ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTISTS:
DIGITAL VIDEO IN THE ELA
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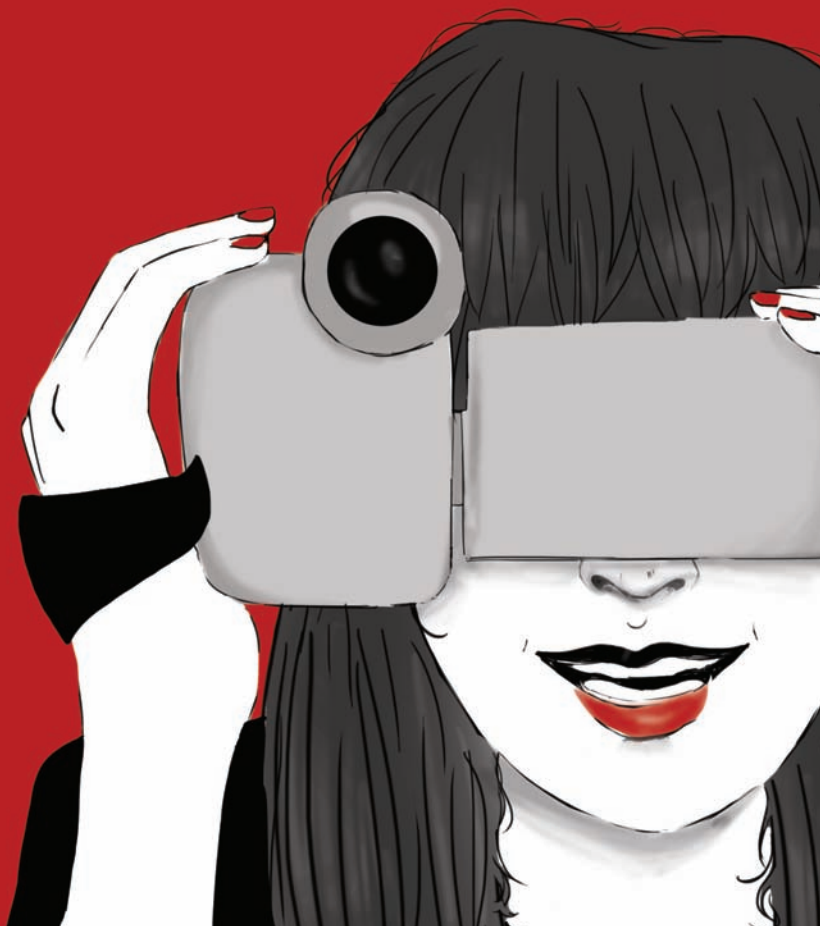
The English Record

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Volume 68 Number 2

Spring/Summer 2018

The English Record

a publication of the

New York State English Council

Aims
The English Record publishes original peer reviewed contributions that focus on the field of English education. *The English Record* features articles on pedagogy, essays, commentaries, program descriptions, reflective narratives, book reviews, poetry, and occasional student work. Please check the website *nysecteach.org* for more information.

Submissions
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Identifying information should not appear elsewhere in the manuscript.
Please include an abstract on the cover page of no more than 100 words.
Manuscripts must conform to APA standards. Manuscripts that do not utilize APA will be returned.
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Letter from the Editor
Lou Ventura

This issue represents something of a departure from *The English Record's* usual process and concept, but a departure we found exciting enough to explore and execute, and we could not be happier with the results.

David Bruce and Sunshine Sullivan address content and process in their article "Writing with Video: Learning and Sharing in Communities of Practice," so it is left to me to discuss the issue's origins: a great professional development experience. In the summer of 2016 twelve educators from the southern reaches of western New York gathered at Houghton College in Houghton, NY for a five-day workshop examining and discovering what digital video might have to offer to the ELA classroom. While a few members of the group had been working with video for years, most of us had at least experimented with it enough to recognize, if not clearly articulate, the medium's potential. At the same time, rapid improvements in technology were making it far more likely that students would be willing and able to record, edit, and publish their video creations.

Those of us who participated in the workshop came to realize that digital video could have a profound effect on the classroom in terms of instruction and output, process and product, a way of coming to terms with the rapidly changing face of literacy from reading and writing words on a page, to recording and experiencing words and images on a screen. This professional development has continued with the same group leaders, most of the same participants, and the continued support of our home districts and the Allegany-Cattaraugus BOCES Center, resulting in new classroom activities which have not only been shared with our group, but also at the most recent NYSEC and NCTE conferences, and now within the pages of this issue of *The English Record*.

Also included in this issue are two book reviews by Katie Ralston and James Cercone which we hope our readers will not only find personally and professionally edifying, but will also serve to introduce two authors, Liz Rosenberg and Jill Bialosky, who will be keynote speakers at the NYSEC conference in October.

Finally, we are grateful to David Bruce and Sunshine Sullivan for their commitment to the production of this issue of *The English Record* as well as their commitment to the professional development opportunity that made the subject matter of this issue a reality.

The English Record
Article of the Year
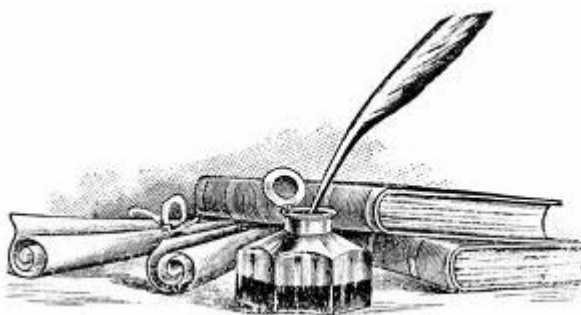
This award is given to one author who was published during the current volume year. Nominations will be sent by members of the blind review panel and executive board to the editor for selection. The award will be presented at the awards luncheon at the conference.

Writing with Video: Learning and Sharing in Communities of Practice

David Bruce
University at Buffalo
Sunshine Sullivan
Houghton College

Introduction

"Teachers these days…"
"It must be nice to have the summer off."
"Teaching is just overpaid babysitting."
"If I were the teacher of that classroom, the kids would have . . ."

Statements like these are commonly muttered or announced loudly in homes, coffee shops, in the bleachers of sporting events, and even published on social media. The national conversation around and about education hovers around failing schools, unprepared teachers for the 21st century, and disengaged students. This deficit mentality that is erroneously used to describe our schools comes from those who have not been supported by our schools or who have positioned themselves outside of our schools. So how do we respond? *We can* engage in critical conversations with individuals. *We can* share our individual and diverse classroom stories, communicating our nuanced and messy teacherly lives. *We can* also act on Kylene Beers' (2016) challenge: join our voices to correct the inaccurate narrative, inviting those who are commenting *about* and *around* education *into* our spaces where they can see and hear our strength, our resolve, our creativity, and our life-long learning.

This themed issue is our effort in joining our voices, inviting you and others to read our counter narrative. You may resonate with one of our voices more than others. You may resist one of our voices more than others. We count those differences as strengths. Our unique approaches allow us to enact our collective commitment to empower our diverse rural learners in exploring their voices with digital literacies. Here you will read classroom-based stories describing dedicated teachers who have worked individually and collaboratively. The stories collected and shared here were possible because educators made and continue to make conscious choices to cultivate, participate, and sustain an evolving community of practice that focuses on purposeful integration of digital literacies in classrooms across a predominantly rural region.

Our Brief History

David (University at Buffalo) and Sunshine (Houghton College) asked for and discovered a powerful partnership with CABOCES, the regional professional development center for 22 school districts in New York's Southern Tier. We met with various stakeholders including administrators, curriculum and technology directors and teacher leaders—to invite teachers from across the region to explore how digital literacies could be integrated in their curriculum, leveraging practices many of their students used, but were not accessed in the classroom.

During our first year, we held two 1-day workshops and a week-long summer institute that we called Writing with Video (WWV). We first gathered with a group of teachers and discussed the value and strategies for reading video texts as part of their curriculum in the fall. In the spring, we immersed a group of teachers in writing with video. They created and premiered trailers that they could take with them and use in their classrooms the very next day (Sullivan & Clarke, 2015).

Throughout both of these one-day workshops, teachers were engaged in creative problem-solving, intentional collaboration, and reflective practice. They took risks, experimented with unfamiliar technology, and realized video as a possible and purposeful compositional tool. We used these one-day workshops as previews for the summer institute.

We welcomed 12 teachers from six districts for our first summer institute in July 2016. Some came with others from their school, while others arrived alone. Some would try to share what they explored with colleagues. Others knew that if they were going to continue this exploration, they would be on their own. They came and discovered others who shared a common vision to empower their students' literacies and voices. While David provided explicit modeling and instructional practices of the various aspects of video composition, Sunshine facilitated reflective pedagogy conversations attending to the time, space, and flexibility necessary for sustained and meaningful composition.

The teachers composed three projects throughout the week. We created a virtual meeting space (using Schoology) that contained the discussion boards, process and products of the digital compositions they created, and curricular and classroom applications/extensions of our work. When the institute wrapped up, they left with tangible projects and plans for the new academic year. They also asked for more time together throughout the year and to be included in another institute the following summer.

Given the distances between the participating regional school districts we initially thought that the learning community would be sustained through online participation in a digital habitat (Wenger, White, & Smith, 2009). We learned quickly that Schoology served their collaborative work as a space to archive and access resources. The in-person meetings,

however, were where the real collaboration happened. Teachers waited until our fall and spring reunions to pose questions, identify roadblocks, brainstorm solutions, and celebrate successes. As teachers arrived with smiles and joyful sighs, we saw hugs and fist bumps.

Instead of our reunions being a place where we offered ideas, we intentionally developed those days to be a space for teacher-centered collaborative conversations. Our role served only as facilitators of the dialogue across the group. The teachers came prepared to share the projects they had been working on with their students. They also came prepared to share their frustrations, as well as ideas for working through or around those challenges. They came prepared to reunite with their "peeps." While we had originally envisioned a vibrant online community, instead, we discovered a resonant face-to-face community that supplemented discussions and shared collaborative work digitally.

During the spring reunion, we talked with the teachers about the plans for the upcoming 2017 WWV Summer Institute. Again, the teachers surprised us. We intended to open the institute for a new group of teachers and to invite the first cohort to serve as the facilitators. As we were explaining our idea, their facial expressions told us clearly what they later vocalized, "Um, no . . . we don't want to do that." Instead, they expressed the need for more time and space to create, to collaborate, to plan. So again, we followed their lead and facilitated and empowered their voice and choice in their professional development through the first WWV Advanced Summer Institute. Ten of the twelve original teachers returned. Once again, they devoted a week of their summer break to take more chances, compose new projects, and do rigorous conceptual and curricular planning. It is out of this extended work that their classroom stories emerged and thus germinated

into the idea to share their work with larger audiences through NYSEC and NCTE presentations and through a proposal to produce a themed issue.

Ruralities and Digital Literacies in Learning Communities

The teachers' commitment to this community of practice sustained their strength to gather their stories here to be voiced together. They wrote these pieces so that others can see and hear what we have learned beside one another: rural contexts matter and a community of practice focused on digital literacies has empowered these rural teachers and their students to engage in incredible learning and composition. This themed issue also makes space for us to attend to the specificity of place, which is especially important as "many of our theories and research paradigms for literacy presume an urban or semi-urban setting and do not account for the experiences and realities of rural places and peoples" (Donehower, et al, 2007, p. 12). Technology, especially, needs to be contextualized within a specific rural setting as there is uneven access, funding, teacher training and administrative support for technology (Plopper & Conaway, 2013). Our community's work here and beyond this themed issue extends the current understanding of rural classrooms by focusing on the specific contexts and voices of the teachers and their students working together across their landscapes of practice (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015), as they use technology to co-construct their learning as meaning makers.

The research around professional development with teachers and digital literacies states that it needs to be sustained longitudinally (Lawless & Pellegrino, 2007; Miller & Borowicz, 2005) and be rooted in theory, practice, and reflection (Bruce & Chui, 2015; Grabill & Hicks, 2005; Stein, Ginns, & McDonald, 2007). In addition, attention to creative

and technical processes is needed (McVee, Bailey, & Shanahan, 2008; Miller, 2007; Pearson, 2005; Rice, 2008; Snyder & Bulfin, 2008). Finally, these experiences should be rooted in their content discipline (Harris, Mishra, & Koehler, 2009) and in "playfulness and exploration" (Phelps & Graham, 2008, p. 129).

　　These learning experiences are ideal to develop within learning communities. However, for these communities to be effective and sustained, they must recognize their distinct requirements from other approaches to teacher development. Communities of practice necessarily position teachers as knowers and meaning makers (Wells, 1986), paying attention to learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) as a socially situated activity (Lave, 1996) through focused and purposeful discourse (Wells & Arauz, 2006). When teachers are supported with needed time, space, and position (Wood, 2007) powerful learning communities are cultivated and in turn they acquire and learn how to cultivate similar spaces in their own classrooms.

　　This themed issue provides glimpses into their rural classrooms, narratives that illustrate the power of teachers committed to leveraging their students' digital and academic literacies to open opportunities for their students and themselves alike to remain creatively engaged in their learning. We begin with some larger observations about their work, detailing aspects of their communities of practice, as well as the ways teachers considered the intersections of curriculum, technology, and content standards.

Learning in Community

Since all communities of practice are specific to the contexts and members of those communities, we thought it important to highlight some broader characteristics of our community's learning. One aspect of their learning community was that all the projects were set up to allow for the teachers to have time and space in which to experiment and engage with the technology. Real learning takes place in the "spirit of manipulative play" (Britton, 1982) and teachers who engage in play while learning with technology have substantive experiences (Bruce & Chui, 2015). One of our teachers said,

> When do teachers get the chance to just create something for fun, for just that whole process? We have students do it all the time. Part of the reason we are teachers and we love English and we love literature and we love writing is because of that creation, that process. We hardly ever get to do that…

The words play, fun—along with a number of synonyms—were constantly used to describe the different projects in which they were engaged. In our current educational climate on assessment and test scores, *play* has become a concept that is often disregarded or, worse, condemned as being frivolous. However, we saw play as substantive learning taking place on a daily basis during our institute. Our teachers' *play* involved experimentation, exploration, trial and error, and taking risks. Certainly, those learning characteristics are what we would hope are commonplace in our schools and classrooms. The most compelling aspect regarding how teachers responded to the institute was their attitude at the end of the week. Rather than having one foot out the door as the institute wrapped up, a number of our participants lamented

that our week was over too fast, and some even wanted to stay another week. We believe their commitment to the work was a result of our teachers being in a collaborative community, while having time and space to play and create and reflect.

Another feature of our community of practice was nurturing a high tolerance for mess and ambiguity during the projects. In our discussions, we frontloaded this concept: *everyone shares the same compositional processes but goes about them in deeply personal and idiosyncratic ways*. Thus, we explained that though we would all start and complete the projects at approximately the same time, the ways in which participants composed their projects all took different routes.

To reinforce this concept, we periodically halted all project work in order to interrupt what everyone was doing. At that moment, we asked everyone to name their specific work task. Each member or group stated their current workflow—downloading images, adjusting audio levels, selecting available footage, trimming clips, choosing transitions, etc. Without fail, participants were never in lock step with one another. Even when they were doing ostensibly the same tasks, the manner in which they were doing them differed.

In mediating the various iterative aspects of writing with digital tools, we modeled compositional options for the larger stages of brainstorming, drafting, editing, publishing, and audience feedback. By naming what we were doing, noting the messiness of the process, and highlighting how this process mirrored our classrooms, the community experienced authentic composition. The latter was never a rote procedure or a worksheet template. Because *they* got to experience the process messiness, we emphasized that they were following the same practices they would be asking their students to enact. This was a profound realization for our participants because it demonstrated a freedom in learning—not following a

prescribed regimen with these digital literacies, and instead placing the process within their teaching and classroom contexts.

