one that students had done as a Powerpoint. It appeared that the negative drag of that tool she had used primarily to have students display information interfered with Mora's reframing of the purpose for the project. Students complied rather than designed. In collaboration with Goss, a member of the University at Buffalo support team, she began to put together a new plan that moved away from this overly determined form to a new genre—student-composed narrative.

First, she asked students to write personal narrative, poems, songs, or essays. Each narrative had to describe and focus on an important aspect of the student's life. Thus, through writing, students explored their own lives and experiences, understanding that eventually this creation would be performed and shared as a DV. Goss (2009) described the excitement:

During the writing process students were focused and engaged, and often would read their narratives out loud to neighboring students, testing to see how they might sound as a voice-over in the video portion of the project. Exclamations like, "Look at this shot", or "Yo, come check this out" were commonly heard during this week-and-a-half long process.

The project results were colorful and varied and truly reflected the diverse student voices and backgrounds in the class. To tell their stories, students used a variety of literary techniques, such as flashback, conflict, and multiple points of view. They engaged in design at a high level with close-ups, camera angles, dramatic reading, careful editing, and special effects to focus theme. Throughout the project, students took control of their own work, turning to peers for response and advice and working overtime, before and after school and at lunchtime. They reshot scenes until they were satisfied.

During the screening of the videos, students laughed and cried. Several videos told stories of sad experiences or anticipated the feelings of loss in their upcoming graduation. Other narratives were little comedies about students at home (i.e., playing soccer with the family dog). Some explored family histories, community traditions, and compelling activities from personal lives. This project was highly successful, evidenced by the fact that students voted to submit four of these videos to the citywide CVCV Video Festival, where the winning films were screened at a local movie theater in front of a large audience. Two videos from Mora's class tied for Best Cinematography, a short thriller about a poker game and a video poem called *I Need to Run*. A video titled *The Major*

Influence in My Life won Best Picture (Video 7 from the CVCV website: http://gse.buffalo.edu/org/cityvoices/awards.html#majorinfluence)

Goss (2009) concluded,

> It is hard to imagine a project design that could value student knowledge, background, and voices more than [Mora's] narrative project. Students were given the freedom to explore their own lives and express themselves in ways that they felt most comfortable.

Providing opportunities for students to draw on and share their own lifeworlds created in them a sharp purpose for these videos, yet also focused student attention on the important curricular concepts of the shape, elements, and impact of narrative. For Mora, this lesson on the importance of students' felt purpose brought together with English content could not have been clearer.

The previous research-based stories suggest that providing students opportunities to create authentic purpose for designing DVs about curriculum involves their personal sense of meaningfulness, a strong sense of a future audience, and a desire to communicate to others this DV text that intermingles self and content. In the CVCV project, teachers who learned to expand their notion of literacy beyond print-based representations took a different path in designing their pedagogies and enacting their curricula—always with a focus on developing student felt purpose.

In the next two stories, the teachers focused more specifically on video interpretations of literature, providing opportunities for students to interpret and fill the gaps of the literary text with their own sense of life and living.

Reviving Literature in Purposeful Social Spaces

Mr. Bradley's students learn through social and multimodal mediation. In her case study of two eighth-grade English classes taught by the same teacher, Costello (2006) found that integrating process drama with DV composing in the classrooms "created opportunities for a synergy through which student interpretation thrived." During DV composing, the classroom space changed as Dylan Bradley left his position at the front of the class and moved around the room to support student work groups. In DV compositions dramatizing vocabulary words, developing a newscast on a novel, and creating a poetry interpretation, students deeply engaged with each other and grappled with ideas and meanings.

In the final process drama/confessional DV, students in small groups enacted a new DV genre, representing each chapter from *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1997) with a tableau, using body placement, gestures, and facial expressions to capture a significant aspect of the text. To meet their own purposes of communicating character, these students also added a reality-show confessional, with students from the tableau later speaking in character, to construct motives, pose questions, and sound themes central to the printed text. In narrating one character, a young boy empathized in the confessional with a character from *The Outsiders,* splashing water on his face to simulate tears, dramatizing an inference never stated in the text, "I don't want to go to jail. *I ain't even had a girlfriend yet*!"

