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Student Experiences in a Multimodal Composition Class[1]

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Despite the social turn in literacy studies, few empirical studies have investigated the practical applications and learning experiences of multimodal composition pedagogy. Using a qualitative research approach, this study examines undergraduates' experiences in producing multimodal texts. Findings report that students' experiences in a multimodal composition class epitomize enjoyable learning. Students enjoyed their learning process because (a) the multimodal literacy curriculum filled the pedagogical gap between the conventional school-sponsored alphabetic literacy pedagogy and widespread out-of-school multimodal literacy practices and (b) the usefulness of the curriculum helped students enhance their intrinsic motivation to learn and compose. By questioning fundamental assumptions about what counts as knowledge in the current ecology of literacies, the authors argue for a dynamic view of literacy into practice.

[enjoyable learning/multimodal literacy/social literacy]

I. INTRODUCTION

With the advent of the social turn (Gee, 2000) in literacy studies, New Literacy Studies (NLS) researchers began to focus on the context of literacy practices. By observing literacy events in social contexts, they have challenged the traditional notion of literacy as purely alphabetic literacy and the binary dichotomy between literacy and orality. Furthermore, the New London Group (2000), as a part of NLS, has argued that

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"all meaning-making is multimodal" (p. 29). Multimodality or multimodalities (i.e., multiple modalities) refer to the various communicative modes of aural, gestural, graphic, spatial, visual, and other semiotic representations. The New London Group conceptualizes that the communicative means of literacy[2] includes multimodalities, because multimodalities and multimedia are widely used resources that enrich meaning-making in a technology-saturated world. In a narrower sense, multimodal literacy[3] signifies people's ability to make meaning using multimodalities. In a broader sense, multimodal literacy reflects people's various ways of being in the world and their ability to make meaning using the resources of human life.

Students often arrive in classrooms with strong visual, aural, and multimodal literacies from their lives at home and in their communities. Representative origins of visual and other multimodal literacies are computers, TVs, and video games (Gee, 2003, 2007). Such media interpellate students with scripts, audio, visuals, graphics, and gestures in reference to popular culture. Students themselves or their communities sponsor popular culture, which is commonly regarded as vernacular culture. Literacy scholars report that student lives are mediated by popular culture (e.g., Camitta, 1993; Dyson, 2003; Finders, 1997). By contrast, alphabetic literacy achievement has been "most associated with school success" (Heath, 2001, p. 465). School has traditionally sponsored alphabetic literacy practices, which are regarded as high culture. The inherent assumption in the distinction between popular culture and high culture is that the society has a predetermined understanding of what counts as official and academic knowledge. The vernacular literacy practices which exist primarily in students' homes and communities are often undervalued, while school-sponsored alphabetic literacy practices are regarded as high culture.

Despite the disconnect between widespread out-of-school multimodal literacy practices and conventional school-sponsored alphabetic literacy practices, multimodal literacy becomes more ubiquitous in social literacy practices. Students' lives in out-of-school settings are now saturated with multimodal literacy practices, which are significantly connected to the prevalence of technologies and the popular culture of students. In turn, "[w]riting with new technologies" has become "a social practice" (Chapman, 2006, p. 36). In this situation, students need to understand and use the various modes and media; reversely, the institutional setting of school should offer students the *opportunity to learn* how to read, view, and interact with, as well as

[2] Researchers began to use the term *literacy* in place of writing due to the interconnectedness of reading, writing, and multimodalities (Schultz, 2006).

[3] In literature, the term *multimodal literacy* tends to be used interchangeably with the term *multimodal literacies*. When it is used as a plural form, it is more faithful on the theoretical ground in terms of explaining the diversity of literacy practices.

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compose and design, various modes using the new media (Hawisher & Selfe, 2004). By incorporating multimodal literacy instruction into the composition class, we, educators, can provide students with tactics and strategies that they can deploy in the current ecology of literacies.

An increasing number of studies have sought to generate a theoretical understanding of multimodal literacies (e.g., Kress, 2003; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; Manovich, 2001; New London Group, 2000; Wysocki, Johnson-Eilola, Selfe, & Sirc, 2004). Despite researchers' efforts to theorize this social phenomenon and the high demand for multimodal communication in pedagogy, limited practitioner research exists which focuses on either students or instructors who explore the application of multimodal literacy theories in their classrooms (cf. Hull & Nelson, 2005; Selfe, 2007). The field of composition needs empirical research that investigates the practical applications of multimodal literacy pedagogy in the composition classroom, and student perceptions of their learning experiences of multimodal pedagogy as applied to the composition class.