A third aspect of our community of practice involved the rich dialogic engagement surrounding the pedagogical considerations and implications of our work. During the projects, we also kept concurrent discussions about the teaching, compositional, and curricular parallels to the digital tasks (Leander, 2009; Bruce, 2008). We kept track of these topical threads through group conversations, post it notes, Google docs, and online discussion forums. Much of the dialogue explored the various affordances for each project, the potentials and limitations, and different ways these projects could be adapted to different classes/assignments. For example, one participant—wrestling with the messiness of the composing process—asked, *how do I help transfer that social aspect of the process into a high school classroom where the struggle is between control and freedom?* The extended discussions around that question dealt with the larger issue of their teaching stance, particularly interrogating the ways in which they used and shared power in their classrooms. Likewise, for nearly every discussion thread, there were nuanced explorations of compositional considerations, classroom contexts, curricular implications, and, above all, deliberations around student learning.

A final characteristic of our community of practice work dealt with the collaborative nature of the way they practiced sharing. Each participant appropriated the institute's projects for their own classroom and curricular purposes, often adapting the materials in unique ways for their own contexts. When we gathered together for our follow up meetings throughout the year, these reunions became places for teachers to highlight the work they had been doing. These sharing times

were crucial to the life of the community, not only because so many of our teachers were relatively isolated, but also because these sharing times became generative. Just as participants adapted the summer institute projects to their own settings, the same phenomenon happened when they shared their own work with the community.

As one of the teachers would share her work, one of the statements commonly overheard was, "I'm going to steal that!" That phrase equated high praise to the one sharing, paying homage to the creative ways that teacher was implanting digital tools in her classroom. In fact, participants routinely stole/borrowed/adapted each other's projects for work in their own classrooms. For example, in one discussion, a teacher shared how she had her students complete an independent reading book review using iMovie trailers. Within the same academic year, others in the community assigned a similar activity. One adaptation required students to compose their book review through a podcast format. The sharing and adapting are examples of "webs of significance" (Geertz, 2008; Shulman & Carey, 1984, p. 503), indicating that individual work was contextually bound to their social and cultural contexts. Thus, in our community of practice, each teacher was inextricably linked to his fellow participants.

Curriculum, Technology, & Standards

Another larger consideration from our teachers' community of practice was the way they navigated the trifecta of curricular, technology, and content standards.

During the institute, we modeled three different projects with them—a video theme, video poem, and literacy narrative. We chose these specific assessments for work with our participants because each assignment has deep connections and multiple connections within ELA traditions/curricula. The

video theme (Bruce, 2007) examined an abstract word or concept—such as freedom, beauty, identity, etc.—through combinations of images, sound, and text. A video poem required the composers use the various affordances of video to create a literal or figurative interpretation of a literary passage/text/lyric (Miller, Knips, & Goss, 2013). The final project, the literacy narrative, involved participants describing a formative event, genre, story, or theme from their own interactions with cinematic texts. For the first two projects, participants used iMovie. The third assignment used ComicLife, a program that appropriates the conventions of comics and graphic novels—panels, word or thought bubbles, text boxes, etc.—to convey the story. Teachers had their choice to work individually or collaboratively on all projects.

During the conversations we kept during their composing and creative work, a large part of the dialogue explored the various affordances of each project, the potentials and limitations, and variations that could be adapted to different classroom contexts. For example, each year all Olean High School students participate in a school wide Poetry Out Loud competition. The teachers from that district explored ways in which they could incorporate the video poem into that existing curricular project. Paramount in these curricular conversations was to explore the various ways in which the institute-based projects could be adapted to participants' discreet contexts.

In the fall and spring reunions that followed the summer institute, the most compelling aspects of these sharing times were the ways teachers modified what they learned through the summer institute and adapted into their unique teaching contexts. In the summer institute we modeled three projects. Over the course of the following year, these teachers customized 12 digitally-based variations of projects and

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applications. These digital assessments included speech remixes, image narratives, video character sketches, digital book trailers, and vocabulary videos. Some of adaptations are featured in this special issue.

In addition to larger curricular considerations, it is important to note how the individual teachers applied creative approaches to technology integration. Oftentimes, incorporating new technology becomes an "event" instead of assimilating it as a regular part of classroom learning. Rather than having an extra project that felt "bolted on" (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 2005) to the curriculum, the teachers embedded the digital literacies into existing classroom practices ("Outside In: Video Composition and Vocabulary Instruction"). This approach is a shift away from "technology as event" and instead focuses on the incorporation of digital literacies as a literacy tool for making meaning.

It is important to note how our teachers dealt with the disparity of technology among their districts. While some schools had made substantial commitments toward providing a rich technological environment for teachers and students, other schools had limited technology resources. While we are aware of the trap of presenting rural schools in manner that focuses on the "rhetoric of lack" (Donehower, Hogg, & Schell, 2007, p. 14), it would be a disservice to those who teach and learn in those districts to neglect the disparity of access to and use of adequate technology. The reality for some of our teachers was that their district's technology options were limited to a computer lab or shared technology cart.

More important than the actual technology, however, were the districts' stances toward it. Research has shown that technology alone does not solve learning problems (Cuban, 1986; 2001). For example, one of the districts in our region had readily available technology. The school, however, used

constricting filters that one teacher equated to "chastity belts for iPads." Not only were there severe restrictions on Internet search engines, the district sandboxed its network to the extent that students were not able to integrate their own media—songs, pictures, videos—into the district-sanctioned technology. Thus, while the school had available tech, teachers and students could do relatively little with it. It is a testament to the creativity, commitment, and perseverance of our teachers in technologically-prohibitive circumstances that they were motivated to use what they learned in the summer institute with their students. They went to extraordinary lengths in order to access equipment and work around the restraints of the technology policies within the school.

In addition to the larger issues of curriculum and technology, we felt it necessary to address the way in which the teachers dealt with standards. As has been mirrored in New York State—and throughout the nation as well—individual districts have been obligated to mandate accountability to and with content standards. However, there are varying degrees to which districts have required adherence. Some have necessitated that content standards drive curricular planning to the point of following scripted teaching materials. Other districts have allowed teachers latitude in applying content standards to inform—but not dictate—curriculum decisions. Since our community of teachers came from different districts—and those districts had varying degrees to which they accounted for state standards—our approach to discussions and planning around the content standards was that they were an *entry point* (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 8) in curricular planning. In doing so, the standards were accounted for without dominating the curricular conversations. As our teachers planned and enacted their technology infused lessons and units, they indicated that student learning was the paramount concern

in curriculum development. Ironically, by focusing most of their planning around the students, the teachers found they had addressed the main benchmarks and learning indicators as a result.

Overview of Articles

This themed issue takes us into the classrooms of our Writing with Video teachers and participants. While each author tells a different story, we see the stories forming an educational mosaic—smaller pieces fitting together to show a larger story. This larger narrative is about what is possible when talented teachers gather together in sharing with each other and in learning from each other. We invite you to read these pieces and to learn with them.

In "Professional Development in Rural Context: Creativity and Collaboration in Learning Technology" **Alex Freer** provides an insider/outsider account of the Writing with Video (WWV) professional development. As a staff member of CA-BOCES, Alex is a veteran PD provider and facilitator. Given that the area for which she is responsible contains 22 school districts across four counties, she has unique insight into the variety of technology integration throughout the region. Alex has been to every WWV function and has cultivated a relationship with each teacher in our learning community. Her account, using the voices of the participating teachers, shares what she has seen take place within and beyond the PD.

A veteran classroom teacher of over three decades, **Lou Ventura** is an expert in working with students' research papers. In his article "Thesis Formation and Collaboration: Finding a Place for Digital Video in the Writing Process," Lou describes how he integrated digital video as part of the research process. Frustrated by the lack of meaningful feedback during the student peer review process, he demonstrates how DV can

be used in a reasonably low-tech environment yet be clearly tied to written compositional processes. Lou describes how he had students articulate their research thesis through video and then use online discussion postings to model and encourage rich peer discussion.

Welcoming the "Outside in: Video Composition and Vocabulary Instruction" has transformed **Sally Ventura**'s classroom culture. She invites us into her classroom to hear the laughter and witness the critical thinking and problem solving she engaged in beside her students as they composed Vocab Videos. Yes, vocabulary, something that is often reduced to a list of words and definitions to be memorized and tested, joined with video, something many teachers keep at an arm's length because of their uncertainty with the technology. Sally, a veteran English teacher, with her emerging digital literacies and willingness to learn beside and from her students illustrates for us how her students were empowered through creativity, humor, and vulnerability.

Through the "You in 6 Words and Images" class icebreaker, **Suzie Snyder** discovered a way to get to know her students as people, problem-solvers, learners, communicators, collaborators, digital composers, and writers within the first week of class. Equally important, her students recognized some of their own as well as their peers' strengths and resources. She describes how both the content and messy process of composing, cultivated a classroom learning community like none she had experienced before. While guiding us through her classes' boundaries and experiences, she provides teachers with a clear understanding of the processes she and her students engaged in during this community ritual as well as insights gained.

In "Video in the Classroom: Re-Imagining the Educational Wasteland of High School Apathy," **Brendan**

Heaney demonstrates how high and low achieving students were engaged during a video project in his World Literature course. Showing how students created videos to respond to their Shakespeare unit, Brendan's article pushes back against common stereotypes of adolescents being categorized as lazy and/or unconcerned about learning. By articulating the projects of two different student groups, he shows how these students defied expectations with the process and product of their work. Both student groups showed ownership of creating their video, meticulous attention to detail, and—most importantly— engaged in meaningful learning in the classroom. Brendan's candid reflections about stepping outside of his teaching comfort zone and trusting students with their work. demonstrates how a teacher can successfully mediate change.

Stephen Sorensen details how he used video in his after school program, Film Club. In "Making Room for Students in Poetic Analysis," he describes how he was approached by students in need of an advisor. Stephen agreed and met weekly with his students after the school day for the remainder of the school year. He describes how they enacted close readings for films and composed original video projects. In particular, Stephen describes how two different students expressed deep learning through their projects. By looking at issues of student ownership of the work and the positive role that "problems" play in the learning process, Stephen shows us how to help students find and articulate their voice.

Brendan Heaney in "The Festival: Video, Audience, and Affirmation," recounts why and how teachers in the Writing with Video Institute created an opportunity to screen student work for family, friends, and peers and how that experience resulted in positive feedback for the artists and an exciting and entertaining evening for their audience, making the film festival an integral part of the creative process.

As the guest editors for this issue, we find it remarkable to look back at the first day of our summer institute and remember these teachers' initial reticence in engaging with digital literacies. Two years later, these same teachers are sharing their stories with a much larger audience, stories that resonate with innovative teaching that result in powerful educational experiences with students. We celebrate these emerging and powerful voices of teachers who are learning and sharing together in community and who are taking their place as teacher-leaders in the field.

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Professional Development in Rural Context: Creativity and Collaboration in Learning Technology

Alexandra L. Freer
Cattaraugus-Allegany BOCES Center

In 2015 Cattaraugus Allegany BOCES (Board of Cooperative Educational Services) partnered with faculty from University at Buffalo and Houghton College in providing professional development (PD) for teachers who wished to increase their knowledge of technology and digital literacy that would propel their learners through the 21st century. Our collaboration project, called Writing with Video (WWV) took the form of weeklong summer PD with follow up sessions throughout the following school years.

Throughout the week, the group engaged in a number of projects aimed at connecting paper-and-pencil composition and reading skills to composing and reading with video. The teachers learned videography and framing, completed three video/visual projects (video themes, video poetry, and literacy narrative), and then connected those with the Common Core State Standards for reading and writing.

CABOCES partners with its 22 component school districts to meet the educational needs of all students ages birth to adult in the region. Located in Cattaraugus, Allegany, Erie, and Wyoming counties in southwestern New York State, CABOCES encompasses 2,159 square miles. School districts vary in size from rural, single campus K-12 settings to small city school districts. District K-12 enrollments range from 220 to 2,606 students. The combined public school enrollment is approximately 17,500 students. BOCES exists to provide cost

effective sharing of educational services among local school districts.

In keeping with this purpose, CABOCES offers a wide variety of programs including special education, career and technical education, adult and continuing education, and instructional support services. CABOCES also provides labor relations, business office support and safety/health issues, as well as assistance in implementing a variety of information technologies within the schools. Adding to its uniqueness, CABOCES maintains distance learning facilities at 20 sites within the BOCES area, as well as a connection to 80 additional sites in Western New York. CABOCES services are provided through the efforts of 600 full-time professional and support staff.

My role within CABOCES is as the Digital Media and Technology Coordinator. I plan, coordinate and implement curriculum, instructional strategies, education integration and assessments utilizing technology and media to model best educational practices. I serve each of the 22 districts, providing PD, classroom coaching, and curriculum support to any classroom or school in the CABOCES Region. Additionally, any use of technology and media falls under my jurisdiction, thus my work with Writing with Video.

But this is not my story. This program really belongs to the teachers who are involved: this is their story and needs to be told from their perspective and with their words.

Trading Places: The Teacher Becomes the Student

The PD in this institute differs from most others CABOCES provides. One reason is that it puts the teacher into the role of the student. Teachers step out of their comfort zone, taking off the hat of instructor and putting on that of a learner.

The technology is unfamiliar, the style is unique, and the format of the training is open, providing space for creativity.

One of the participants, Brendan Heaney, teaches at Fillmore Central School that has a student population of just over 600. He talked about being a learner in this unique setting:

> It's really important to be in the students' positions. Having that chance and that opportunity, and having to deal with the frustrations, the complications, the problem solving, the creativity, and the creativity blocks, and all that kind of stuff, it's essential. Being actively involved in that is an enormous part of the success of this. That's the fun part, in some ways, when you're back to having students in front of you and you say, "Guys, I did this too and I ran into problems."

Students often feel that their teachers are out of touch with what is being assigned and the demand therein. Having a teacher work through the same assignment connects teacher to student in a powerful way.

Stepping into a student's shoes is eye-opening for some, bringing them back to the feelings they may have had in their high school English class. One of the teachers, Suzie Snyder, related, "I have not given myself this space and the time to write . . . but to actually be a writer again is difficult and it opens my eyes to my students who are having difficulties." She continued:

> It really makes me think about it and go, "Remember how I felt this way? Remember how I couldn't come up with an idea? Remember how I couldn't get the words right? Remember how I got frustrated and said I'm done but I really wasn't done?" I need to remember that when my students feel that way.

As an English teacher in a school with a student population of 1,100, Suzie's opinion rings true across the board, regardless of school size, teaching experience, or content area. Most teachers have been in front of the classroom for so long, that the role of being the learner—not the expert—is a refreshing but unnerving space.

Moving from teaching to learning also serves as an inspiration for engagement. Another participating teacher, Christina McGee, reflected,

> The whole thing was just—you can work at your own pace, you don't have to be concerned. You can take a break if you need to, it's no big deal, but the whole entire time even when I was on break, I was thinking about the project, the work that I was doing. I think when you apply that to students, it's going to be the same for them. They're going to be thinking about their projects and if they're thinking about that all day long, how incredible is that? You never get a student to think about work all day long!