In this social space for "wholehearted literature study" students used the print text, home language, life and media experiences, movement, dramatic portrayal, props, the teacher,

their peers, the camera, the editing program—all to mediate and represent their experience and understanding of literature. The six focal students from *The Outsiders* homeroom all passed the end-of-year school district exam (patterned after the 11th-grade state graduation exam). The most challenging section was a critical lens essay, requiring students to interpret any piece of literature from the perspective of a supplied quotation.

Costello's analysis of those written essays revealed that students all incorporated their DV composing interpretations—"either the pivotal moments in the story that they focused on for the DV project or the thematic issues explored." Students developed deep understanding of these print texts from DV composing, which provided support for their thinking in timed essays of academic writing. This finding argues against a dichotomy between new multimodal literacies and print academic literacies: The embodied experience of multimodal design "may be the basis for achievement on high-stakes essay assessments about literature" (Costello, 2006).

Ms. Gorski's change: from test-prep to aesthetic reading. In her study of Ms. Gorski's 11th-grade English class, Blondell (2009) traced the growth of a teacher whose students would be taking the state English language arts graduation test. Diane Gorski's first thought about doing DV composing was to use it as a test-preparation tool. Her first project asked students to create an advertisement on the elements of the state exam rubric (e.g., organization, focus, details, etc.). When she saw that students were not engaged in this task, she was concerned that she was "ruining" DV for her students. She had used aspects of the CVCV model—using genre and giving students choice of role in their collaborative DV workgroups and of what commercial they wanted to make. The focus on literal facts from the rubric, however, offered little space for students to engage deeply with the curriculum as a multimodal meaning-making practice. Diane, and thus her students, focused on the definitive content (i.e., an organized Regents essay is…), which left too little space for student composing and design.

In professional conversations with Blondell, who was part of the University at Buffalo support team, and considering what she had learned from presentations of other teachers in the project, Diane reflected on how to adapt to what she framed as her students' needs. Over the course of several weeks she reframed her perception of DV and realized she would have to design a project that had an authentic purpose both for students *and* for learning the curriculum. Diane began to focus the DV activities on literature study through multimodal resources and texts (i.e., performance, song, and color). She referred to the DV projects she herself had composed, but also attended more to her own latent belief that reading print-based texts was a *sensory and personal experience*: "She considered her own passion for literature [and her favorite novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston, 2006] and realized how she read literature best with all of her senses, through a symbol or a tree or the damp swampland of Janie's muck" (Blondell, 2009).

In reconnecting to her belief that reading literature was much more than preparing for timed essays, Diane also began to rethink the district mantra of "I do, we do, you do" as the primary pedagogical practice. She saw that this traditional modeling through imitation was not conducive to purposeful learning opportunities and realized that, instead, she and her students would have to take on new roles.

Since the literary elements were embedded in all the lines of the novel, Diane saw "how the project could enable students to use traditional literary terms without constraining their expression of meaning. She also felt that poems, as a genre, opened up possibilities for students' performance of *their own* meaning" (p. 128). In her new role she provided the assignment, conducted student-sustained discussions about themes, then, "stepped

back" and focused on "relinquishing that control, letting them do things, letting them make decisions, allowing them to discover things for themselves and just being there as a support" (p. 141).

She created strategies to focus on students' multimodal design—she asked students about props to represent a character and how font color could change the meaning of text. In the context of a school district that was mandating direct instruction, Diane reclaimed her professional identity as a teacher who could and would respond to student needs by negotiating the classroom space: "'This is what we're going to do. Now how do you wanna go about doing that?' I think that has worked."