In order to develop a more complete understanding of how multimodal literacies contribute to student learning and development as composers, a more accurate description of student experiences with multimodal composition pedagogy and their perspectives on such pedagogy is needed. Because the prior literature regarding pedagogical application of multimodal literacy is limited, this exploratory study has two research purposes. First, this study investigates undergraduates' learning experiences with producing multimodal texts and the ways how they perceive instruction in a particular learning context. Second, this study offers inferences about the pedagogical insights gained from employing a multimodal literacy curriculum in an English composition class.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Under the social turn in interdisciplinary studies (Gee, 2000), NLS has explored primarily out-of-school contexts in investigating literacy practices. Critics of NLS have asserted that NLS has focused too much on local and out-of-school contexts, where advances in technology and the media have enriched people's lives with images and sounds in addition to words. Hull and Schultz (2002) also pointed out that NLS has "embraced out-of-school contexts, almost to the exclusion of looking in schools, and unabashedly valued out-of-school literacy practices as distinct from those associated with schools" (p. 27). In the same vein, narrowing down the discussion to literacy and technology, Brandt and Clinton (2002) have argued that the "paradigm maintains its own,

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tacit great divide—one that assumes separations between … literacy and its technology" (p. 11).

Notwithstanding these criticisms, NLS does not necessarily privilege either out-of-school or school literacy practices; rather, the NLS approach offers "more effective mutual recognition of these practices in both sites" of school and out of school (Freebody, Ludwig, & Gunn, 1995, p. xxii). In other words, NLS is moving toward understanding literacy as a networked phenomenon of orchestration across school and out-of-school contexts. The divides between school-sponsored alphabetic literacy and student out-of-school multimodal literacy practices, and between literacy and technology, require a redirection of pedagogy that has focused on alphabetic literacy education. The multimodal composition class that the current study examines follows this theoretical foundation.

III. RESEARCH CONTEXT

The broad research context of this study was an undergraduate composition class at a large research-oriented Midwestern university in the United States. This university provides basic, first-year, and second-year composition classes; the first-year and second-year composition classes are part of the General Education Curriculum (GEC). The English Department administers the first-year composition class, whereas for the second-year composition class, students select a course from among disciplinary composition courses offered by various departments. Students can test out of the first-year composition class upon satisfactory completion of an exit exam, or they can take a basic composition class if their grades are below the acceptable standard of the exam. The basic composition class is an intensive reading and writing class; the first-year composition class focuses on analysis-based generic college composition instruction; the second-year composition class serves as an entry point for disciplinary composition.

The specific research context of a multimodal composition class was one section of three computer-based, second-year composition classes offered by the English Department in the autumn quarter of 2006. The class met two times a week for 98 minutes per session. The material site was a computer lab in the English Department, where each student used a Macintosh computer. In this class, students formulated written proposals for a series of public service announcements (PSAs), or non-commercial advertisements for the public good. Over the course of the quarter, they created three multimodal texts—a print PSA, an audio PSA, and a video PSA—in order to convey their arguments. The first assignment, a print PSA, was a 1 to 2 page document designed with words, graphics, and color that worked in concert to create meaning; the second

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PSA assignment was an audio text, an audio essay of approximately one minute in duration, designed with script, voice, and sound effects; the third assignment was a video PSA, a video essay lasting approximately one minute, designed with script, color, image, gesture, geographic meaning, voice, and sound effects.

The corresponding author of this paper was the course instructor. With her expertise in the literacies of technology and digital composition developed over the past 30 years, Cynthia Selfe provided content and technological support to facilitate the students' creation of the course assignments. Specifically, technological support was given in class workshop sessions on the use of the graphic functions available in MS WORD for the print assignment; the use of Audacity, a program for editing audio, for the audio assignment; and the use of iMovie, a program for editing video, for the video assignment. In addition to individual feedback, the instructor provided feedback on the content of students' PSA projects and technology guidance to the students collectively during classroom review sessions in which all class members reviewed an individual student's project.