Christina is in a unique position, compared to the other teachers in this institute. She is employed by CABOCES as a teacher, working with all our 22 component districts and their students who are using blended or online learning options. This type of teaching/learning mode is used for credit recovery and at-risk students, for those students who want to improve their college readiness by increasing the availability of advanced courses, or to increase educational opportunities and depth of student transcripts. Christina's participation in this weeklong institute signifies her unique understanding of how rural districts utilize online and distance learning programs to help broaden the scope of student transcripts and give students unique opportunities to experience courses which otherwise would not be offered.

The Collaboration Station: Now Boarding!

Another aspect of this unique PD opportunity is the ability for these teachers to collaborate. Some of them are working in larger schools that employ several teachers within the same discipline, others fly solo in very small districts. Regardless, the collaborative aspect of WWV project appealed to participants regardless of their setting. Stephen Sorensen teaches in the Olean City School system, one of our larger districts with just over 2,000 students. He stated:

> We're all this shared purpose. We're all super different the people in this room, and may not work together on, you know when you go to these other PD programs, you don't walk out of there saying like, "Hey, let's stay in touch so we can be resources for each other." There's something about working with digital video and digital literacies that creates more collaboration. This is not multiple authors on a novel, but there's a ton of people listed in the credits, and it's just by its very nature of the format, more collaborative, that pushes you towards collaboration. It's more fun to collaborate and then it's because of the nature of it because it's a communal experience to go to a theater and see a movie and to share as a family. It has that result too where we want to share it collaboratively and produce it collaboratively.

Stephen works in a building with two other WWV participants, Lou and Sally Ventura, and they regularly share/build on what each other is doing. For example, during their second summer institute, the three of them met up after the PD day to film their video project at one of their homes. Teachers were never required to put time outside of the PD day, but they believed that to make their project work, they

needed a specific setting and specific props to compose their video.

       While the Olean teachers come from one of the largest districts, on the other end of the spectrum is WWV participant Lacey Gardner. Her school district has just over 200 students, and while she shares similar beliefs as Steven's, she is the sole English teacher for the high school grades.

> The whole working together, I don't ever work together. Like I said, I'm by myself, I'm the only high school English teacher, so having to work with other people is also a nice thing I can connect to with kids. Like, "Oh, I remember when I was doing this with a partner," because I don't ever have to do that. So, that was a great experience for me.

In fact, her participating in an ongoing collaborative experience has reinforced and influenced that aspect of her as a teacher. Lacey stated:

> Now, I'm conscious of those traits and things that you have to do when you're working with other people, that I don't even think about when I'm assigning it to my kids. I'm letting them workshop together, so I think it's going to make me reflective and thoughtful when I'm planning stuff for kids this year, which is good.

       Additionally, partnerships have the side effect of iron sharpening iron. Each of the teachers has individual strengths that end up contributing to the larger group. For example, some of the teachers have more background in digital literacies or technology, others poetry or novels, while others have a better film background. Working together has pushed and pulled the participants as learners and leaders. Sally Ventura, a veteran teacher of over 20 years and a colleague of Steven Sorensen's, shared how valuable it is to have colleagues to learn from:

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> As a professional community, the fact that some people have come in, I think Brendan comes to mind and Sorensen, with that comfort, helps speed the process for me because they're ahead of me in some areas. I can see what they do and they're already making the connections. That pulls me along in a way that never ever, ever would happen if I just jumped into this on my own.

Thus, the teachers have been able to bring their various expertise to the group, all the while being able to lean on the strengths of others.

Ironically, through developing her own video project, Sally became the de facto expert in the group on a specialized video project called Video Vocab ("Outside in: Video Composition and Vocabulary Instruction"). In order to spice up the garden variety vocabulary lesson, Sally's students presented a vocab word in video form, complete with sounds and images that capture the meaning of word.

In sharing his thoughts on the Writing with Video experience, Brendan also commented on the relationships that developed among members of the group:

> It is a community. It's a growing community. I hope this continues. I hope this goes on and on where I'm going to be continuing to get more and more out of it because I do think that there's a recognition that there is so much more to get out of it. We're only scratching the surface. We're only at the tip of the iceberg. What we can do when we take it back and what we get out of our students with that. Not only that but like how we as a community, what we're able to do to connect our schools, to connect our classrooms. It feels like harnessing the potential of something that we just know it's good. We know it.

Finding a workshop that cultivates creativity is one thing: finding one that continues on, breeding collaboration across districts, is unique and participants can't get enough of it.

Technology: Juxtaposing Functionality and Frustration

The technology aspect of PD both attracts and discourages teachers. Again, at this institute, we had teachers with varying degrees of technological savvy. In the beginning, the teachers who lacked confidence in this area struggled with various aspects of the video compositions. At times, technology was in danger of becoming an impediment to creativity. One of the teachers came to the institute with no prior knowledge of either how to use an iPad or how to work with the iMovie app. The steep learning curve in just five days was almost too much to overcome.

However, the teachers were able to work together, troubleshoot and problem solve. Lou Ventura, an English teacher who also works in the Olean School District, experienced this hurdle first-hand.

> I think the technology thing is if you want to get someone stressed immediately say, "Here's something new that we're going to teach you." I know the assignment I want to do can be done, but I'm struggling with turning those abstract ideas into concrete images. It shouldn't be so hard! I can do with words but the actual visuals, that's been hard. I'm struggling, and I'll get this done today.

After two years of participating, Lou is coming to a wrestling détente with tech—he continues to learn to use technology in ways that make sense to his teaching and his classroom ("Thesis Formation and Collaboration: Finding a Place for Digital Video in the Writing Process").

Suzie's take on technology was much different than Lou's experience:

> I love technology. I actually got my masters in curriculum and technology use and all of that kind of stuff, then I completely went away [from it]. With children and everything, all of that got pushed aside and this is bringing back what I love to do.

Suzie took the reins on a project she actually started with her students. "You in Six Words and Images" was born out of a Pinterest search for ideas. Several variations exist, but Suzie used it to have her students introduce themselves the first week of school, again using sounds, images in a video format to illustrate the six words. Through her work with WWV, she reconnected with her love of technology and planned for ways to have her students use it in classroom contexts.

Due to the rural nature of our region, there are varying degrees of technology and connectivity in our schools. Some of our bigger schools are not just one to one (one device per student) but three to one. In those cases, the students can use a BYOD (Bring Your Own Device), a district iPad and district work station upon which they can do larger cloud based projects. However, in some of our smaller districts, technology is more scarce. Some schools still have to share a laptop cart between three or four other classrooms, or schedule times to use a centralized computer lab. Limited availability of technology is frustrating for both the teachers and the students. Composition instruction in some of these districts is limited to tools that have not been updated in decades. However, we have found that it is less about what technology is available and instead, how it gets used. Teachers can have 1:1 access and limited bandwidth but may still be able to use the tablet as a high-tech notebook or use projectors as electronic chalkboards. What matters is that the available technology is being used in

thoughtful and considered ways to engage students in meaningful learning opportunities.

Above all, the thread that wraps around all these aspects of Writing with Video is the level of PD. All of the teachers in this weeklong institute have received PD from the moment they earned their teaching degree. This PD can be delivered in-house or at another site. It can be given by peers or world-class speakers. The PD can be incredibly effective or a waste of time. Our hope in this institute was to provide high quality PD that would be easily replicated in the area schools. From the comments we received, it is clear that our goal was not only met, but surpassed. Here are some of the participants' own words describing their experiences in WWV.

> Michelle Grillo:
> I really like the way that you two (Dr. Sullivan and Dr. Bruce) build the workshops. I really do. I like the reflection even though reflecting is sometimes difficult for me. I'm not good at it but I like that. The reflection, I like the conversation. I feel there's enough space in the week. There are workshops that deal with sort of the same thing that I've stopped going to because they're not that way. There's something quite unexpected to come out of it and it's something that I take with me into the classroom, at home, when I'm in the car, and it sticks with me. It's meaningful and important to think about.

> Christina McGee:
> It's phenomenal. I get to work with other teachers who are trying to have creative teaching spaces, and we share our own work and we share what we're trying to

do in the classroom. It's just inspiring. I think that anything where I'm engaged, where I'm asked to be creative, where I'm asked to actually be doing something is probably a workshop I want to be at. Anything where I'm just listening to someone talk for hours is not really a workshop I'm excited about. Although it could be very beneficial, I won't be as engaged, I won't be learning.

Lacey Gardner:
What an impact, I mean, as far as the, "Oh, I can't wait to see everyone, that was so much fun." I've never been to anything in the summer that I was like, "Oh, that was worth it." This was definitely worth it to me, obviously, we're all here again.

Suzie Snyder:
To work with these people who are all English teachers, we all have that kind of goal, we all use this in our classroom, but we are all so different. Such different teachers in our classroom and to learn from that and learn from these people, it really and truly has gone beyond anything I could have imagined and I've always, in that 16 years I've taught, I've never had a PD experience like this. This is exactly what I needed at this point in my career when I was starting to feel burned out.

Stephen Sorensen:
Again, it's just the testament to the people that you're working with, that these people are on fire for education and for specifically using technology in the

classroom in meaningful community creating ways. It really saved the week for me.

Sally Ventura:
A lot of this is working with great enthusiastic people. I've gone to enough PD workshops that become just like, "Well, that's stupid. You can't blah blah blah." I'm far enough in my career, I feel I have no patience for that. I want to surround myself with enthusiasm and positivity. Not once ever did I hear, "No, we can't do this. This is limited use," that kind of thing. There's none of that. That's why, I almost, in a lot of ways don't care what the topic is. That positive energy is what will bring me back. If you all of a sudden decide that you're going to talk about tracing writing and we're all going to spend days copying over something, I'd say, "Okay." With this group, it could be a positive experience.

Lou Ventura:
There are simply some things I think you need to do the face to face thing with and I think it's hugely important our getting together from time to time like in the same place not virtually but really. I think it's huge and it's really important just for me.

Brendan Heaney:
I don't even consider it like a PD or a training so much as there's something more to it than that. It's almost like when I put those stupid PD phrases to it like, this PD, it's not a PD, it's a group, it's a club of some sort in some ways. The story is that I couldn't wait to get here. Being here's been fantastic. It's the best seven

hours where you come, you can't wait to get things going, you can't wait to have conversations with people. You leave feeling energized, you leave feeling creative, you feel like your batteries got charged rather than drained during that day.

In this partnership with CABOCES, Houghton College, and University of Buffalo, we've stumbled across such a unique way to offer and deliver PD that we want to keep striking while the iron is hot. Teachers are yearning for trainings that are pertinent, readily usable, and engaging. CABOCES is proud to have been a part of this powerful and integral training, reaching into our rural schools and pulling out high quality learning. One of our biggest contributions to this has been to provide the space, resources (sub days, release time, PD credit, etc.), as well as the networking resources in order to allow these talented and dedicated teachers to come together and become better at their craft.

We refuse to be defined by the traditional narratives that rural schools are lacking. We refuse to be limited by what we do not have. We would rather tap into the vital resources we are surrounded by and use them to their utmost capacity, in ways that engage students in meaningful learning. We tap into the potential and the power of "yet," weaving a thread that connects us in making lifelong learners. And the best way we have seen this is by engaging in this process together.

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Thesis Formation and Collaboration: Finding a Place for Digital Video in the Writing Process

Lou Ventura
Olean High School

Abstract
The early stages of the research writing process, gathering and evaluating information, and especially the thesis development step of the prewriting process, could benefit greatly from student collaboration. However, traditional techniques of collaboration, group work and peer tutoring for example, often result in the inefficient use of class time, problems of teacher oversight, and ineffective input from peer reviewers. While there is no denying the effectiveness of the peer review process for professional writers, the same collaborative process has proven ineffective for student writers beyond the proofreading of early drafts. Digital Video (DV) technology, however, now offers opportunities to overcome problems inherent in the student collaborative peer review process.

Background and History

The research paper has been a staple of the high school curriculum for as long as I have been part of the equation, over forty years and counting at this point, the last 30-plus years as a secondary school English teacher: three different stops, two different states, public and private. Regardless of time or place, the research paper has remained a time-honored inevitability—usually required at some point during a student's senior year. There was even discussion some years ago that New York State would add the research paper to students' ELA graduation requirements, part of the shift toward more informational texts and, what I hoped would be, a tentative

testing of the portfolio assessment waters. And while that requirement ultimately never got off the drawing board, the research paper endures.

And it has endured sometimes in spite of, and sometimes with help from, a technological revolution that shows no sign of slowing down. In the 1970s students often had a difficult time physically taking possession of relevant and timely information discovered in the green paperbacked *Guide to Periodic Literature*, or culled from the card catalogues of public libraries. However, today with the ubiquity of Internet search engines and subscription databases, the problem is not finding information. Students are now drowning in information with little understanding of how to evaluate it. Teachers now have to show students how to wade through the morass of misinformation and disinformation, and what actually constitutes fake news. This informational triage can be problematic, but ultimately enormously positive; it is hard to argue that greater access to information is a bad thing.

However, despite all the technology and all the available information, unified, restricted and precise thesis statements still prove elusive to students (McCrimmon, 1984, p. 27). In my experience most research papers that end badly reach that unfortunate end because they begin badly, with poorly crafted thesis statements.

The Assignment

Not all research papers are created equal. This particular project is question based and persuasive in nature working within the parameters of the traditional research framework of gathering, evaluating, and integrating information. Students are not looking for information to support positions they already have. They are looking for information that will successfully address and answer research

questions they have framed. The answer to the research question must result in a persuasive thesis with a call to action directed at the individuals or groups most affected by, or most in control of, the circumstances surrounding the research question.

For example, the thesis to a research question like *what is causing the loss of honey bee colonies*? might be a call to action to eliminate the use of some pesticides or undertake steps to mitigate the effects of certain kinds of insects harmful to honey bees. This process should in turn help students identify their target audience. In this example, the audience would be individuals or groups most affected by the loss of honey bees: farmers, beekeepers, consumers, and those who serve and regulate industries and organizations that directly affect and depend on healthy, vibrant bee colonies. Most importantly, however, the part of the audience the writer must look to address and persuade is the group that, for whatever reason, disagrees with the paper's thesis, its call to action. Identifying this group and making sure to present persuasive information in a way that does not alienate skeptics but persuades them, is key to successful persuasive research writing. For the latter to happen I have found collaboration to be an overlooked but powerful tool.

I had used collaboration once before in the research process to address a persistent issue, one that affects more than just research papers: late assignments. Students hand in work in stages with each assignment building on the last. No assignment is accepted until the previous assignment has been handed in, evaluated, and returned. This keeps the focus on process (which is where I think it belongs) and minimizes the number of students who might be tempted to hand in final drafts that are not entirely their own. However, receiving work in a timely manner was a problem. In an attempt to address this

problem, I began to consult with students when determining due dates thus avoiding dates that had some significance to them but not to me: the big game, a local theater production, a class trip. Some classes might show a preference for Friday due dates over Mondays, and for a process that generally takes weeks and weeks to complete, I could usually—though not always—accommodate their preferences. I give them the last possible date the final draft can be submitted, and we then work backwards together. I also set due dates for myself; if students hit their due dates, I hit my mine (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Research Paper Assignments, Due Dates, and Requirements

Assignment	Due Date	Return Date	Pts.	Format
Works Consulted/ Video Thesis	10/23(M)	11/9 (Th)	100	**Video/Typed/ Electronic**
Introduction	11/14 (T)	11/21 (T)	20	**Typed/Electronic**
Outline	12/1 (F)	12/8 (F)	100	**Typed/Electronic**
1st Draft	12/21(Th)	1/9 (T)	150	**Typed/Electronic**
Final Draft	1/18	------	200	**Typed/Electronic**

The **Final Draft** will not be accepted until the first draft has be submitted, evaluated, and returned.