Many things changed during students' creation of found poems from the text of the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and then designing those as poetry videos. Diane mediated students' processes (i.e., "What's your theme?") and listened to the students' language as they negotiated their ideas with one another.

Initially, she had found observing students' learning difficult as she facilitated that learning, but she developed another way to assess student engagement and curricular understanding interactively by asking students directly about their thinking: "Where are you going with this?" or "What are you going to show for that line?" This interactive pedagogical design focused on student meaning and purpose in their reading of the print text and their representation of their interpretation multimodally through DV composing.

Becoming a mediator in this social space transformed Diane in the classroom. Blondell captures this transformation:

> Her purpose of designing DV *for student learning* focused her attention *toward* student learning. She realized that what she could understand about students' learning was a valid way to assess that learning; she didn't always need to use traditional assessments. The more that she changed her strategies for assessing students' responses to her practice, the more apparent and necessary her attentive and observational roles were for promoting authentic composing and building strategies for assessing student learning. Not only did this enable her to re-see students' interests, talents, and needs, but also validated her own developing teaching practices.

Her new focus on student meaning-making grew as she became aware of the resources students could bring to literacy and literature in the classroom:

> I mean they bring in their worlds. I don't know if it's something from popular culture. I think it's almost more personal what they bring in.... one student who does artwork and anime and she draws and brought in all these drawings and these things. And we were able to look into her world and see things from her perspective.

Such opportunities for Diane reframed her notions of what counts as literacy.

Students' processes and DV products during this composing cycle provided evidence of the influence of Diane's changes on opportunities for student literacy learning. Students' DVs demonstrated how intentional and mindful they became as they added "layers of meaning" to their interpretations of a novel. For example, Carlos began his video with the camera tilting up from the trunk to look at the branches of a large tree for his poem "Branches," as Blondell explained:

> [He] uses his overall concept of Janie to begin his poem with the line, "She saw her life like a great tree in leaf, with things suffered, things enjoyed, things done and undone. Dawn and doom was in the branches." Because he has a deep understanding of Janie's search, he introduces both sides to her story all at once to begin his poem. He sets the stage for the rest of the poem by illustrating the tensions that Janie faced throughout the whole novel. (Blondell, 2008, p. 192)

Carlos liked the way DV composing focused his attention: "…and through my whole life it's always been better visual than just someone saying it and you're trying to get it. When you're actually into it and you're focused on it, it really does help better." That attention to the composing process came from the spark of DV composing: "Once they say it's a video project…it just starts formulating up there and you just keep picking pieces and pieces and it just comes out to be your own masterpiece." This "formulating" felt to Carlos like shaping the pieces together as they come "tumbling like blowing snow."

According to Blondell (2008), Diane attended to this kind of literacy learning as a powerful approach to interpretive reading and composing:

> Carlos's [DV] was "just nice and peaceful and we talked about theme and we talked a lot about blooming, the idea that blooming as a symbol, so a lot of students thought to use actual wildlife, like trees to show or illustrate that blooming and it was just neat" that he had made the connection between his poem and the themes that they had talked about when discussing the novel. (p. 171)

Screening the DV Carlos designed to discuss symbol and theme as live elements of the DV interpretation of the novel seemed highly beneficial for Carlos and the class.

In a similar way, Diane's student Kiara's process of creating the found poem surfaced the purpose for the products she wanted to create:

> I knew how to set my poem up when I got the first couple lines. I didn't have my title at first. But once I got the other quotes, I understood what my title and what my purpose was gonna be for the poem. (Blondell, 2008, p. 183)

Her composing of the poem and video eventually titled "Who Am I?" prompted her to explain to Erica, another student, what to do with the several lines she had selected: "Can we put them in any old order? Well, not any old [order] but in the sense that it makes sense." They laughed about her double use of the word "sense." But Erica then proceeded to read and reread, attending to the details she selected from the text, leading to her own interpretation and design of those details in the found poem and in her video that she, too, would share with the class.