Fourteen students enrolled in this class, and eleven students voluntarily participated in this study. The demographic information of the eleven students shows a central tendency for research participants to be second-year undergraduates, aged 20, with little multimodal technology production experience. Students came from a range of majors (i.e., Business, Communication, Education, Engineering, English, Marketing, Nutrition, Physical Therapy, and Textile Clothing). Eight (73%) were male and three (27%) were female. Ten students (91%) indicated that they liked to use computers, though prior to the class they had had little production experience with multiple modalities that use digital, audio, and video instruments. Four students (36%) explained that the reason for their class choice was related to their enjoyment of computers or because they had taken a computer-based first-year composition class. The other seven students (64%), however, had chosen the class because it was convenient for their schedules and because it fulfilled a GEC requirement, which may reflect the nature of GEC undergraduate classes.

IV. RESEARCH METHODS

1. Research Design

To portray undergraduates' experiences of and their perspectives on the multimodal composition class, this study employed a qualitative case study of "cases within a case" (Stake, 2000, p. 447). Qualitative study is an overarching research method used to understand people or social phenomena in their natural contexts (Denzin & Lincoln,

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2000). Composition studies frequently employ a qualitative case study (North, 1987; Webb, 2006), which helps to identify particularity and enable thick description, heuristic function, and inductive reasoning with foci in research process, context, and discovery of meaning (Merriam, 1998). In this study, "a case" refers to the research context of a multimodal composition college class, while "cases" refers to three case study students who were focal research participants. In comparison to a single case study, multiple case studies facilitate understanding of complex social phenomena by maximizing variations (Yin, 1989). The three focal research participants, Ann, Jeff, and Chris,[4] were chosen among volunteers by purposeful sampling that considers factors such as prior college-level composition classes, familiarity with computers, ethnicity, and gender. The intent in choosing these factors was to capture "core experiences" of a multimodal composition class (Patton, 1990, p. 172).

Furthermore, given the complex relationship of the researcher to research participants and the possible differences between insider and outsider perspectives in qualitative fieldwork, complementary insider and outsider perspectives were achieved through the authors' engagement in the fieldwork. The first author observed the research setting as a classroom visitor with an outsider perspective (i.e., visiting author), whereas the corresponding author served as the course instructor (i.e., instructing author), thus representing an insider perspective in the research setting. Involving the visiting author who was not a course instructor in the interview process partially assuaged the students' anxieties about classroom participation and possible concern about their grades being affected by participating in the research.

2. Data Collection

For data collection, three different approaches were used in this study: classroom observation, a grounded survey,[5] and interviews. The visiting author observed three class sessions during which students were engaged in discussion and a video classroom review session, while the instructing author observed and interacted with the students for ten weeks.

Because little research has been conducted on this topic, the eleven volunteers out

of the fourteen class members were also surveyed in the final week of the course in order to capture the commonality of the whole class experience. Observing participants

[4] Ann is a pseudonym. Chris and Jeff are the real names of the participants. In the research consent process, they indicated that they preferred to use their real names in referring to their experiences and assignments.

[5] The term *grounded survey* derives from grounded theory. The term was borrowed from Patricia Lather's website (Retrieved February 1st, 2007, from http://www.coe.ohio-state.edu/plather/pdf/courses/966-05%5B1%5D.new.pdf).

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in the classroom was especially helpful in formulating a context-specific survey that reflected the emerging themes of the research context (Anderson-Levitt, 2006). This grounded survey helped to validate the themes that had emerged from observing and interacting with the students. The eleven undergraduates responded to a six-point, 38-item Likert-type scale questionnaire designed to capture the larger pattern of student-perceived experiences with multiple modalities (see Appendix). The survey achieved high construct validity. The instructing author, a literacy expert in the U.S., confirmed the face validity of the survey instrument by an item-by-item analysis. Reliability was tested with Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, resulting in a mean of r = .82, which signifies that the survey instrument is highly reliable. To understand the distinctive dynamics holistically, open-ended questions asking the role of multimodal literacy in the composition class were included in the survey.

Furthermore, to triangulate the results of the survey and to capture a more rich and in-depth exploration of student experiences, the visiting author conducted in-depth interviews with three case study students immediately after the course ended in Autumn 2006; three after-course interview sessions per case study student lasted from 60 to 100 minutes per session. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for fine-grained analysis. The individual interviews captured students' "'stories' of their experiences" in their "own descriptions," which are "invaluable indexes to their views and perceptions" about multimodal curriculum (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 75). They also resulted in vivid and trustworthy findings, unveiling the unstated reasons and complicated dynamics of student perspectives that were captured in classroom observation and survey data. Furthermore, to identify the bridges and gaps between student experiences and course instructor expectations, the visiting author conducted a two-hour formal interview with the instructing author regarding the goals of the course, the rationale of the course, and the strengths and challenges of implementing multimodal curriculum in a college setting.