This student input into the process has not eliminated all late papers, but it has eliminated lots of outside-the-classroom excuses. However, the dynamic between me and my students was more negotiation than collaboration. While entering the world of student due dates did create a sense of shared responsibility and purpose, it still fell short of the authentic kind of collaboration among students I wished to

achieve in my classroom, collaboration that fostered a feeling of something in it for everyone resulting in a kind of discovery as well as improved results. This is similar to what Muriel Harris (1992) described as "collaborative writing . . . between writer and reader to help the writer improve her own abilities and produce her own text—though, of course, her final product is influenced by the collaboration with others" (p. 370). I also envisioned the collaborating readers functioning as fellow writers—not readers who remained silent throughout the writing process until a first draft had been completed. Most professional writing includes at least some level of collaboration, from important memos to peer reviewed journals—a term which overtly states an intuitive truth—input from peers improves a final product. However, making collaboration work, especially at the thesis development stage in the writing process, means overcoming problems inherent in classroom collaboration.

My initial attempt at student collaboration in the thesis development process was the usual option of group work ending in student presentations, but these were problematic. I could observe students in groups, and occasionally comment on work being done in groups, but my attention would inevitably be divided among the groups in any given class. As Michael Graner (1987) observed, " . . . several conversations are occurring simultaneously, and it is virtually impossible for the teacher to guarantee that these discussions do not become small talk or social chit-chat" (p. 41). However, as DiPardo and Freedman (1988) rightly pointed out when they commented on Graner's observation, trying to eliminate the social interaction here, eliminated "the role of social interaction in the acquisition of written language" (p. 127).

The next, most common step of group work, requiring groups to make classroom presentations to share their findings,

often resulted in a significant amount of class time dedicated to these presentations—especially when classes could include up to 30 students—slowing the research writing process to a mind-numbing crawl.

Finally, getting useful feedback from students once these presentations were completed was another significant problem. Groups had to be closely monitored—which was not always possible—to make sure students were addressing given criteria. Also, time dedicated to questions following student presentations often deteriorated into too few students asking too few questions. Solutions like having students respond to specific questions about the criteria for each presentation, while theoretically promising, took time to collate and share, and were not always useful. And trying to hold students accountable for the evaluation of each student presentation meant significant time commitments for everyone involved, most especially the teacher.

As DV became more available, examining its collaborative potential to address these challenges seemed more than reasonable. Because the group work is archived on a website, I and the students could view the work at any time, and students could access and comment on videos outside the classroom. I in turn could view student work and share the most instructive examples with the entire group. Therefore, DV could allow for collaboration and also expedite the process to the point that it was not only useful but practical.

DV in the Research Process

Considering the research process which I already had established and my desire to improve the quality of student thesis statements, I decided the most useful place to insert a collaborative component was after the research had been completed and before writing had begun. Waiting until a first

draft has been completed before allowing for collaboration, as is most often the case (see Kinsler, 1990, p. 309), limits collaborative activities to proofreading and grammar checks. And while it is possible to offer "thesis support" as Kinsler demonstrates through things like "thesis support worksheets," there is simply much more to fix if this support comes after the fact, after the first draft has been completed (p. 309), and therefore after the poorly crafted thesis statement has done its damage.

As mentioned earlier, the gathering stage of any research process has been made easier by recent technological advances, but the evaluation stage has become more problematic. During the evaluation stage, students must judge the efficacy of their research materials based on how credible, timely, and relevant the information is. This is an area where other students with a knowledge of these criteria could lend a helping hand. I found DV to be most helpful with this issue because it offered a way for students to give input to a small group of their peers regarding source material that would ultimately shape and support each student's thesis. (Complete instructions and materials as they were given to students can be found in Appendix A.)

Students created a short video of themselves as they talked through their core paper argument. In the online forum, members of the group viewed the videos and commented on the content. The creator of the video then responded to the comments. The public nature of this work created a heightened sense of ownership and investment. The video thesis then acted as a bridge from evaluation to integration and, for most students, resulted in a working thesis statement. The foundation for this bridge is the works consulted page which students were required to complete when they had finished gathering source material. The page consisted of ten or more sources listed as

they would be in a works cited page, but with annotations addressing their relevance to the research question, their timeliness, and their reliability:

> Relevance – Does the information in the source help answer the research question?
>
> Timeliness – Has the source been published recently? Has information from other sources made this source obsolete?
>
> Reliability – Who is the author and where was the source published? Does the author have some expertise in the field? Is the journal peer reviewed?

At this point students built working thesis statements which clearly stated the answer to their research questions with appropriate calls to action. Students were instructed to videotape themselves addressing the following requirements:

- State the original research question.
- Discuss the information you encountered, good and bad, and why you decided to use some sources and reject others.
- Focus on what you consider to be the most convincing information you have and how you intend to use it.
- Share your working thesis statement.
- Discuss what you believe to be the biggest barriers to persuading your target audience (those people who disagree with your thesis) and how you intend to reach them. Tone is an important consideration here.

Students then uploaded their videos to a class Schoology.com account, a platform that allows students to upload and share video and also allows students to comment on other student videos. This is where the collaboration took place. While other

platforms may be useful for this part of the process, Schoology has proven effective and user-friendly. Much like a Facebook interface, students posted their video thesis statements and then responded to each other's comments in discussion threads. Students then commented on their group members' videos, offering opinions regarding the choice of sources, the effectiveness of the working thesis, and anticipated approach to the audience. Students were asked to determine if working thesis statements were

> Logical – thesis is persuasive and can be supported by information available
> Restricted – thesis can be developed within the parameters of the assignment (5-7 pages for example)
> Unified – thesis argues only one position
> Precise – thesis can have only one interpretation, no ambiguity

After group members commented on each video produced by other members of the group, they reviewed that commentary and decided whether or not to implement changes to their thesis statements based on this input. If a recommended change was not made, an explanation was required. This is where I stepped in at times to mediate disagreements regarding whether or not suggested changes should be made. The video, the commentary, and the responses to the commentary were all important checks for understanding. Students received points for addressing each aspect of the video assignment. (See Appendix B for rubric used in grading the videos and commentary.)

Creating the video did not require a significant amount of technical expertise from students and certainly not from me.

Many students simply used their smartphones to film themselves delivering their messages and uploaded their videos on the Schoology app. One of the best parts of this exercise was that while it depended on video technology, the production value of the videos did not have to be high. In fact, I described the finished product "a conversation with props" (source materials). Some camera-shy students never actually appeared in the videos, but their source materials did, with their commentary as voiceover.

I informally categorized the videos uploaded to Schoology as follows, terms I used with the students during classroom conversations:

1. Awesome – hitting every figurative nail on its head – with feeling
2. Adequate – dutifully addressing components of the assignment, sometimes inconsistently, sometimes with a lack of clarity or understanding
3. Off the Mark – revealing a lack of understanding of the assignment's purpose or its place within the research writing process

The commentaries, were also similarly categorized:

1. Useful – thoughtful and thorough, indicating an understanding of the review process and the writer's place within it
2. Adequate – dutifully addressing components of the assignment, sometimes inconsistently, sometimes with a lack of clarity or understanding
3. Perfunctory – of little value, revealing little understanding of the review process

John, a senior in a regular section of English 12, produced a video thesis which was of the "Off-the-Mark" variety. It was more like a not-so-brief summary of the entire essay before it

had actually been written, starting with a discussion of how the author arrived at the decision to research this particular topic (the efficacy of body cameras worn by law enforcement officers). While John did, in fact, offer a unified, restricted, and precise thesis statement, other important aspects of the assignment were missing. Ultimately, these omissions were highlighted by the other members of his group during their peer review. For example their comments included the following:

> "Your original research question was stated and you covered your working thesis very thoroughly."

> " . . . your video lacks a mention of sources you rejected and what barriers of persuasion there are in your target audience."

> "How will you overcome those barriers to persuasion?"

John responded by saying, in part,

> I understand I forgot to state my sources I rejected, and lacked informing how I would overcome my barriers. My rejected sources were about military body cameras instead of police cameras. I would've tried to convince them with stating that the practice of using the cameras was very beneficial when studied with the Orlando Police Department.

All of this discussion took place without my oversight, but I was still able to review it, share it, and comment on it. It also served as a check for understanding for everyone in the group. Most importantly, this online conversation moved John to adjust the way he was approaching his audience. Peer reviewers offered important observations and suggestions

before the author actually began to outline, not to mention before he began to write.

The student videos and comments also helped expose other problems. For example, one problem present in this discussion which continues to plague these interactions and student discussion in general is student reluctance to use domain specific language in their observations. For example, when John addressed his failure to mention the sources he rejected and why, he did state the rejected sources "were about military body cameras instead of police cameras," but he failed to use the word which needs to be applied in this situation, relevance. The sources rejected were connected to the discussion but ultimately were not wholly relevant to the discussion. Having student thesis statements and comments posted in an online class forum allowed me to make comments that most likely would have been missed if students worked in literal groups and the comments had been made orally during their individual group discussions.

In another video thesis, Ellen, a senior in a section of Advanced English 12, did an excellent job fulfilling the requirements of the assignment—a great example of "Awesome" on the video thesis rubric—beginning with the core of her working thesis about the effect of smartphone use on intelligence and social interaction: "Smartphones are not making us stupid or anti-social." Some of the commentary was equally effective. For example, one group member stated,

> There will be more than enough information online to develop a 7-10 page essay [restricted]. The thesis does argue one position only [unified] . . .. The thesis can only be interpreted in one way, and is understandable [precise] . . .. The use of logos in your essay would be very effective [how best to persuade the audience].

Both this video thesis and this commentary are well done although the comments still lacked some domain specific language which I have added: restricted, unified, precise, and persuade the audience. As was the case with the previous example, the video and subsequent posts served as a quick and effective check for understanding. In fact, given the accessibility of the forum threads, I was able to present this as a useful model to share with other members of the class outside the collaborative group itself.

While much of the commentary was useful, the discussion posts still suffered from the types of filler comments that often plague peer revision. Comments like "you brought up some really good points," or " . . . in your conclusion remember to consider your tone" suggest the writers did not yet fully grasp the process in their own work and were, therefore, unable to add much to the discussion surrounding someone else's, again a quick and effective check for understanding. However, I was able to use these posts as examples of what kinds of comments are helpful and effective and what kinds are not.

Takeaways

The use of DV in my classroom resulted in a much more efficient use of class time. It also improved the quality of peer to peer feedback. The very public nature of the work, and student affinity for personally produced DV in general, improved motivation for many students, and clearly demonstrated what others have noted: collaborative work can improve understanding and awareness of audience (Kinsler, 1990, p. 305; DiPardo and Freedman, 1988, p. 124). DV is increasingly the way students make themselves known to others, mostly on social media platforms; therefore, they feel a

need to present something of quality that will represent them in a positive light, even in the classroom.

Most importantly, student collaboration through DV improved students' sense of ownership of their work and the work of others. By following the steps of the process and the criteria provided, students ultimately saw that their input could improve the work of other group members and the input from other group members could improve the quality of their own work. I was no longer the sole arbiter of what was good.

The DV component does not try to reinvent the writing process; instead it attempts to augment and redefine it. DV allows students to effectively collaborate, and it also allows teachers to efficiently monitor the process along the way, helping make student collaboration an essential part of the student writing process, as it should be. As stated earlier, no self-respecting professional prepares something for public consumption without the aid or input of others. Peer reviewed journals derive their credibility based on their explicit appeal to group sponsored collaborative efforts. This very article you are presently reading has passed through several hands with the requisite suggestions and revisions all in the name of focus, precision, and clarity. However, we hesitate to afford our students the same process we lean on so heavily to produce our best work, mostly because traditional collaborative techniques are time consuming and often result in only perfunctory student participation which is not effective or instructive. As Reither and Vipond (1989) point out, we must " . . . find ways to design courses to make writing and knowing truly collaborative activities for students—just as they are for the rest of us" (p. 857). Digital Video has the potential to help make that happen.

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Appendix A
Works Consulted/Video Thesis
Purpose of Assignment – facilitate completion of the
research process
– facilitate collaboration within
that process

The research writing process consists of three major steps:
- gathering information
- evaluating information
- integrating information

This assignment is specifically designed to take you through the first two steps of the process. You are required to prepare works cited entries for the sources you have identified and write a brief evaluation of each source commenting on
- credibility/reliability
- timeliness
- relevance

The two components of the assignment:

The **Works Consulted** will be uploaded to turnitin.com on the agreed upon date. (See the list of assignments and due dates, and a sample **Works Consulted** on my website under the resources link.)

Think of the **Video Thesis** assignment as a conversation with props. You will have this conversation with a few of your classmates who will give you feedback about your thesis. You will consider their input and then determine how that input will affect the direction of your research. Think of this group as your peer reviewers.

At this point I have no time requirements for the video. That may change as we work through the process in class.

Video Thesis Process
1. Upload the video to Schoology.com on the agreed upon date. (See the list of assignments and due dates on my website under the resources link.)
2. During the course of the video you must

- State the original research question
- discuss the information you encountered, good and bad, and why you decided to use some sources and reject others
- focus on what you consider to be the most convincing information you have and how you intend to use it
- share your working thesis statement
- discuss what you believe to be the biggest barriers to persuading your target audience (those people who disagree with your thesis) and how you intend to reach them. Tone is an important consideration here.

3. Group members will view your video on Schoology and post their observations and recommendations on Schoology as well. Group members will comment on whether or not your thesis is

- Logical – thesis is persuasive and can be supported by information available

- Restricted – thesis can be developed within the parameters of the assignment

- Unified – thesis argues only one position

- Precise – thesis can have only one interpretation, no ambiguity

4. You will review their recommendations and write a brief comment about how their recommendations will affected your writing process.

Therefore, the Video Thesis has Three components
1. your video
2. the group's recommendations
3. your response to those recommendations

Appendix B

Video Thesis Rubric
Video Addresses each of the Following:

- original research question   /5
- information encountered during research   /5
- most convincing information   /5
- working thesis statement   /10
- biggest barriers to persuasion: tone   /5

Comments Must Address degree to which video is

- Logical – thesis is persuasive and can be
  supported by information available   /5
- Restricted – thesis can be developed within
  the parameters of the assignment   /5
- Unified – thesis argues only one position   /5
- Precise – thesis can have only one
  interpretation, no ambiguity   /5
                                                /50

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Outside in: Video Composition and Vocabulary Instruction

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Abstract

To increase student vocabulary and digital composition proficiencies, I developed a project, "vocab videos," for my eleventh grade classes. Not only was the project successful in increasing vocabulary knowledge and digital skills, but it yielded other positive results as well, most significantly, creating a classroom culture that encouraged risk-taking. Whereas diagnostic and formative assessment confirmed the gains my students made in vocabulary knowledge and digital skills, very powerful anecdotal evidence supports the conclusions I have drawn regarding the positive impact of this assignment on classroom culture.

Introduction

Vocab videos are short videos, about one minute in length, that students compose around the vocabulary words we are studying. While they may appear simple, in reality they have changed my classroom culture in powerful and surprising ways. One of the most memorable examples of the impact this assignment has had on my classroom occurred when we viewed a video that a student composed for the word "monotonous." He had been receiving accommodations throughout his academic career for selective mutism. In his video we all heard his voice. His classmates were awed by his video as well as hearing his voice for the first time. A teacher aide who had known this young man since his elementary

school years affirmed the significance of the experience when she wrote to me: "To witness how well he had presented his vocab word in his video, not only with confidence but with the courage to speak knowing others would be watching, was astonishing to me and the students watching the video. I think I can speak for everyone when I say we all were so happy for him and will never forget the word monotonous!" Indeed, when we encountered the word "monotonous" during a reading from *Of Mice and Men*, one student started giggling. The context of the word in the novel wasn't humorous, but he had recalled some of the silliness in the "monotonous" vocab video his classmate had produced. Connections and responses like this have become a regular part of our classroom community. They are indicative of the several important changes that have occurred in my classroom as a result of the vocab video assignment.