When Diane finally saw students deeply engaged in such purposeful sense-making *and* understanding about that novel and about how novels worked (the curricular content), she understood the power of purpose in her students' literacy learning. Her students' composing of the found poem and poetry video opened up space for her to become "the teacher I am supposed to be."

Transformed Teaching, Transformative Learning

Keith Hughes, the teacher whose students made *Wings of Hope,* had several years later integrated DV composing as a regular part of his classes. One extended example can

illustrate the impacts on his teaching and student learning. In teaching the Progressive Era, he decided to have pairs of students design a video to show the key components of various events and issues in and around the period. Keith introduced a Movie Trailer assignment to students (all topics were picked out of a hat, though some picked more than once). Students were to create a 1-minute DV about an imagined film on the topic that would be "Coming to a movie theatre near you," using key vocabulary and ideas relevant to the selected subject matter.

Two of Keith's students, Paige and Nicole, picked Jim Crow Laws as a topic and felt the need to answer the first question they asked each other: "Who was Jim Crow and why did he get to make laws?" (recounted in Lauricella, 2006). In a few minutes, they located some clues from an online search engine and were off on an inquiry into multimodal texts (e.g., Library of Congress newspaper accounts and other period artifacts including advertisements, photographs, literacy tests, and political cartoons).

The students were searching for appropriate music and took the advice of Paige's mother, who suggested using "Strange Fruit" (Meeropol, 1936), a haunting antiracist song performed by Billie Holiday, focusing on the shocking reality that people were hanging from the poplar trees. Keith had asked students to write a narrative voiceover, but Paige and Nicole asked him if they could use this song, instead, for part of the video. He asked for their rationale and listened carefully to their explanation. This kind of intense meaning-making about the curriculum and drawing from their lives was exactly what he had aimed for in DV composing. He said, "Yes, do it. You have good reasons."

Reading an original newspaper advertisement online for a lynching stunned them—these were not spontaneous events. Seeing photographs of proud perpetrators sickened them (see example images at the American Lynching website: http://www.americanlynching.com/pic1.htm). Contemplating a photograph of a man saved from lynching prompted questions about how people could live with such emotional trauma. They discussed at length whether lynching photographs would be too disturbing for the audience of their video.

Paige and Nicole drew on vernacular history from their community about what they knew about the Jim Crow era and enacted scenes about segregation, using the school water fountain with a posted sign, "Whites Only." A classmate agreed to wear a "do-rag" to represent the role of a person being discriminated against, using her head covering to represent those they had seen in pictures on the heads of women picking cotton.

This movie trailer demonstrates the power of students' drawing on community and culture and remixing them with historical images and enacted scenes to communicate their outrage—strong feelings that personally connected them to the curriculum. They integrated their strategies for historical thinking and evaluation of sources learned in school with their strategies learned out of school for answering questions.

They looked into their history textbook and sought valid information from their communities and searched archives on the Internet. From there, Paige and Nicole composed what was a moving representation of discrimination and lynching in the post-Civil War era in the U.S. It is easy to imagine such a video developing in students' deep understanding of the historical context for reading novels like *To Kill a Mockingbird* or *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry.* After the class screening, the students were silent, astounded by the powerful story the video told. Then they applauded. (See Video 8, *For Colored Only* from the CVCV website: http://gse.buffalo.edu/org/cityvoices/festmov/featured.php#coloredonly)

Paige and Nicole's deep understanding of Jim Crow history prompted them a few weeks later to stop a fight in the school cafeteria that grew out of someone stepping on another student's sneakers: "Do you know what we've been through to even be here? You can't fight about this!" Taking their learning out into the world, was exactly what Keith had hoped for.

On Keith's part, he introduced the content and the engaging composing task, provided access to Internet sites to aid in their inquiry, assented to their idea for a music soundtrack, and throughout the process aided in their deliberations. In the year of the study his students composed six videos, and all of his more than 120 students passed the state U.S. history graduation test, which only 73% passed in the rest of the school district. Lauricella (2006) concluded that through their embodied learning in these classes, students developed strategies for historical thinking and deeply appropriated historical knowledge, at the same time that they learned to "experience the world with an embedded understanding of what it means to be an active citizen" (p. 161).