3. Case Study Students

As addressed earlier, based on their prior college-level composition classes, familiarity with computers, ethnicity, and gender, Ann, Jeff, and Chris were selected as three focal research participants. Ann had had two composition classes, Jeff had had one composition class, and Chris had had no previous composition classes in college. In contrast, none of the students had prior experience with production using digital instruments, though their familiarity with computer use varied.

Ann was a third-year African-American female majoring in Marketing. She identified herself as a "bad writer" and had had prior experience in basic and first-year composition

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classes. Ann liked to use the computer, but her use was limited to word processing and e-mailing. As a Marketing major, she aspired to work in advertising. Jeff was a second-year Caucasian student majoring in English who had had a prior positive experience in general composition, including a first-year computer-based composition class. This positive experience had helped to solidify his career goal to be a professor of English, to which he had aspired since high school. In his personal life, Jeff liked to explore technology and computers. Chris was a freshman who was exempted from the first-year composition class; he enrolled in the second-year composition class which was the research setting during his first quarter in college. According to Chris, he had been identified as an "expressive writer" by his high school instructors. When Chris registered for the second-year writing class, he was apprehensive about composing "a hard-core 20 page paper" due to his inexperience with writing a college paper. He selected the course because his expectations of the computer-intensive class matched his familiarity with computers in general.

V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From the grounded survey, enjoyable learning emerged as a theme from the study of multimodal literacy curriculum in relation to student learning experiences and the theoretical underpinning of NLS. Based on the interview data, two reasons for students to have enjoyable learning experiences are explicated in the following section.

1. Enjoyable Learning

Table 1 shows that students' perceived experience of the multimodal composition class can be epitomized as enjoyable learning. In ordinary people's reflection of their literacy practices, Brandt (1994) depicted that their memories of productive writing experiences were relatively not enjoyable memories as compared to memories of their receptive reading experiences. By contrast, the students in the multimodal composing class show enjoyable composing and producing experiences with agreement rates above 82% across each of the three assignments. Despite their agreement about their enjoyable learning experience, students did not show the same level of consensus on the easiness of the assignments (Table 1). The majority of the students (82%), in an open-ended question, reported that learning how to use a technology was a primary challenge in their class experience. The finding from this study coincides with Daley's (2003) stated

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TABLE 1

Enjoyable Learning and Easiness (*n*=11)

Item	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Mean	S.D.
Enjoyable learning in print assignment	91	9	4.36	1.12
Enjoyable learning in audio assignment	91	9	4.45	0.93
Enjoyable learning in video assignment	82	12	4.36	1.50
Easiness of print assignment	55	45	3.82	0.87
Easiness of audio assignment	55	45	4.00	1.27
Easiness of video assignment	55	45	3.55	1.21

Note. Mean numbers range from 1 to 6. 1 (Very strongly disagree); 2 (Strongly disagree); 3 (Disagree); 4 (Agree); 5 (Strongly agree); 6 (Very strongly agree)

concerns, questioning the "wide assumption" that today's undergraduates "already have an adequate knowledge of … multimedia" (p. 37). Students may have technology skills for viewing and interacting; however, these students had little experience in *producing* and *designing* with new technologies. Given student difficulty in learning technology applications, it is meaningful that their primary experience in a multimodal composition class remains enjoyable learning. This echoes educators' comments, saying that "learning [should be] a form of profound pleasure" (Gee, 2007, p. 95) and that people who distinguish between education and entertainment don't understand the true value of either (MacLuhan, 1964).

TABLE 2

Confidence (*n*=11)

Item	Before the class		After the class			
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	*t*	*p*
Confidence in print assignment	3.82	1.17	4.64	1.12	-2.32	.04
Confidence in audio assignment	3.36	.92	4.18	1.17	-1.76	.11
Confidence in video assignment	2.64	1.12	4.45	1.29	-3.19	.02
Overall confidence in technology	3.82	.87	4.45	.69	-2.61	.03

Note. An alpha level of .05 was used for all statistical tests. Mean numbers range from 1 to 6. 1 (Very strongly disagree); 2 (Strongly disagree); 3 (Disagree); 4 (Agree); 5 (Strongly agree); 6 (Very strongly agree)

As a learning outcome of the multimodal composition class, student confidence in technology shifted toward positive after the class. Table 2 shows the Mean comparison of the students' perceived confidence in the three multimodal assignments. Analysis of the total scores of their perceptions before and after the class with paired *t* tests indicates statistical significance in print and video assignments as well as overall technology

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confidence before and after the class. In particular, student confidence in the video assignment was lowest before they took the class (M = 2.64); however, their confidence in technology increased substantially after the class (M=4.45). The learning outcome regarding the use of technology can be meaningful because the students learned complex video editing skills within the short time span of a ten-week period, and their learning process was associated with enjoyment.