Context

A couple of years ago, a colleague's enthusiasm for incorporating digital tools to support the literacies of our students prompted me to register for a workshop hosted by our local BOCES (the Board of Cooperative Educational Services of Cattaraugus and Allegany Counties), although admittedly, I registered with some skepticism. I anticipated that the workshop would promote new educational software programs designed to increase the expediency of our lessons because so often the juxtaposition of "digital" and "education" referred to the kind of management resources which would allow students to access various media, or which could generate endless electronic reading comprehension passages and companion reading comprehension questions. I harbored some suspicions of "film literacy" as the euphemism for the kind of pre-vacation lesson planning with which I wanted no association.

However, the workshop redefined my understanding of "digital literacy" and inspired me to sign on for a week-long "Writing with Video Summer Institute: Rural Voices Rural Visions" during which I joined a group of educators from several rural districts in New York's Allegany and Cattaraugus counties to learn about the role of digital literacy in the ELA classroom.

The summer institute was unlike any other professional development experience I have had throughout my thirty-year teaching career. It was not a training, but rather an immersion. My colleagues and I met every day all day to create and discuss different digital literacy projects, most of which I have since used in my classroom: video narratives, video belief statements, video trailers and video themes. We re-envisioned poetry in video format and we experimented with cartoon animation. We worked independently and we worked collaboratively. Those projects that we could not finish during the institute hours we finished at home because we had become so invested in them. I—and every one of my colleagues at the summer institute—became very excited to explore digital literacies in our classrooms and maintain correspondence throughout the year about our work.

Despite all of that excitement and all that I had learned, however, I did not have confidence with my new technical skills. I had spent much of the week asking questions and seeking help from my colleagues. I worried that if I introduced some of the projects we worked on during the institute into my classroom, I did not have the skill base to support students in their own growth with digital proficiencies. If I needed assistance, I knew I would be able to continue to rely on my colleagues who attended the institute along with me, but I didn't know what support systems my students would have in my classroom, and I didn't know how I would keep those

students who lacked confidence with both technology and ELA skills engaged.

Because I teach in a rural district with a high poverty rate, I was keenly aware that the assumption that all young people possess an ease with the digital world is false: the range of access to technology and the range of digital proficiencies is commensurate with the disparity between household incomes. Although all the students in my high school are provided with laptops, they would need other devices to film. It was irrelevant that the number of students who didn't own cameras or phones was small; this was a population that would particularly benefit from increased digital literacy but would be unsuccessful—if not frustrated—if I were unable to provide them with the tools they needed.

Securing iPads to loan to these students for filming was problematic: ostensibly, the provision of one-to-one laptop devices seemed to be enough to level the playing field with regard to technology, so surprisingly, iPads were not readily available. Students who owned personal laptops and smart phones were at an advantage. To avoid highlighting this advantage, I sought a project that could serve as an entry point that all students could successfully complete, and a project that didn't cause those students who were self-conscious about their lack of technology skills to feel further disenfranchised.

My heightened sensitivity to the needs of children from low economic households has made me aware that not only are technology skills roughly parallel with socio-economic status, but a correlation between socio-economic status and vocabulary range has been documented as well (VanDeWege, 2007). Because of the special importance of vocabulary instruction in a district with a high poverty rate (Jensen, 2009), I had been continually seeking lessons that challenged students to learn words deeply, in ways that not only facilitated the

reading comprehension of a specific text, but also promoted transfer in variant grammatical forms to other texts, and broadened students' composition vocabulary. These goals, I decided, might be accomplished digitally.

On the last day of the institute when we discussed which project we planned to bring into our classrooms first, instead of choosing one we worked on during the week, I shared my idea for an assignment I believed would be manageable for me and any of my students who were tentative about working with digital tools: vocab videos.

What is a Vocab Video?

I had decided that a simple, straightforward project would allow me to determine my students' level of technological skills quickly, to ascertain which resources I would have to procure, and to maximize the chances that every student produced a finished video. I also believed the successful completion of a short vocab video would give students confidence to tackle more complex productions as the year progressed. Finally, I believed that this assignment would provide obvious differentiation opportunities within the ELA framework (see CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4-6). All of these goals have been met through my students' engagement in the vocabulary video assignment.

For the vocabulary video assignment, students created a video that helped their peers learn a word they had chosen from a list derived from the texts we consider in our curriculum. The criteria for the videos were (a) the video must be composed with predominantly original footage and (b) the video must help prepare their peers for the vocabulary quiz (in which students are asked to define 15 out of 25 words, use them in sentences that demonstrate their definition and usage

understanding, and identify the part of speech as they occur in their sentences).

Currently I am using this assignment across all sections of my English classes. I teach a wide range of learners with individual strengths and areas for potential growth. For example, in one section, 37% of my students receive CSE services and 9% receive declassification services, the rest of this section requires my ability to differentiate instruction. Another section is full of students earning college-credit, presenting still other differences to which I must be aware and respond to effectively. This video vocab assignment is one way I am able to meet the diverse needs across my sections while being an inclusive and responsive educator with high expectations for all of my students. The purposes of the assignment are for all students to

- learn vocabulary from a "wide angle" perspective, considering various parts of speech and usage;
- develop metacognition skills; and
- develop skills with technology.

I begin the assignment by posting the list of vocabulary words, and then asking each student to sign up for a word. Students tend to select words with which they are somewhat familiar, increasing the likelihood that they will learn those words more deeply. Once the vocab video assignment has become an established project in my classroom, students vie for the ability to choose first from the list, and they often ask me, "What does this word mean? And this one?" before they make their selections. Those questions ensure that the assignment will not only help them learn the word they ultimately choose, but others on the list as well.

The first time I assign this project in the school year I ask students to complete a "pre-writing survey" to indicate their familiarity with the movie-making applications available

on the school's devices as well as their level of access to technology outside the school. This information helps me to know how much class time I should allot for creating videos, how many iPads I need to secure, and which students I might call upon to offer support to their peers and me! For subsequent vocab video assignments, I ask students to write a paragraph of about 150 words demonstrating that they are familiar with the correct usage of their chosen word. This paragraph can include sentences from the video script or a summary of findings from researching the word, but is not limited to either of these options. The paragraph provides an opportunity for me to discuss the relationship between grammar and vocabulary, as I emphasize that understanding usage is often dependent upon an understanding of parts of speech. It has also allowed for an organic conversation regarding etymology as students tend to read the entire dictionary entry to familiarize themselves with their words, rather than simply memorize synonyms.

I give students a class day to research their words, complete the prewriting assignment and plan their videos. Very often students have researched their words and planned their videos before I have even assigned this work because they are eager to get filming. Some students want to share with me their ideas for their videos—most often they choose a narrative approach—but many of them want their videos to be "surprises." This flexibility is vital to maintain a classroom culture that is responsive to students' diverse approaches to creative compositions and learning processes.

A few days later I devote another day of class to the project so that students who prefer to film in school can do so, and students who prefer to film outside of school can edit. Students share information about apps for special effects, and they often share their videos with each other. On these days our

classroom is active and noisy, affording ample opportunities to exercise and develop habits and skills associated with accountable talk (Michaels, O'Connor & Resnick, 2008).

Generally I give students about a week to post their finished videos to our class Schoology page. I create a discussion forum that prompts students to upload their videos and allows everyone to see and comment on each other's work. The Schoology platform is easy for students to use and provides a lot of storage space for video projects.

After the videos are submitted, we view each one together in class. My students have developed their metacognition skills by recognizing the importance of repetition and a memorable gesture or image associated with the word (see Figures 1&2). Sometimes they are drawn to the narrative created in the video. Sometimes they simply recognize good videography (see Figure 3). Although the videos remain posted on Schoology to view anytime, students often ask me to replay certain videos. They also hear of great videos from other classes and ask me to share them (I usually comply, with the filmmaker's permission).

Figures 1. snapshot of tapping finder from "apprehension"

Figure 2 QR code for "apprehension" video

Figure 3 QR code for "pinnacle" video

As with any new teaching practice, the investment of time during the first year I implemented this project was greater than the investment of time my second year. I have estimated that viewing each video requires an average of three minutes: a vocab video is generally one minute long, and it takes approximately two minutes for students to note a sample sentence and comment on an effective element of each video. For a class of 25 students, viewing time, therefore, is approximately one and a half hours, or, in my case, two class periods. This year, my second year with the project, I provided one and a half workdays so the project in total required three and a half class days.

The significant increase in student performance on the vocabulary tests I administered after introducing the vocab video project encouraged me to adopt it as part of my repertoire. These assessment results align with Hall and Stahl's (2012) finding that learning is increased when lessons target both verbal and non-verbal "channels" and utilize different types of media. My students' work also aligned with research found students with learning disabilities who used video in vocabulary instruction "had statistically higher word acquisition scores than those in the nonvideo instruction group" (Xin & Rieth, 2001, p. 87).

Initially I required students to record sample sentences and definitions while we viewed videos so that they could have notes from which to study for their vocabulary test. However, now I hand out a list of sample sentences and definitions that I have prepared to supplement the videos because this practice saves time, prompts more discussion, and helps students focus on elements of the video. My intention going forward is to add another column to this list for students illustrate a gesture or image from each video that will be helpful in remembering the vocabulary word. Creating a graphic will be useful during our

brief discussions after the viewing of each video about what elements were particularly effective and memorable.

I have been tempted, as my students and I create compilations of particularly effective and memorable vocab video qualities, to provide a formula for this assignment. That temptation was too great to resist after my first successful attempt with vocab videos; I dutifully set out to design a perfect rubric (see Figure 4). Implementing a rubric would certainly make assessment easier and would help to guide students in making successful videos, I reasoned. The result, however, was bland, uninteresting, flat videos. Very few students incorporated humor into their videos. The vocab video had become just another assignment, and students lost their space for creativity, lost their engagement. Although I was disappointed with what was lost through this round of videos, I learned a great deal from them. I learned that exercising too much control was detrimental to student-centered energy. Students produced the videos they thought I wanted to see, not the videos they were inspired to create.

This failure inspired me to reconsider some of my grading practices. Currently, I am awarding grades of 100 to almost all students who complete their videos (the exception occurs when videos contain misinformation). This practice has not led to perfunctory work, mostly because of the public nature of the product, but also because the single explicit goal (teach a word to your peers) can be assessed without various shades of distinction. Awarding grades of 100 has also encouraged my students to trust that their efforts and their growth will be rewarded, regardless of where their vocabulary and technology skills are when we undertake this project.

	Excellent (90+)	Good (80+)	Adequate (70+)	Inadequate (70 -)
Cinematography and Acting	- original footage - impactful use of camera perspective, scenery and acting - acting is convincing	- original footage - manipulation of camera perspective - thoughtful use of scenery - credible acting	- original footage, but little or no manipulation of camera perspective or scenery and / or - acting is not credible	- does not use original footage
Quality	- music and effects enhance the content - excellent sound and image quality	- excellent sound quality	- sound quality is good	- sound or image quality is poor
Transition	- transitions are used skillfully	- transitions are used effectively	- transitions are present, but not used effectively	- no transitions
Demonstrates an understanding of the word	- word is used correctly in more than one sentence, for example, as different parts of speech - information about usage or history (etymology) of the word is provided - definition is provided	- word is used correctly in a sentence - definition is provided - more than one example of usage is provided	- word is used correctly in a sentence	- word is not used correctly
Effectively teaches the word	- video uses repetition, **memorable** images or gestures, or narrative to reinforce the meaning and usage	- video uses repetition, images, gestures or narrative reinforce the meaning and usage	- images, gestures or narrative reinforce the meaning and usage	- word is not used correctly

Figure 4. failed rubric

Classroom culture

I have always advocated a humanist approach to education, thus valuing first person essays and creative writing, knowing they help me get to get to know my students and at the same time help some of my students get to know themselves. However, even these types of assignments didn't give me the glimpses into their lives that film has. And while I have always encouraged laughter in my classroom, until this project, I haven't embraced silliness. Most significantly, however, even though I have always been open to learning from students, my lack of knowledge has never been a starting point in any lesson. My choice to introduce the video vocabulary assignment with the admission that my technical skills are not my strong point has empowered my students to also take risks.

Outside in.

I thought I tolerated messiness fairly well in my classroom; I am flexible—I dodge and swerve through my lesson plans depending upon the feel of the room; I extend deadlines, modify assignments, and rearrange the furniture in the middle of instruction. However, the vocab video assignment has required my openness to a radical messiness, teaching me a lot about the culture of my school and my room.

Most of my students choose to film outside of class time and use the class time I provide to compose, edit or share their work. But many students, either because they have chosen a school setting for their videos or because they want to work collaboratively with classmates whom they may not see after school hours, use the class time I give them to film. Providing this flexibility to empower their creative composition choices has expanded their learning spaces beyond the four walls of my classroom.

When I first began writing passes allowing my students to leave my room to film in the hallways, library, the cafeteria, the foyer, the administrative offices, I worried. Like most public high schools, we discourage movement in the hallways between classes, to protect students and to prevent disruption. And, I was suspicious that some of my students would take advantage of the pass out of class. Yet I discovered that students could easily account for their time: better than any hall cameras, they had their own video footage. I also learned that students very much wanted to claim the building as their own space. One student asked a custodian at the end of the day for permission to film in an area of the school she had never seen before. She was so excited to report what she had seen—a corridor that led to central receiving and a room which housed the central air control machinery.

Most students choose to film in their homes, even though I never assign any part of this project as "homework," having very consciously ensured ample time for the planning and filming to be completed during the school day. When we watch the videos that are set in students' homes, everyone—including me—watches attentively to look into the private lives brought into the room on the screen. Through video snapshots of my students' homes, their surroundings and their lives are brought into our classroom, the outside becomes the inside. The significance of bringing their outside lives into the classroom became evident to me in the case of one particular student.

Although most students produce videos about one minute in length, one of my students, a girl who was marginalized because of her unconventional behavior, submitted an eight-minute video. I worried that students would be disrespectful while they watched her video because it was not very scintillating—a conversation among the girl and two

66

family members around the kitchen table during which they repeated the vocabulary word as often as possible. I was surprised by my students' reaction to the video. They were mesmerized, riveted by the normalcy of the kitchen, the family dynamics, the gray cat that skittered in front of the camera. The room was quiet as students understood that their classmate was a person with whom they had much in common, not just the strange girl they politely ignored.

Humor.

In their recommendations to create a language and word-rich environment, Blachowicz, Fisher, Ogle, and Watts-Taffe (2006) note the importance of providing "opportunities to have fun with words" (p. 527). The vocab video assignment is certainly such an opportunity, as students seem to compete with each other to produce the funniest vocab video. Many of these videos are just plain silly—a form of humor that I hadn't fully embraced in any previous classroom assignment (see Figure 5). Given that we deal with some tough topics in our consideration of literary themes throughout the year, the spontaneous laughter is very important in creating an inviting culture in my classroom.