Discussion

Purpose as the Engine for Transformation

By reframing their purposes for their students' DV composing activities, these teachers offered students the opportunity to co-construct purpose for their literacy activity. In the process, teachers transformed their practice and their students' learning. As students took up new purposes for making meaning from the curriculum in school, they engaged in social spaces for designing multimodal texts that drew on their media and community lives outside of school. These moves toward transformative classrooms provide images of the kind of "New Learning" (Kalantzis & Cope, 2008) required for 21st-century personal, civic, and workplace spaces.

In their framework for conceiving of teaching as a professional practice and education as a way of knowing the world, Kalantzis and Cope (2008) argued,

> Education in all its aspects is in a moment of change, or transition. The idea of "New Learning" contrasts what education has been like in the past, with the changes we are experiencing today, with an imaginative view of the possible features of learning environments in the near future. What will learning be like, and what will teachers' jobs be like? (p. 3)

This future in a global knowledge society where learning happens everywhere (not just in schools) includes new tools, purposefully communicating with new media, and a balance of agency with teachers acting as professionals and intellectuals facilitating "knowledge-making by learners" (p. 15) who are increasingly diverse.

The DV-composing classrooms described here portray contexts, teachers, tools, and learners in transition to this vision of new learning. In Nate Russel's classroom Darrius constructed his own felt purposes for DV composing, transforming himself into a knowledgeable student in the process—even though Nate did not fully understand the power of the literacy learning that his students experienced (Borowicz, 2005).

Dylan Bradley appreciated the engaged learning of his students in their DV composing but stopped the project early on in another class because he saw DV composing as a "reward" that they did not deserve, due to what he perceived as bad behavior (Costello, 2006). Focal students in this second class did not pass the end of year essay test on

literature; in his DV composing class, all six focal students passed. Dylan did not, however, reframe DV composing as a literacy tool to which all students should have access, maintaining that "DV is a privilege." In the context of his school, strict control of students trumped their learning.

In contrast, Mora Green changed her approach when she learned from her Buffalo DV Project that even working with video did not, in itself, engage students' best work. In an effort to better engage students, she provided an opportunity for students to develop a personal narrative about a significant aspect of their lives. Students' deep sense of purpose in this project sparked a profound change, as they designed meaningful texts, drawing on their lives and working to orchestrate multiple modes to communicate themselves to a real audience.

Similarly, Diane Gorski learned from her early project on the state test rubric that students needed to feel a sense of purpose in their projects. As they created found poems and from the poems designed videos, students purposefully connected themselves to the novel through their aesthetic response (Rosenblatt, 1994) and then designed a multimodal version of their text to share with an authentic audience. Students' intensity of attention to the details of the print text in order to compose a video representing their interpretation, provoked a new level of literacy learning—what Carlos called "going deep." In this class, Blondell (2009) argued, DV composing prompted both the teacher and the students to transform their stance toward literature and their ability to compose interpretations.

Finally, in Keith Hughes' class, students engaged in an historical inquiry, first out of curiosity and then out of anger as they discovered the systemic racism that promoted discrimination and lynchings. Paige and Nicole's DV composing spilled into their lives in a variety of ways, prompted by their purpose of making sure their audience knew and understood the history from which Americans have come.

In all, a teacher's overriding purpose cannot, in itself, create a purpose for students. When teachers offered the chance to students to co-construct the purpose for their multimodal composing, they took on, as well, new roles and stances in order to design the text they envisioned.