2. Reasons for Enjoyable Learning

1) Bridging Out-Of-School Multimodal Literacy Practices with School

Interview sessions with the three focal research participants helped to explicate two reasons for students' enjoyment of multimodal learning. They attributed their enjoyable learning experiences to a multimodal literacy curriculum, which filled the pedagogical gap between the conventional school-sponsored alphabetic literacy pedagogy and widespread out-of-school multimodal literacy practices. Stated differently, student enjoyment was due to their bringing in their out-of-school multimodal literacy practices, which are often related with technology-mediated popular culture. While it can be partly true that the accumulation of alphabetic literacy has contributed to upgrade human lives in terms of economic richness and high civilization, the context of literacy has evolved over decades (Graff, 1979). The two male participants, Chris and Jeff, referred particularly to the prevalence of popular culture and their self-sponsored video game literacy practices in their lives. They played video games at least two or three times a week and had done so since childhood. As they grew older, the medium of the game changed from a video game system to the computer. Despite the fact that communication technologies were ubiquitous in their lives at home and in their communities, in their experience, school had provided few opportunities for instruction about how to use these technologies. In other words, these students enjoyed their popular culture by reading, viewing, and consuming various modes and media. Nevertheless, in reflecting on their K-12 schooling, these three focal research participants noted a disconnect between their in-school pedagogy and their out-of-school literacy practices. While school focused on increasing alphabetic literacy skills, they had had no multimodal composition instruction in the K-12 setting. Consequently, in spite of the ubiquity of technological literacies in the students' lives, their experiences were limited to a receptive use of technology, i.e., the consumption of multimodal literacies. Ann stated, while linking the multimodal curriculum with her "daily life":

> During school, there were times that I wondered why I was learning all of these

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> [alphabetic literacy] things. This class was different. This class used technology, music, and video, all of which permeate my daily life. I learned how to use a Mac, burn CDs, download music and related copyright laws, open and use programs such as MS WORD's pictures, and import and transport files in this class. I can take videos of my family. I plan to take a video of my younger brother's birthday party (Ann 2[6]).

Ann was making sense of her life in relation to the multimodal curriculum. Both the learning process and outcome are not separated from her situated life, as the curriculum considers the popular culture and technological factors embedded in the current practices of literacy. Being literate is no longer limited to building alphabetic literacy skills. Instead, individuals need to be sociotechnologically literature because digital technology permeates contemporary culture. In this cultural context, student learning of multimodal composing raises their potential for meaning-making in their lives. The multiple modes and media become a communal resource to make sense of student lives beyond the limits of written words. The multimodal literacy curriculum is not playing the role of *gatekeeper* to academic success. Rather, the multimodal literacy curriculum plays the role of *gateway* to student composing and learning throughout life, as it is theoretically grounded in NLS, which links school and out-of-school literacy practices. Familiarity with popular culture and use of multimodality-rich technology seem to have led the research participants to enjoy the multimodal curriculum.

2) Motivation

Three focal research participants also attributed their enjoyable learning experience in producing three multimodal texts to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation means motivation which drives an activity so that "there is no apparent reward except the activity itself and that the person is deriving enjoyment from the activity" and bringing out "internally rewarding consequences" (Deci, 1975, pp. 23-24). In comparison, extrinsic motivation refers to motivation that drives an activity through seeking an external reward beyond the activity itself.

In this study, students' immediate need for course credits provided extrinsic motivation. More importantly, students' awareness of the usefulness of the multimodal curriculum in their lives intrinsically motivated the research participants to invest extra time to learn the technology that was needed to finish their assignments. As shown in Ann's quote above (Ann 2), these students were well aware that technology and

[6] Ann 2 refers to Ann's second interview; the student's name and numbering refers to the interview session of that student.