Figure 5. snapshot from a student video of a silly moment

Humor also facilitates an outreach beyond the classroom. Students enlist teachers, family members, and other students in

the school to be part of their videos (see Figure 6). Unlike any other assignment this project has encouraged the enthusiastic involvement of some parents. Students have reported that they have shown their parents their finished vocab video project, and some students have said their parents helped with filming. All the videos are accessible on Schoology, but I also have linked some of our favorite videos to my staff page, the page entitled "Refrigerator Door." The fun is shared around the building, and students couldn't be more pleased than when their scripts get the laughs they desired.

Figure 6. QR code for "notorious" video

Humor requires an awareness of audience because not all people find the same jokes funny. For example, the word "discreet" typically inspires a humorous video centered on student cheating. Asking students to compare their reaction to a funny video about cheating to the reaction teachers might have had if they were shown the same film at a faculty meeting is a convenient launching point for a conversation regarding audience when I turn to written composition (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. snapshot of a student cheating from "discreet" video

When they create films that their peers agree are funny, students may achieve acceptance, yet incorporating a sense of humor is risky. As I advise my students when they write speeches in my classes, a good joke goes a long way, but a bad joke can be painfully awkward. Because they already know this to be true, they laugh.

Bloopers are other sources of welcoming laughter in our classroom. When students share their "bloopers," their mistakes in the composition process, they confirm that our classroom is a place where we can and do take risks. The act of sharing their bloopers helps other students who may be more hesitant to take risks. I could not require this kind of sharing or this kind of risk-taking. I can only be responsive to my students' attempts to co-construct a culture of care and creativity that is most tangible when students choose to take risks.

Taking risks.
Identifying and articulating that which makes us vulnerable is essential at all stages of life for growth. As much as I'd like to seek only professional development opportunities that build on my areas of interest, I also know that my professional growth necessitates reflection upon my areas of weakness. Ultimately, my willingness to

take risks in my own professional development has empowered both my students and me.

Teachers who know their effectiveness will be primarily measured by their students' performance on state tests most likely have at one time or another felt that the investment of time away from explicit state exam prep is risky. Making decisions regarding time investment is one of the great challenges teachers face. With the rollout of the common core standards and rubrics, along with the simultaneous emphasis on STEM, I, like many of my colleagues, focused on academic writing and eliminated more creative endeavors, consequently eliminating a lot of energy and passion in my classroom as well. Building a curriculum centered on test prep may feel safe; however, it can stifle a vital component in the classroom—creativity. Creativity is inviting: it communicates to students that they'll be accepted for all their crazy silliness; it says their perspective matters; and it affirms that their individuality is welcome in the classroom.

An established culture of risk-taking in the classroom leads to broad gains, and I encourage that culture each time I choose to ask my students for help in developing their digital productions. When I lack knowledge in various aspects of specific software, student leaders often came to my aid, and I have found that these students are often different than the ones who are sure of themselves with regard to traditional academic practices. Because technology is ever changing, students will always be excited to teach their classmates and me about their discoveries. I will never be comfortable with digital projects as I will never be able to stay up with all of the changes. I have discovered over these past two years that this perceived weakness is a strength. I have spent a lot of

time in my teaching career scaffolding assignments to help students achieve a desired outcome; I have not spent much time modeling my own learning for students.

Modeling my willingness to take risks is critical to those students for whom undertaking the very first steps of this project requires embracing risks, including those students who aren't experienced with technology, who don't trust their own creativity, or who don't like anything they do to be published. High school students can feel particularly vulnerable to social pressure and videos are particularly public. The student who has generally not been successful in academic pursuits risks a lot in order to produce a video, yet I have found that these students are more likely to produce videos than complete other assignments. Their willingness to engage in the vocab video assignment might be attributed in part to the fact that this assignment is unfamiliar. When I assign a traditional essay, the students who has repeatedly been labeled as "underachieving" might be reluctant to write another composition, but the video project is something new. Also, the academic content is not "high stakes"— there are no threats of being ineligible for English credit based on the production of a vocab video, making the assignment appear like a departure from the rigors of typical classwork, even though in actuality it requires the skills and habits associated with higher level thinking (e.g., multi-modality engagement, creativity, sustained focus, independence). The trust required for risk-taking is just as evident with high achieving students, whose performance is often guided by the terms of their assessment, and who want to know exactly what is required for an A. They want a formula for the video, but there is no formula.

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The willingness on the part of students to assume risks for this assignment is especially obvious when they compose narrative videos around the subject of their own vulnerability. For instance, in a particularly memorable video, an athlete produced a video for the word "sullen" (see Figure 8). The video shows him playing basketball in a park, and then feeling "sullen" at the end of the day when he watches an NBA game and recognizes the disparity between his level of talent and that of the professional players. The narrative model he chose blurs the distinction between film and filmmaker, so it appeared as though this high achieving, popular, accomplished athlete was sharing something deeply personal under the cover of several humorous images. His video suggests that his aspirations to play in the NBA will probably never be realized, a narrative which resonates poignantly with all those students who are attempting to reconcile their childhood dreams with post-secondary career realities. As with any creative work, we can never know the extent of autobiographical material; nevertheless, his willingness to suggest a relationship between his video narrative and a personal conflict is the sort of project that simultaneously contributes to, and provides evidence of, an environment that allowed his risk-taking.

Figure 8. QR code for "sullen" video

Complimentary composition

As I incorporate video more often I continually see new connections between the process of film and written composition. I often use the same language in crossing between genres: prewriting, transition, editing. Students have noted about their peers' videos that while a concept was good, the lack of attention to detail was distracting, an observation I echo in my injunction to pay attention to detail in written composition because issues like spelling errors detract from a good thesis.

With regard to our literary analysis, the video vocabulary assignment has been invaluable in our consideration of narrative as a vehicle for ideas since many students choose to construct their videos around the narrative mode. For my most recent vocab video assignment, in preparation for a reading of Charles Portis's *True Grit*, I encouraged cowboy-themed videos. Not only were these videos extra fun, they also provided material for me to initiate a discussion regarding American West mythology. My allusions to the humorous videos that students produced provided some balance to the serious academic consideration of the role of guns in that mythology (see Figure 9).

Figure 9. snapshot from a cowboy-themed video

Implications

I introduced this assignment to my classes with one simple purpose—each student had to teach one vocabulary word via video—but the work students produced far surpassed that goal. Not only did they learn the words around which they composed their videos more deeply, but they increased their knowledge of other vocabulary words as well. Additionally, they examined their own learning needs, an important step in assuming agency in their own educations.

The project has prompted discussions of "fun" and its role in the classroom, as students are quick to point out that they learn better when they are having fun. However, they generally define "fun" in terms associated with "new" or "undisciplined." They see "fun" and "work" as opposites, but acknowledge a need for both qualities in their education. The vocabulary video assignment is a pivot point on the continuum.

They also tend to associate "fun" with collaboration. While they supported each other as they developed and viewed their videos, they taught me a lot. My humanistic approach to education was centered on my relationship with students and students' discovery of themselves. The video project allowed me to reflect on students' relationships with one another, and students' relationship with my classroom space.

I still have work to do. I am still struggling with grades, because I want to reward students whose work is exceptional with a higher grade. I find myself still having to resist the temptation to judge student videos according to criteria that I did not include in the assignment. Evaluating whether or not a student met the one goal of the assignment, teaching one vocabulary word to their peers using a video

composition, can be uncomfortable, but I remind myself that that uncomfortable space for me is where students find opportunities to be creative.

Undertaking this project required a good dose of humility, a quality not often associated with risk taking. However, to approach any understanding of the experiences of the students in my classroom who are hampered by their lack of confidence, I benefited from my lack of experience in digital technology. Identifying how I dealt with challenges in my own learning experiences helped me understand ways that I could support my own students. Furthermore, wrestling with grades reminds me that some of my most important assessments—the health of my classroom culture, for example—is not so easily quantifiable.

I also still struggle with the disparity in student access to technology. My district has an 18.26% poverty rate (our county is the ninth poorest county of New York state's 62 counties) (NYSCAA 2017, p. 14). I am cognizant of the divide between that handful of students who rely on borrowing iPads and those who use their phones for digital projects, but I am not willing to ban phones. Students who have smart phones prefer to use them to record video, and students who own computers often use apps, especially to manipulate audio and to create effects, that are not available on the school-owned devices. Additionally, some of our students who may own devices like laptops and smart phones live in rural areas where Wi-Fi is unreliable, and, in some cases, unavailable. For these reasons, I need to continue to commit adequate class time to the vocab video project and allow ample time between the day I announce a vocab video assignment and the date it is due. I have extended the number of workdays I can offer by using the flipped classroom approach: as the class composes an essay,

for example, I allow some students to work on their videos and complete the essay as an assignment.

It is difficult to accept that I cannot entirely level the playing field, but I hope that creating videos ultimately helps by giving all students the opportunity to work with technology that they might otherwise not have. I have been awed by the willingness of some students who, recognizing the inexperience of some of their classmates with technology, offer to help; that spirit of cooperation engenders optimism for me and for my students.

After a parent contacted me to say that she couldn't believe her son produced a video because until recently he had been classified as "non-verbal," I reflected on how un-extraordinary his experience had been: every video my students have created represents a navigation between the non-verbal and verbal. I am not surprised that students who have low confidence in their verbal skills have been motivated to engage in this assignment.

As video composition becomes more common in classrooms, I will have to reassess the effectiveness of this assignment knowing that its success was due in part to its newness. Nevertheless, some variation will remain a part of my repertoire as its advantages are certainly worth building upon.

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You in Six Words and Images

Suzan Snyder
Allegany-Limestone Central School

"Life's a story I'm still writing." – Nicole Marra

"Don't be stuck here, be here." - Miranda Collison

Hearing and seeing this much information about my students during the first week of school created connections and a sense of community like no other icebreaker I have ever planned. It allowed students and teachers to connect in new and surprising ways. Students took charge of their learning by creating videos containing six words, six images, and music to introduce themselves to their classes. Additionally, this project hooked students and immersed them in the forms of project-based learning that we would do together throughout the year.

Setting

I am the tenth grade English teacher in the rural community of Allegany, NY. I teach in a merged district, meaning two small communities combined their schools into the hyphenated community of Allegany-Limestone. Our school was built after this merge in the late 90s in a former farmer's field. For sixth through twelfth grade, we have one English teacher per grade level that averages between 80 and 125 students each year. Every day I see my students for forty-two minutes, and I have four sections of sophomore English and one section of sophomore English Honors.

For the area, which sits nestled in the foothills of the Alleghenies and borders on the Pennsylvania line, we are considered to be a district with higher socio-economic status for the area. However, our socio-economic status varies widely, and we have a poverty rate of 32%. We educate the children of CEOs and doctors; we educate the children of professors at a local university; we educate children of drug addicts and dealers; we educate children of two parent incomes, single parent incomes, and families with no income. Poverty is real. Although I have lived in this rural town almost my entire life, when I was first hired we went on a bus trip at our new teacher orientation. During this bus trip, we observed the affluent

houses that smatter the area, and we observed the well-kept homes of tree-lined neighborhoods. We travelled up the hollows and dirt roads to see trailers from the sixties and seventies with no skirting and garbage piled up to the windowsills, and we saw shacks that might work as a person's hunting cabin but turned into a person's home. Although I had lived here my entire life, I had turned a blind-eye to the array of people within the district's borders.

These differences across our district require teachers to attend carefully to how they begin the school year. Taking time to get to know our students for who they are and making space for them to get to know one another is vital for establishing a classroom learning community. After teaching English for sixteen years, I have started the year out with the whole gamut of getting-to-know-you routines. The M&M game and the toilet paper game have been done. I have written letters to my students and had them write friendly letters back to me. I kept trying new ideas because these were not helping our class really know one another. I realized that the way you start your year, your icebreaker, should be so much more than a one and done.

One summer while flipping through Oprah's magazine, I came across an article about Six Word Memoirs. Basically, you write six words that describe an aspect of you at that moment in time. For a few years, this was the icebreaker I used in my sophomore English class, and the kids seemed to enjoy the small project and sharing their six words with their classes. Then, in 2016 I chose to invest a week of my summer to become a member of the Writing with Video Summer Institute at Houghton College learning about teaching reading, writing, listening, and speaking with digital literacies, and an epiphany happened. During that week and the weeks prior to school starting, I honed my project. Students would use six words to

describe themselves and make a short video that showed images and videos that represented them with respect to those six words. The video had to be composed with images, six words, and fitting music. The video had to be between thirty seconds and two minutes in length. I composed and shared my own six-word memoir with my students. I offered up a cart of iPads the students could use but quickly discovered the students preferred using their own devices, phones, or school issued laptops. However, it was important to provide some for those without the means of recording devices. With that said, I encouraged the kids to use iMovie because I was most familiar with it.

6 Word Memoirs in Action

Students created a video based on six words that described themselves or an aspect of their lives that they wanted to share publicly. Along with the video, students wrote heuristics explaining why they included the pieces in the video and the process of creating the movie. Just like a piece of traditional writing, students brainstormed, planned, drafted, revised, edited and published their videos and writing pieces. Once the videos were completed, students uploaded the videos to Schoology, and their videos were premiered in class. Students felt the pride of showing their work to the class. Those intimidated by public speaking felt less intimidated because they were not actually up in front of the room. Students and teachers got to know each other better, and peers gave positive feedback to each other. The whole project took less than two weeks and was a valuable investment because of the connections it made among classmates and with the teacher, which all helped foster a healthy classroom community.

Beginning with Boundaries, Time, & Flexibility

  The project started with six simple words. That's it. The six words needed to describe an aspect of the student's life while being school appropriate (see Appendix 1 for handout). By sharing a list of six-word memoirs with the class, I gave them ideas. Some of the examples were, "Life gives lemons, be the juicer," "The good child, until I wasn't," or "Enjoy the moments while they happen." From these, I had the class divide into small groups of four or five students and come up with ideas of their own. First, the students brainstormed topics such as summer vacation, favorite bands, fishing, friends, sports, etc. Then they tried to put at least three of their ideas into six words. When some students were really stumped, allowing them to *Google* six-word memoirs helped. While in groups, students also brainstormed ideas of images that could fit with the words they listed. The students shared their ideas for topics, six-word memoirs, and potential images with the class verbally or on the board. At this point, I shared my own six-word memoir and heuristic. This allowed the students to see a completed project along with the person I am outside of school. Providing the students with this sense of what is expected after they had already grappled with their own ideas created space for creative thinking while also providing the necessary guidelines and scaffolding.

  Boundaries.

  Providing boundaries in which students can play helps them to know what they can play with and the purpose of the play. One of these boundaries set forth in the guidelines was the requirement of using original shots and video footage, fostering creativity and dodging copyright infringement, as well as providing a window into students' out-of-school lives. Additionally, setting the time requirement between thirty

seconds and two minutes provided my diverse students with the flexibility that they needed to effectively tell their six-word memoir. While the time boundary of 30 seconds required a certain level of depth for those who often remained at the surface, the two minute boundary held those who often droned on and on to a certain level of brevity.

Time.

Time for thinking and talking is vital for composition. During my first class meeting of the year, I provide my students with time to work on creating at least three six-word memoirs by the end of our time together. Students could work alone or chat to get ideas. As students worked, I conferenced with kids one-on-one who were experiencing writer's block. For example, one particular student was very introverted. Not only was he reluctant to speak up in class, he also had a difficult time talking with me on the first day of school. This one-on-one conversation at the start of the year opened up communication between us and allowed us to work through his difficulties the rest of the year. I was also able to learn a lot about him as I asked him about who he was and what his interests were. These conversations were great for learning about my students, especially the introverts. Once they had the three ideas written, they turned them in for feedback from me. This feedback loop allowed me to see what interests they had, what was important to them, and who struggled with the assignment and needed additional guidance the following day.