Purpose for Designing Texts Reframes Roles and Stances

As argued in the CEE (2005) Policy Statement about Technology, the DV texts that students designed in social spaces with mediational resources were "more dynamic, interactive, generative, exploratory, visual and collaborative." These spaces initiated by teachers provided opportunities for students to create and perform their understanding. Students researched; orchestrated music, narrative, and images; and dramatized voiceovers and enacted scenes in order to create effective texts from multiple modes into "things that work" for their purposes. Students took on roles as researchers, interpreters, writers, editors, and designers of meaning.

Students took up these literacy events "to reinvent and enhance notions of audience, purpose, genre, form, and context" (CEE, 2005)—all fundamental aspects of literacy learning. Darrius reinvented the theme of a novel as a cautionary tale from his neighborhood and reinvented the memorial form as a hip-hop music video, again linking to his lifeworlds. Dylan's students created a new DV genre with the character confessional, designing the opportunity for themselves to infer how the novel intersected with their lives. For the first time, Diane's students took up an aesthetic stance toward

literature (*Their Eyes Were Watching God*), as they located significant lines from the novel, created a found poem, and designed the video version for the local audience in the class and a worldwide audience on the Web.

After an experience in which students felt no authentic purpose, Mora provided the opportunity to create a significant personal narrative in print and video, releasing students to orchestrate multiple modes for representing their lives: assembling a narrative that sharpened their sense of self and the world through an inquiry into experience. This narrative thinking, analysis, and creation are at the heart of the English curriculum.

DV Composing and Passing Tests

The missing element in many school-based technology activities—the element students need in the age of information overload—is *performance* knowledge: knowing how to find, gather, use, communicate, and imagine new ways of envisioning assemblages of knowledge (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). Yet, especially in the context of the high-stakes testing frenzy, students often have fewer opportunities than ever to find purpose and make meaning in school and little space to use their multimodal literacy strategies for school learning. Even in classrooms with these testing pressures, though, teachers moved toward multimodal literacies, and students took on roles as interpreters and designers, *and* they passed the state test.

The case studies provide evidence that deep understanding through DV composing can provide high-interest performance knowledge as a foundation for timed-writing tests—which in New York State constitute a large portion of the English language arts and social studies graduation exams. Costello's (2006) study of Dylan Bradley's classes inadvertently represented a naturalistic quasi-experiment: Of the 12 diverse focal students in two classes, those who finished their DV character confessional wrote about that and passed the literature essay exam. Those who were stopped before they began their DV did not pass that exam—a regular occurrence in a school with a pass rate under 50%.

Keith Hughes' students all passed the U.S. history graduation exam, a striking result in this urban district. Over the past 8 years, as he continued to use DV as a major tool for learning, 96% of his students (including mainstreamed special education students) have passed the state exam. Other factors could certainly be at play, but these findings provide solid evidence that the time spent supporting students' DV composing does *not* result in lower test scores. In fact, it may provide the experiences that can promote higher ones—in addition to all the other benefits pointed out in these narratives.

Students Take Their Learning Out Into the World

The ultimate goal of MLP is for students to learn deeply. One benefit of such understanding is that students can take this learning out into the world and use it in their lives. Instead of school knowledge as separate and uninvolved in meaning and lives, transformative knowledge illuminates living and action in the world. Since most student-designed videos are published for a worldwide audience, student DVs arguably act as remixes of curriculum, student lifeworlds, and multimodal cultural artifacts (e.g., music, images, and media genres) and, thereby, serve as a contribution to the world. This notion has merit. Narrativizing experience helps adolescents compose their lives reflectively.

From these videos shared in classrooms, on the Web, and in this article, educators can better understand the impact on 21st-century adolescents of unrealistic female body image; the importance of running, poker, or the family dog in their lifeworlds; the influence of overcoming cutting, a friend's death, a loved-one's addictions; and their human connections to Janey's search or Ponyboy's confusion.