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multimodal literacies have permeated their daily lives. They were also aware that the technological skills that they developed in this class would be resources for their career development (Selfe, Hawisher, Woodbeck, & Walikainen, 2004). Chris noted, "Our daily lives are saturated with technology. Computer skills are in high demand in the real world. The skills I gained will become resources for my access to campus jobs, and my future possibilities are also broadened" (Chris 3). Although these students are now conscious of the usefulness of the multimodal curriculum, they expressed little confidence in technology use before the class (Table 2); they perceived their low preparedness in technology as a barrier to their completion of course assignments and their career development. This awareness increased their intrinsic motivation, which consequently drove them to overcome the immediate difficulty of learning new technology for multimodal composing with digital instruments. As Ann noted, "This class took more time than other classes, but I enjoyed the whole class a lot" (Ann 2). In sum, in relation to the alphabetic literacy curriculum, students identified the multimodal literacy curriculum as a resource for making sense of their lives by linking school and out-of-school literacy practices, working toward resolving their life issues, and achieving their life goals (Street, 1984; Tusting & Barton, 2005).

VI. RESEARCH IMPLICTIONS

1. Theoretical Implications

During the multimodal composition class, the focal research participants, Ann, Jeff, and Chris, negotiated between in- and out-of-school literacy practices. The observations of these students provide support for the NLS position which resists the traditional view that individuals must discard their home and community literacy practices in order to be included in academic discourse. Instead, as "[c]lassroom teaching and curriculum have to engage with students' own experiences and discourses" (New London Group, 2000, p. 88), the dialogic discourse between in- and out-of-school provides students an empowering zone to raise and enact their multimodal literacies. Grounded on the epistemology of pluralism, a pedagogy of multimodal literacies thus aims to create empowering zones for students to broaden their present and future participation in the real world.

In the shifting cultural ecology of literacies, if one's understanding of composition is limited to the traditional alphabet-based literacy, people will be immobilized within a static view of literacy. As Scribner and Cole's (1981) seminal finding of Vai oral literacy

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practices, which enable logical and syllogistic reasoning, has broken down the Great Divide[7] between orality and literacy, students' out-of-school literacy practices needs problematization regarding what counts as text. Text in the classroom under study is not limited only to the written proposal for PSAs; the text includes a Print PSA, an audio PSA, and a video PSA. As today's students are situated in relation to popular culture mediated by familiar technology, "if we continue to define literacy in ways that ignore or exclude new media texts, we … abdicate a professional responsibility to describe accurately and robustly how humans communicate, and how they compose and read in contemporary contexts" (Selfe, 2004, p. 55). Indeed, the communicative modes of literacy have been broadened to include a written language, an oral language, and multimodality. What counts as literacy evolves, just as the cultural, historical, social, and technological contexts where people are situated change. By problematizing the static notion of conventional alphabetic literacy, we argue for a *dynamic view of literacy* that takes into account the ecology of literacies, the "complex set of socially and culturally situated values, practices, and skills" (Selfe, 1999, p. 11). In conceptualizing a dynamic view of literacy, the authors put an emphasis on what people do in the real life setting and how they perform literacies in their situated contexts.

2. Pedagogical Implications

Classroom practitioners who are seeking insights regarding how to incorporate multimodal composing into a composition class can benefit from this study. First, students' varying degrees of technological preparedness can be a challenge to a course instructor. For example, in this study, Ann's functional literacy with the computer, prior to this class, was limited only to word processing and e-mailing; in contrast, one male Engineering student had video production experience using a digital camera. This wide range of technological preparedness creates an ongoing challenge for instructors. A similar challenge can be identified in the disconnect between students' reception and production skills with composing technologies. Teachers too often assume that the current generation of students has high technological skill and "less fear of the computer and more technical ability with software for rich media" (Daley, 2003, p.37). However, as reported in this study, students' technology preparedness may not always extend beyond the reception skills of reading and viewing communications with technology. Despite some students' lack familiarity with technology and production experiences,

[7] According to the Great Divide theory, alphabetic literacy results in modern and educated individuals; conversely, individuals who have no knowledge of alphabetic literacy skills are regarded as primitive and uneducated (Graff, 1979).

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they can achieve success with technology. Ann, for example, successfully finished her multimodal assignments even though she initially lacked technological skill. Ann compensated for her relatively low technological competency with an increased time commitment in order to become comfortable and confident in working with technology for the class. From the student side, Ann's case suggests that students must be willing to learn new technologies and to seek out support. From the instructor's side, the need for robust technological support systems within a course, department, or school becomes evident for the successful implementation of a multimodal curriculum.