Flexibility.

Flexibility within the process was core in creating a space that was responsive to my students' diverse visions, writing styles, and abilities. This was seen through the planning, drafting, and editing processes. As I attempted to

engage my students in purposeful planning, I presented the ideas of storyboarding and using templates. However, some students really balked at this step and asked to just jump in and begin drafting. In response, I explained to each class that the planning stage was different for each student just as writing was different. This explicit attention to the flexibility needed within the boundaries gave a huge sense of relief in my classroom culture. The students took that invitation and ran with it. Even those who chose to storyboard their pieces did so differently. While some storyboarded with pencil and paper (see Appendix 2), others used a digital version, or an online storyboard site like *Storybird*. The students who jumped into the video-making app had the opportunity to play with iMovie or other programs or apps such as Windows Movie Maker, Animoto, and many more. Most of my students preferred iMovie because they could easily manipulate text, photos, and add music. However, one piece of advice was that students should not use the trailer templates because they asked for more than six words and images. These students worked with the app and explored its options and limitations. It was important for me to allow for diversified planning and allow students to help one another and talk through their ideas with their peers as I monitored and helped when needed. My choice to create boundaries, provide time, and communicate their choices helped them find their voices and positioned them as experts in their composition process.

Messy Learning

When it came time for more students to explore the video creation apps, music, and templates, I started by humbly acknowledging my own limited fluency with technology and letting the students know that while I can help them, they would be learning beside me and at times take on the role of

teacher. I provided a short tutorial of how to use iMovie and reviewed expectations. Each student had a laptop provided by the district and our class had an iPad cart that held 25 iPads with iMovie. They had what they needed, so I set them free to explore and share. They enjoyed and used the flexibility of time, process, and workspace to compose their videos. They knew the video creation apps better than I did, and watching the students working with one another helped me plan for future assignments. As they manipulated their images with their text, my room was in constant motion. The classroom environment got messy, but the pay-off was rewarding. The mess allowed student-centered learning and growth. It fostered the interpersonal communication skills required when working with others. It provided opportunities for collaborative problem solving while helping students over the technological hurdles. In the mess I saw students uploading footage they took or found in their picture rolls while other students were finding music that fit with their themes, and others were already meshing the pieces together. Making space for these concurrent and different processes added to the mess as well as opened up opportunities to work together in notably different ways. Some of the students with technology skills were the students on the outskirts of popularity; suddenly they were the knowledgeable ones that other students came to for help. Students too shy to speak up or ask questions, I paired with more technologically savvy students. When I sat back and observed each of my class sections in this messy work required by this video project, I heard authentic questions and saw students respond to those questions. Each of my class sections grew quickly as a learning community.

Although there were several opportunities for mini-lessons, I chose to primarily support my diverse students and their projects with observations and conferences. My students

learned to ask for help from their peers, and I was able to circulate throughout the room. I was easily able to observe which students asked for help too quickly, which students attempted to fix their problems but then turned for help, and which students did not ask for help and needed me to initiate interventions or small moments of mediation. These observations informed future seating arrangements and my work as I supported students to overcome their insecurities or unwillingness to help themselves. Topics I used for mediation were focal points, adding text, adding music, timing, moving pictures with timing, and different options for text appearance. If students were not adjusting picture focal points or understanding how to use parts of iMovie, then I, or better yet a tech-savvy student, took a moment of class time to share this observational feedback. Additionally, depending on the progress of the students, Friday or Monday after the start of school were great days for me or a student to provide an editing demonstration for the class as a whole as the students revised their videos.

   Between the completion of their video and the premiere, I required my students to complete a one paragraph heuristic. I revisited my own heuristic for my six-word memoir as a model for their paragraphs. I then outlined a sample paragraph on the board for the reluctant writers. The outline:

I. Topic sentence—introduce your six words and the assignment.
I. Explain what the six words say about you as a person (1-3 sentences).
II. Explain each picture and how it helps to show the six-word memoir (3-5 sentences).
III. Explain how the music pairs up with your above choices and why you chose that music.

IV. Explain the video-making process—what did you like, what did you struggle with, etc.

V. Overall, how satisfied were you with the project?

Through this heuristic, I got to read an authentic piece of writing of each student and saw where they were as writers within the first week of class. While my more confident writers expanded the template and shared more depth (e.g. see Appendix 3), others stuck to the outline, and some struggled to follow the basic outline. Again, the students' differences were observed and used in my planning for future lessons.

Grading of the heuristic was based on how each student completed the prompt requirements, not the technicalities of writing. While I noted the areas where they could improve as writers in my own records to inform my future instruction, the objective for this first writing piece was assessed by their ability to clearly address each of the prompts in the outline. Keeping copies of these paragraphs allowed me to gauge students' growth over the course of the year. It is important to note that this part of the project is vital and should not be required to be more than a paragraph. This is another flexible boundary that I discovered to support my diverse students and my ability to serve them throughout the year. My reluctant or struggling writers had no qualms writing a paragraph while my students who used writing as a processing tool had no qualms of writing more than a paragraph. Students wrote what they needed to write to address the prompts effectively.

The day before the premiere students loaded their videos up to Schoology, ensuring a seamless viewing experience. I also previewed the videos for content and technical difficulties. There were and will probably always be common issues that arise during this day, thus having a day to work out these kinks provides time to do so without stress or

embarrassment. These technical issues exposed the levels of perseverance in my students and revealed to the students that I could also problem solve with them (not for them) as their teacher.

Tuesday was premiere day. I strongly recommend never starting premieres on Mondays because students needed a day to put together the footage they recorded over the weekend and some forgot their footage and needed to get last minute shots. Using Monday's class to prepare for Tuesday gave students a feeling of empowerment instead of a chaotic dread of a deadline to start the week, which also helped foster the classroom environment I was building.

My class was set up with the desks stored in the next classroom and the chairs in a four-row semicircle facing the projection board. Students were welcomed to bring in snacks and drinks to share. The blinds were down and the lights were low to soften the mood and see the videos clearly, and soft music was playing as the students entered the room. The class started with a brief talk about what it meant to give specific, positive feedback. Referring back to my six-word memoir video, we discussed possible feedback that would be appropriate. I did not allow criticism during the premieres, which helped students trust the class and the environment with their vulnerable videos. Three to four students gave positive, specific feedback after each video.

Some examples include, "The shot of the stairs showed a really interesting perspective." Another student concluded, "The music you chose completely connected with your six words." Our feedback was an important part of the viewing process. The students knew they could be called on randomly to provide this feedback before we started the premiere. This set a tone for the class to be on-point and provide honest and respectful feedback to their peers when they were called to do

so. I had previously tried written feedback but liked the verbal much better because of its immediacy and positive impact on the classroom culture. I also had students provide feedback first while I began to complete the rubric. This also made space for their ideas to be the primary focus instead of everyone looking to the teacher to find out how well the student did. This routine continued until all videos were shown. Most of my classes held their premieres in one forty-two minute period; however, my larger classes took two class days to premiere all films and provide feedback.

Conclusions

My students spent four and a half class days working on this project. In that time, they came up with their idea and made their idea become a central focus for the entire class. They brainstormed ways to visually show their six-word memoirs with original footage, found music to tie it all together, and adjusted visuals to focus on important pieces of the image. They created a premiered video and invested in a heuristic explaining their video composition. Watching students engaged and working diligently on their projects told me more about each student than I had ever gotten from any other icebreaker.

Although this project was much more in-depth than a forty-minute icebreaker activity, I was able to reap what I sowed. Giving students space and time to work collectively and independently helped to grow a learning community that could continue to develop throughout the year much more effectively than a one-and-done canned introduction. I discovered that these pedagogical practices, encouraging students' trials and errors and supporting collaborative problem solving were valued not only by me, but by my students as well. At the end of the year, I had a reflective class meeting where the students

discussed what they thought were the strengths and weaknesses of the course, providing suggestions for improvement. My students definitely remembered the six-word memoir project that last day of school. A young woman reflected, "My favorite part of the entire year was the six-word memoir project!" A young man suggested, "For the beginning of the year project, you should let us add more videos and pictures than just six." Another young woman stated, "I really enjoyed learning about my classmates. I would have never known that Annie liked to race dirt bikes!" I came away from this project knowing so much more about my students from our conferences, my observations, their video as well as their heuristic. Most importantly, I learned how to listen and respond to my students with boundaries, flexibility, time, and space for the messy work of composition.

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Appendix A

"Life is bigger than six words." - Casey Curran

"Always living life in the wild." - Griffin Klice

"Music is life. Lyrics, the story." - Allyson Youngs

"Felled by dreams...saved by family." - Olivia Fitzgerald

Video in the Classroom: Re-Imagining the Educational Wasteland of High School Apathy

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"Kids these days!" Generations of adults have been uttering these words probably since the first time a cave-man got upset with one of his kids for wearing his sabre-tooth loincloth backwards in an effort to start a hip, new trend among the cool cave-kids. Every generation looks at the one that follow with a critical eye. It's what we do. In the 1950s Depression Era parents saw their kids spending countless hours watching the new television sets that invaded their homes and wondered if the new generation they spawned was going to have rotten brains. Adults my age fail to remember that our own generation was criticized with the same stuffy attitude because our parents couldn't understand why we wore acid-washed jeans, had mullets, and spent a lot of time playing the Atari. Generational criticism is an intrinsic part of human nature.

As educators we see students every day. Every thoughtful teacher has been in the predicament of questioning if kids are different today. The answer to this question can be found in anyone who reads Shakespeare. The old Bard knew that the more things change, the more they also, frustratingly, stay the same. In other words, times change but people don't. Culture changes, technology changes, but human nature stays the same. Every generation gets labeled. People from the Great Depression and the World War II Era got labeled as "The Greatest Generation." Their kids were called "Baby Boomers." This begot "Generation X" and then "Generation Y" and then

"The Millennials." Each title carries with it some stereotypes. Like all stereotypes there is some truth and some unfairness.

The current generation of so called "Millennials" and "Generation Z" is largely lamented by the adult world as kids who have grown up on cell phones, who live their virtual lives on the Internet, and who choose to communicate by Snapchat, Twitter, or Instagram. This generation has been critiqued for their so called "gap years" and labeled as lazy and apathetic. Those are the negative stereotypes. It is important for those stereotypes, like all stereotypes, to be challenged and deconstructed. The assumption that kids are lazy and apathetic is not true. In fact, the opposite might be closer to reality. The current generation of students concerns itself with a post 9/11 world full of problems. They were given cell phones before they got car keys.

The high school classroom can be looked at as the laboratory in which we analyze the latest generation. The problem is that our ways of communication have become largely antiquated by the exponential growth of technology. How can we possibly get kids to care about reading *The Great Gatsby* in the age of YouTube, or writing bluebook essays in a Twitter world? While writing is still the gold standard by which we measure students' critical and creative thinking skills, we must always be looking for new ways to engage the compositional components of the newest media. We certainly can't keep saying "kids these days" just don't care. Or, "kids these days" are just lazy. We have to recognize that there are things they do care about and meet them with the tools they currently use in order for their caring voices to be heard. The use of video in the classroom, as a form of composition, is a strategy that can certainly help to engage students across a wide learning spectrum.

In the summer of 2016, I participated in a professional development summer institute where I joined other teachers in learning digital video in the context of classroom learning. The following school year, I decided to challenge my senior elective World Literature class by introducing them to the idea of writing with video. The class was a typical group of twenty high school seniors, with an even mix of male and female students. The class contained students who were at the top of the class academically and students whose grades had been at the low end of the spectrum. As an instructor, I thought this would offer a great opportunity to try something new and let the cards fall where they may. I was keenly aware that I would be making mistakes along the way, but I was willing to learn from those mistakes.

My main interest was to break the dreaded "senioritis" I had seen for almost twenty years of teaching. The video assignment I gave was to make a video that was "inspired" by a work from William Shakespeare. As a class, we read and viewed various adaptations of *Much Ado About Nothing, Macbeth, and Hamlet*. We also looked at a lot of film and video production—watching a wide range of content, from Twilight Zone episodes to Spice Girls videos—to analyze film language. We studied various formats of possible videos, such as video poems, thematic videos, and narrative videos. Students were beyond eager to jump into the project. They were inspired by Shakespeare and they had ideas; they shared a deep desire to create. I didn't give them lots of project details, just time to work on their projects and lots of individual and group feedback.

I was surprised by the scope of the projects; they were really good first efforts! Even if I didn't exactly put a stake through the heart of *senioritis*, this project dealt it a blow that I'd never landed before. However, my biggest takeaway could

be seen in two sets of students. I saw two high-achieving students, Alicia and Tess, push themselves to produce a video composition that was simply amazing. I also saw a set of low-achieving students named Isaac and Phil who latched onto a video composition and produced something that left all of their peers in a state of awe.

Waiting for the Fog

Throughout my career I've focused on motivating struggling learners. I've always approached students with the idea that if I can inspire them to appreciate the subject matter, the quality of their work will reflect that appreciation. While I have always been concerned about these struggling students, I have also been concerned with reaching the high achieving students as well, trying to find ways to push them to create quality work that tested their own abilities. A "type" of student we all know is the extremely intelligent, hyper-artistic, mature beyond her years kid who, tragically, is not challenged enough academically because the curriculum more often than not must play to the middle.

Alicia and Tess were two students who fell into this category. Both young women were certainly intelligent but also conveyed a quiet artistry and integrity in their work. They did not study to get good grades. They studied to learn. They were empowered by education and valued everything from Shakespeare to calculus. These were the kinds of students who were frustrated by being made to write formulaic essays when they wanted to write creatively with style and voice.

Tess was a senior who had devoted herself to excellence in academics and athletics during her entire high school career. However, she suffered an injury during her junior year that left her unable to play soccer or run track. To fill up her time, she picked up photography. Everyone became

used to seeing Tess always armed with her camera. She taught herself through practice and online resources and became so adept that she began her own portrait and wedding photography business. Tess was just one of those students who would not let a set-back set her back. She turned the devastation of a season ending injury into a tremendously positive life changing opportunity.

Alicia was a student whose greatest strength was her ability to empathize with others. It was a quality that made her a tremendous student in any English classroom. In her writings and class discussions, she displayed insights into human nature that were wise beyond her years. Furthermore, Alicia was a student who practiced her empathy. Alicia volunteered her time in inner-city areas to help impoverished people. In class discussions, she always engaged with tough questions about the texts and offered acute insights and analysis.

For their video inspired by a work of Shakespeare, Alicia and Tess chose to respond with a video poem based on Macbeth's "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" soliloquy. The film can best be described as a three minute long tour de force of images that depict a girl wrestling with the problems of being a teenager in the modern world. The cinematography brilliantly showed a girl—played by Alicia—questioning faith, politics, peer pressure, and other struggles that a young person sometimes shoulders. The voiceover of the famous lines of Shakespeare's "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" speech were juxtaposed with lovely natural images along with depictions of a young woman grappling with her very existence.

They spent at least two months brainstorming, planning, filming, editing, and perfecting their vision. Alicia brought to the project her keen literary mind and her willingness to embrace Shakespeare the way her peers

embraced Snapchat. Tess brought an appreciation for the visual arts so intense that she was motivated to start her own professional photography studio at the age of seventeen. The two complimented each other well. They certainly had artistic differences at times. In conceptualizing their project, Alicia had a grainier, rougher vision of things. Tess wanted the images to be beautiful. Together, they negotiated a piece that had lovely but stark images set to haunting, discordant music to represent the harshness of the nihilism and teenage depression they were representing.