However, transformative knowledge at its most satisfying enactment is more akin to the impact of Paige and Nicole's *For Colored Only* video (Video 8) on student audience and on their own understandings. Composing their video provoked a sharp historical awareness in them that transformed their ways of seeing. The fact that these two 16-year-olds broke up a brewing cafeteria fight because of their new understanding is quite startling. Their teacher transformed the classroom with his MLP, these students transformed themselves through DV composing, and further, they acted on the world based on their new knowledge.

Similarly, articulating a vision for English education, Alsup et al. (2006) drew on Paulo Friere's "transformative literacy," because through it individuals become fully human by naming and helping to create the world. In all, DV composing for felt purpose provides opportunities for teachers and their students to do just that.

Conclusion

The research reported on here suggests that teachers were able to reframe their practice to integrate a quintessential multimodal literacy into their school subjects as a student learning tool. With ongoing professional development in multimodal composing, each of the teachers described here was able to make changes in approaches to teaching and learning. The professional conversations enabled by the partnership between the university and the school district enabled in-classroom support and teacher reunions, help that sustained teachers' efforts. Successes of teachers fed the CVCV community, sustaining the project and each other.

The framework for MLP provides explanations of what essential elements teachers struggled with and learned over time. This pedagogical theory for multimodal teaching and learning integrates identity-making literacy practices with attention to purposeful multimodal design in order to reframe teaching for the 21st-century. The principles identify the dynamics of multimodal pedagogy and explain the transformative nature of its defining ideologies, tools, materials, attitudes, beliefs, and values.

In the narrative analysis reported here, changing and co-constructing a significant purpose for multimodal composing was the leading change that prompted students to bring their lifeworlds and curriculum together and to attend to design so that they could communicate clearly what they wanted to say. These activities were sustained in the classroom social space mediated by peers, teachers, print and nonprint texts of all sorts, the DV camera, computer linked to the Internet, and editing software.

Figure 1 represents the key principles of MLP, and the narratives in this article demonstrate how they transacted as teachers and students engaged together and transformed what happed in school. Figure 1 also represents the context for these changes—administrators, community, teacher educators, and policy makers form a constellation of potential facilitators and barriers to these transformations. What MLP represents is an impulse toward New Learning—a resituating of professionalism among teachers and teacher educators and of meaning and understanding among 21st-century students (Kalantzis & Cope, 2008). The findings from these studies represent a call for

purposefulness in school literacy as the crucial change needed in schools and offer digital video composing as a 21st-century literacy shown to engage students purposefully in the curriculum.

Finally, it is true that "Living in a cyber world has transformed the very nature of literacy itself" (Alsup et al., p. 284). In response, teacher educators must prepare teachers (and teachers must prepare their students) for 21st-century personal and workplace spaces. Just as important—perhaps, more important—we must attend to preparing savvy future citizens who create and interpret multimodal texts, so they can be actors in and designers of our increasingly digital democracy.

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Notes:

[a]The Buffalo Public Schools system has 70 schools which serve predominantly high-poverty communities. Seventy-four percent of Buffalo Public School students are eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch (compared to 38% of students statewide). Once a thriving industrial city, a stop on the Erie Canal, Buffalo slipped into economic decline in recent decades as the steel mills and aircraft manufacturers closed. The median household income is $28, 544, a little over half of the state median (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). According to their NYS District Report Card (2003), the multiethnic community is reflected in the school population of 41,600 students with a Black majority, both African Americans and African immigrants (57%); with Whites of western European origin—especially German, Irish, Polish (26.9%); Hispanic (12.4%); and American Indian, Alaskan, Asian, or Pacific Islander (2.7%). Students for whom English is a second language comprise 6.4% of the district.

[b] All names are pseudonyms, except for Keith Hughes, who has written about his experiences and wanted to be identified.

Author Notes:

This research team was funded, in part, by The John R. Oishei Foundation, whose mission is to enhance the quality of life for Buffalo area residents by supporting education, healthcare, scientific research and the cultural, social, civic and other charitable needs of the community. The Foundation was established in 1940 by John R. Oishei, founder of Trico Products Corporation.

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