Second, it should be noted that the availability of digital composing instruments was a challenge to students. Within the large research-oriented institution where this study took place, students could borrow instruments such as digital video cameras and digital audio recorders from either the English Department or the university's technology center. The need for such devices, however, was pressing because some students experienced difficulties in securing multimedia production equipment. It is clear from this case study that instructors need to plan for the technological requirements of assignments and organize both interdepartmental and intradepartmental systems of support for implementing multimodal pedagogy.

Third, the implementation of a multimodal curriculum may challenge course instructors and administrators who are "blinded" by the alphabetic literacy tradition (Wysocki & Johnson-Eilola, 1999, p. 349). It is becoming increasingly clear that students need a multimodal literacy curriculum in both K-12 and college settings in order to cultivate skills to operate new modes and media of expression. We, educators, need to rethink the role of a composition class in today's ecology of literacies where communication employs various semiotic modes and media. As seen earlier, the case study students specifically expressed an awareness that few formal opportunities were given to them to be trained for the prevalent technologies and multimodal literacies to which they were exposed in real life. Therefore, it may be needed for course instructors to broaden not only their own practices of composing but their approaches to teaching about composition as well.

3. Limitations and Future Direction

As this study took place in a natural classroom setting, the findings on implementing a multimodal curriculum have high ecological validity (Liebert & Langenbach Liebert, 1995; North, 1987). Nevertheless, it should be noted that because of the context-specific nature of the composition curriculum and the limited number of participants, it is difficult to generalize the findings of composition studies (Goubil-Gambrell, 1992; North,

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1987). Therefore, the classroom practitioners who explore implementation of a multimodal composing class need critical interpretations of the research contexts, curriculum, and research results in order to find meaningful insights that may be transferable to their particular teaching context.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the multimodal literacy curriculum reported here is an intervention study in the tertiary English classroom, where English is used as a first language. Applying the multimodal literacy curriculum to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts can open new perspectives—benefits, and challenges—in English education. The authors hope that this study will invoke other empirical research in EFL, both quantitative and qualitative, that will assist educators' attempts to rethink the role of schooling and create social support systems in the current ecology of literacies.

4. Concluding Remarks

Under the overarching influence of the social turn, perspectives on learning have shifted from knowledge acquisition to social participation in a situated context (Gee, 2000; Sfard, 1998). The term *acquisition* means that learning is the accumulation of decontextualized knowledge. In contrast, the term *participation* refers to the way people think and act in the real world by transforming what they have learned. By employing a dynamic view of literacy in general and multimodal literacies in particular, the current study questions fundamental assumptions about what counts as knowledge in the current ecology of literacies. The dynamic view of literacy blurs the boundary between school-sponsored literacy and out-of-school literacy practices, and between alphabetic literacy and multimodal literacies. Emphasis should be placed on how students accomplish various functional literacies and how smooth their transitions are across different contexts. In this study, student participation in multimodal composing can be epitomized as student empowerment through building their multimodal literacy skills, responding to their present and future needs, and consequently broadening their opportunities to participate in the real world. The multimodal literacy curriculum can be a compelling way to facilitate student participation in both school and the real world.

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APPENDIX

Investigation on Undergraduates' Experiences and Attitudes
on the Multi-Modality Composition Class

The survey questionnaire consists of three parts. Part I contains statements about your opinions regarding your experience to using multiple modalities in English 367C01. Part II is related with your demographic and background information. Part III includes open-ended questions regarding the role of multi-modal literacy in English 367C01.

Your sincere responses would be appreciated. The usefulness of this questionnaire depends entirely on your honest and thoughtful responses. All information that you provide is anonymous and confidential.

I. **Reactions to Using Multiple Modalities in the Composition Class**

Direction: Please read each of the following statements and *circle* the number from 1 to 6 that best describes you, according to how much you agree with each statement.

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Example:	Very strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Very strongly agree
I like to read on my computer.	1	2	3	4	(5)	6

1. I enjoyed doing my print assignment
2. I enjoyed doing my audio assignment.
3. I enjoyed doing my video assignment.
4. It was easy to finish my print assignment.
5. It was easy to finish my audio assignment.
6. It was easy to finish my video assignment.
7. At the beginning of the course, I felt confident at the print assignment.
8. At the beginning of the course, I felt confident at the audio assignment.
9. At the beginning of the course, I felt confident at the video assignment.
10. Now I feel confident at the print assignment.
11. Now I feel confident at the audio assignment.
12. Now I feel confident at the video assignment.
13. I had some difficulty in the print assignment due to limited access to computer/hardware.
14. I had some difficulty in the audio assignment due to limited access to computer/hardware.
15. I had some difficulty in the video assignment due to limited access to computer/hardware.
16. I had some difficulty in the print assignment due to limited access to the software program.
17. I had some difficulty in the audio assignment due to limited access to the software program.
18. I had some difficulty in the video assignment due to limited access to the software program.
19. I had some difficulty in assignments due to unfamiliar computer-related vocabulary in this class.
20. At the beginning of the course, overall, I was good at computer technique.
21. Now, overall, I am good at computer technique.
22. The practice sessions were helpful to learn the computer technique.
23. The computer technique was easy to learn.
24. I had enough technology support for doing my print assignment.
25. I had enough technology support for doing my audio assignment.

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26. I had enough technology support for doing my video assignment.
27. I had enough feedback for doing my print assignment.
28. I had enough feedback for doing my audio assignment.
29. I had enough feedback for my video assignment.
30. The print assignment was helpful to expand my understanding of literacy.
31. The audio assignment was helpful to expand my understanding of literacy.
32. The video assignment was helpful to expand my understanding of literacy.
33. Overall the course was helpful to expand my understanding of literacy.
34. Course reading was helpful to expand my understanding of literacy.
35. All sections of English 367C should provide some practice with multiple composing modalities.
36. I would recommend English 367C01 to English majors.
37. I would recommend English 367C01 to science and technology majors.
38. I would recommend English 367C01 to general students who are looking for GEC 367 options.

*** II. Demographic & Background Information**

Direction: Please *circle* or *write* your response at the blank of each question.

1. Name (optional):
2. Email address (optional):
3. Phone (optional):
4. Age:
5. Gender: Male _____ Female _____
6. Major (pursued or in progress; ex. English):
7. Year at college (ex. junior):
8. Native language (ex. English):
9. Other languages that you could use except English (ex. Spanish):
10. Other writing/composition classes that you took at a college level (ex. Edu T&L 107, English 109).
    At OSU: _____
    At other colleges: _____
11. Technology classes that you took at a college level (ex. Computer Science 110).
    At OSU: _____
    At other colleges: _____
12. Do you like to use computer? Yes____ No _____
13. How long have you used computer? About _____ years
14. How often do you use computer for personal purpose? (*Circle* one)

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Several times a day ___ Once a day _____ Several times a week _____
Once a week _____ Other _____

15. How often do you use computer for school work? (*Circle* one)
Several times a day ___ Once a day _____ Several times a week ____
Once a week _____ Other _____

16. Did you know how to use digital audio recorder before you took this class?
Yes ____ No _____
• If *yes*, how many times did you use digital audio recorder?
Once ____ Twice ___ Three times ____ More than three times ___

17. Did you know how to make I-movie before you took this class?
Yes ____ No _____
• If *yes*, how many times did you make I-movie (or equivalents)?
Once ___ Twice ___ Three times ___ More than three times ___
• If you have used equivalents for I-movie, please write down your software programs.

_____

18. Why did you choose to take English 367C01? (*Circle* one)
Because it is a computer-intensive course _____
Because it fits on my schedule _____
Because my friend recommended _____
Other _____
• If you chose the option, *other,* please explain the reason of your enrollment in English 367C01.

_____

19. Have you heard about multi-modal literacy before you took English 367C01?
Yes ____ No _____

20. What was your understanding of literacy before you took English 367C01?

_____

III. The Role of Multi-Modal Literacy in the Composition Classroom

Direction: Please write your response at each question and explain the reason of your response.

1. Is there any *change* in your understanding of literacy after taking English 367C01?
Response: _____
Reason: _____

2. What was most *helpful* aspect of your English 367C01?
Response: _____

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Reason: _____

3. What was most *challenging* aspect for your English 367C01?

Response: _____

Reason: _____

4. What are *important* things that you've learned in your English 367C01?

Response: _____

Reason: _____

Thank you very much for your time and effort to finish this questionnaire. If there are any *comments* that you would like to convey, please feel free to use the following space.

Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Levels: Elementary, Secondary, Tertiary

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