After weeks of shooting they came to me with frustration and asked if they could have more time. They had been waiting for a foggy day. They were convinced that a few scenes needed the right kind of natural light and that there had to be a foggy mist in the air to capture the atmosphere just the way they wanted it. I'd never before seen such devotion to the realization of an artistic vision. I'd certainly never seen a student write an essay and care this much that the finished product be this pristine . . . not even close. So I honored their request. And thank goodness I did. The finished video was an exploration of beauty and heartbreak. It showed soul. It showed depth. It showed wisdom. It showed what they could do if given the space and freedom to do it.

These two "exceptional" students, whose good efforts were routinely taken for granted, were able to engage in an educational process that pushed them. The video project allowed them a chance to express their unique intelligence in a way that honored their skills and allowed them to stretch themselves. They were challenged to envision, to work collaboratively, to connect to an audience, and to realize a vision with a voice that was theirs. The quality of their final product did not come as a surprise given that these were

talented students given the opportunity to rigorously engage with a rich text.

Trespassing – Keep Out!

If Alicia and Tess were engaged students, then Phil and Isaac were disengaged from the classroom. These were the kids who could give a damn about anything having to do with school. Somewhere along the way these guys were let down by the school system. They carried themselves with cynicism and anger and found the tropes of high school life to be false and fabricated. They would rather not do work because they saw grades as arbitrary. At first glance they seemed not to care, preferring to play X-Box than read Shakespeare. They played the part of the angry youth, and other students assumed they were ignorant, lazy, or had given up on themselves. How could these guys ever do anything artistic for a school project?

If you've ever seen *The Breakfast Club* then you've met Isaac. Isaac is Judd Nelson's iconic character Jon Bender. Imagine Bender in the last frame of that 80s classic with his jean jacket and his gloved fist defiantly thrust into the air. That image is Isaac. He spent his summers roofing houses and secretly reading Hunter S. Thompson. He's hyper-intelligent, cynical, jaded by some hard-scrabble circumstance but full of defiant pride that acts as a shield keeping the world at a respectful distance. Isaac's big secret was that he truly cared but he'd never admit it.

Phil is a big, scruffy, teddy-bear of a guy who gave the impression that he didn't really care what anybody else thought of him. Phil was cool because he was comfortable in his own skin and didn't pretend to be anything for anybody. Phil was one of those guys who truly knew the ins and outs of computers and computer programming. Phil seemed like someone who could get into a deep-dive philosophical

conversation with Arthur C. Clarke about the future of mankind with relation to artificial intelligence and be able to hold his own. Phil's secret, to quote *Good Will Hunting*, was that he's "wicked smart," but he'd never admit it.

Through the video composition project, Isaac and Phil showed me and their peers that they could create an aesthetic composition. They showed that they cared deeply about life and had deep integrity with regard to how they felt about the world. Isaac and Phil had been given the same video project Tess and Alicia had been given. Everyone in class saw that Isaac and Phil were partners and assumed that what they came up with would be a joke, at best, or not done at all, at worst. Every time somebody asked how their project was coming they'd mumble or shrug as if to say "get off my back." So when the day came to screen their video, expectations were not high.

However, much to the surprise of their classmates, we sat for eight minutes and watched a fully realized dystopian vision of despair, hope, and humanity set in a fictional wasteland. The cinematography was reminiscent of footage from a *Walking Dead* episode. The crafted voice-over narration told of a horrific future in which a plague has devastated the world. The visuals depicted a young man walking through a deserted asylum and ultimately deciding—after reading lines from Hamlet—to continue living in this flawed world. With the videography, Isaac and Phil demonstrated how to frame powerful images. With their editing, they showed their ability to craft an intelligent and compelling narrative. They also knew the strength of a location shoot and insisted on driving to an actual abandoned mental institution in Dansville, New York so they could depict the setting of a dystopian world as a kind of character in their narrative. Their final project was mature, smart, and fully realized. The class was blown away. Phil and

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Isaac were beside themselves with pride. After the screening, their classmates viewed Isaac and Phil with a different lens and newfound respect.

After class, Phil and Isaac came to me with sheepish grins. They were proud of themselves in a way that they'd never experienced. "Did you like it?" they asked.

"Are you kidding? I'm blown away!" I remarked.

Isaac said, "Just one thing . . . can you write us a letter saying that we're good kids and that we did a good job on our project?"

"Absolutely. Why?"

"We kind of got arrested for trespassing when we were at the asylum shooting the movie."

"What?!?"

Isaac and Phil cared about their work. They knew they needed footage from inside a place that was marked "no trespassing," so they risked getting the images despite potential consequences. Yes, they were caught and paid a fine, but it was worth it to them. In their high school careers they were rarely engaged in academic tasks, but their work on this project demonstrated ownership and voice.

Grappling with Technology

Any fan of science fiction can tell you that one of the most common themes is that of the danger of technology. Over the past few decades, we have iconic films dedicated to that theme: *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Blade Runner, Terminator*, *The Matrix*, and *Her.* We are fascinated by visions of a world in which our notion of humanity is challenged by the advancing roles of machines and artificial intelligence. As we watch technology grow at an exponential rate, some aspects of that once-distant future are happening now. We ask questions that reflect a modern existential dilemma. What does it mean to be

human now? How is technology shaping our thinking? How is it shaping our relationships with others? What problems are being solved? What problems are being created?

As one who has used technology in the classroom, those questions make me think about how tech affects our classrooms. Many educators in the 21st century are wrestling with this. We acknowledge the tremendous power of technology but are constantly racing to keep up with it and figure out a whole set of new "best practices" on the fly. It seems like any endeavor is a process of trial and error. My own experience has been hit and miss.

However, I have seen transformational learning happen with the purposeful use of film in the classroom. As an educational tool, it is a powerful way to engage students and get them to think and to feel. It is even more effective when used in conjunction with traditional literature. However, recently I've seen an even deeper power with the use of film. While I've been using film in the classroom for my entire career and have mostly used it as a tool to teach students to closely read film as a parallel to how we teach them to closely read books, I've been energized to use film as a composition tool as well. I'm excited to help students find their voices and be able to equip them with the tools necessary to be film-makers.

In the last two years I've seen students develop video compositions that were different than any five page essay I've ever read. Their video work reflected the various stages of the writing process, but in a more authentic way than I've seen them engage in typical academic writing. The video work included pre-writing, planning, storyboarding, and outlining. I saw them problem-solve and brainstorm. They shot footage, assessed and reassessed, then re-shot footage. They edited with a sense of audience awareness. They published. They proved to

themselves that they were authors, and I watched them experience the pride of authorship and ownership.

Project Takeaways

After doing this project with students, several aspects of classroom learning stand out to me. First, I saw students actively engaged. While the dreaded "senioritis" that I've fought against my entire career was not erased, these students were energized by a project in a way I had rarely seen before. I always talk with my English teacher colleagues about methods that will allow students to be more "hands on." I've recognized the value of getting kids out of their seats and getting them active. The struggle has always been how to transition some "out of the seat" activity back into cerebral "sit-down" compositions. The video composition project offered a great format in getting students up and out of their seats and being engaged and active. They had to interact with their environment and with each other. But they also had to bring their results back and shape them into something meaningful. I was impressed with the balance of "out-of-seat" and "in-seat" activity that was naturally built into the project. At one point a student actually said this project felt like what a "real world job would be like."

I've also seen kids who rarely speak in class find a voice. The projects were intentionally designed to be open-ended so students could produce videos that spoke to their creative choices and interests. I always tell my students that writing is an act of bravery and encourage them to risk putting their ideas on a screen for an audience of their peers to see. Putting ideas out there and facing potential criticism or judgment takes courage. Some students are silenced by that knowledge, but video composition challenged these students to

come out of their shells and express their voices in a way I hadn't seen before.

I also saw kids who never seemed to care about anything show interest. It was a game-changing project for me. I can honestly say that I have at times criticized students for not caring enough about academics. In retrospect, I could criticize myself for failing to recognize students as much more nuanced and complex than I gave them credit for. What, on the surface, looked like apathy actually might have been a lack of student interest because assignments lacked any hint of student choice. Students saw this video assignment as original, and therefore trusted that what I really wanted was their creative best, based on the freedom of personal choice.

At the end of the day I've been able to reflect on my initial foray into video composition in my classroom and have had a healthy awakening to a brave new world of possibilities. At the beginning of every school year I like to re-focus my goals and ask myself what I want my students to be able to do at the end of the year. I always come up with the same answers. I want my students to be able to care about other people. I want them to be able to express themselves effectively. I want them to become problem solvers who can think critically. I want them to value their voices and the voices of others. I can only reiterate how much my students' final video projects were able to help me accomplish my goals.

Conclusion

As I learned how to use video as a composition tool, I was uncomfortable because it was unfamiliar. Yet no matter what my comfort level is with technology, students are using it in their lives all the time. I'm learning to integrate traditional composition *along with* new formats of expression. In my teaching, I'm learning to use technology in a way that gets

students to use 21st century skills to share their cares, their views, and their voices.

"Kids these days" is a terribly misleading statement. In painting an entire generation with broad strokes as lazy and entitled entirely misses who these young people actually are. This article described the projects of four students—Alicia, Tess, Phil, and Isaac. Along with their classmates, they don't deserve to be lumped into such reductive, fallow statements and cliché driven stereotypes. As educators, we condemn stereotyping because we recognize the harmful impact and the terrible unfairness of it. Stereotyping ignores nuance and makes for simplistic answers to complex questions. Instead, these students should be viewed as having tremendous potential. Their voices need to be recognized and encouraged to be heard. In allowing them the chance to express themselves, I affirm that "kids these days" are awesome.

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Making Room for Students in Poetic Analysis

Stephen Sorensen
Olean High School

"Film composing is a splendid discipline, and I recommend a course of it to all composition teachers." – Ralph Vaughn Williams.

Origins—Setting the Table

Teaching composition is often about training the mind to see language. At the secondary level, we often use scaffolding organizers for this purpose: it is difficult for novice writers to feel confident in knowing where their thoughts belong, and it helps them to be able to see their thoughts take shape. We are visual creatures and identifying shapes and following movement is our mother tongue. We learn rhetoric and the style of symbolic representation next, and this is where we often feel lost. Visually, we are instinctive. Rhetorically, we are reactive.

In 2015, a student whom I had never met before approached me in the hallway in between classes.

"Are you Sorensen?"

"Yes… how can I help you?"

"I went to see Mr. A. (the high school principal) about starting a Film Club and he said, 'Go talk to Sorensen. That sounds like something he'd be into.'"

It turns out that Mr. A. was absolutely correct; I had been working to incorporate film and media literacy into my freshman curriculum and had even overseen the creation of a handful of student film productions, and I was looking for something more. Connecting with a group of interested students became the impetus for the creation of Film Club, an after-school program focused on film production. Starting an

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extra-curricular club allowed me time and space to develop the kind of approach to film that wasn't tied to a curriculum but was free to focus our energy on cinema alone.

During our first year, we worked on developing and sharing the same vocabulary when discussing film. Students took turns finding scenes in films that exemplified the various shot types, and we had a bi-weekly matinee in the local theater workshop where we would alternately pick classics from Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (my choice) to *The Goonies* (their choice) and call out our favorite shots as they flashed brilliantly on the screen. We discussed our favorite cinematographer, Emmanuel Lubezki, by watching clips of his tense long takes in *Children of Men* and *Birdman* and breaking down how he would have had to stage the actors to pull off these impressive shots. We experimented with different methods to imitate the way he framed characters in their world. When discussing compositional elements such as the "rule of thirds," students took turns taping one another to practice positioning their subjects. Once we were able to use a common language to talk about what made these scenes work, our viewing experience became a way to talk about production possibilities.

As we entered our second year as a club, we needed something to hang these ideas and images on, something concrete but open enough to allow for artistic interpretation. Poetry was a natural choice, from the elasticity of meaning in the hands of the poet to the image-laden language that gave students an entry point for interpretation. This project coincided with our schoolwide launch of Poetry Out Loud, an annual unit where all the students in our high school choose poems to memorize for their ELA class (part of the Poetry Foundation and NEA's Poetry Out Loud national recitation competition) and the creation of a corresponding video would surely lead to the holy grail of "extra credit."

Over the course of that second year, the students in Film Club produced a number of video poems using canonical texts as well as personally penned poetry. Every project had its own triumphs and troubles, and we grew together as we tackled each individual setback. One of our major impediments was (and is) a lack of access to technology. Through grants and some pressure on our tech department, we were able to procure a handful of iPads. I chose to work with iPads because students can shoot and edit on the same device. Some students chose to shoot with their phones and download editing software. Others chose to use editing software on their district-issued laptops. Students learned to accomplish a lot with a little, and it was through this process that I learned an integral truth about project-based learning: the problem *is* the point! The camaraderie that we developed in finding solutions to inevitable issues laid the groundwork for the culture of our club.

I interviewed two students from Film Club at the beginning of the following summer about their experiences with poetry that year. KM was a graduating senior who picked Pablo Neruda's "Finale" for her film, and AP was a freshman who had picked "Late Lament" by The Moody's Blues' drummer, Graeme Edge.

Freedom v. Formula—the Importance of Choice

In my conversation with AP, it became immediately apparent that one of the key differences in using film to analyze poetry versus a more traditional written approach is that the latter engenders a fear-based approach to reading and composing while the former allows students to view problems as possibilities. AP, who was wearing a T-shirt with a large yellow rectangle which read "National Sarcasm Society: like we need your support," characterized his regular written

English assignments as a "maze of boringness," likening the student to a rat struggling to find his way out in order to ensure his own survival, puzzling over the sequence that was hidden in the maze by the instructor. The Video Poem, conversely, was "fun and demanding" and a little like the maze but with more possibility, much like a "choose your own adventure" story in which the sequence of the maze was replaced by "branches… (in which there was) no wrong answer because you can go back and edit according to feedback." I reminded him that of course revision is a key component of writing and that as teachers of the essay, we strongly encourage our students to revise and edit according to feedback.

What was the difference here, in which one medium seems so conducive to creativity and inherent motivation and the other seems prohibitive in its notion of fixed ends and elusive sequences? It is clear that the difference is in perspective. When I pressed AP on the fact that writing is a recursive process and that we as instructors encourage and teach revision, he pondered for a moment and explained that "poems are full of metaphors, which are tough to write about but it's easy to find pictures" and that since editing is one of his strengths as a filmmaker (but not as a writer!), he preferred to work with fixed images. He explained that "the video shows me *how* to do it (say what I want.)" It is the *process* of filmmaking that becomes the instructor, and it is in *doing* that the student begins to know.

The interview that I conducted with AP took place a week after our final exam in ELA, during which the students wrote an essay based on the NYS Regents "Text Analysis Response." In the test, students are given a short piece of writing, typically a memoir or speech, and are asked to determine the central idea and a literary device that the author uses to develop that idea. The essay that I chose was

"Chronicle of Ice" by Gretel Ehrlich, which dealt with the effects of global warming on glaciers. AP explained to me that in reading the piece, he had been reminded of a lyric from the song "Horse with No Name" by the band America and had wanted to use that lyric to frame his analysis. "With film, I knew how to do it, but I didn't want to take any chances to risk my grade because I had heard (from another student) that we could get penalized for using outside information." For whatever reason, the construct of the essay and the elusive quality of the assignment had eliminated choice in AP's mind and forced him back into the maze, making decisions based on his assumption of what was desired rather than using his own reading of the text to drive him. What could have been an insightful analysis became stilted because of the assumptions based around written composition.

Before he left my room for the summer, I asked AP if there was anything he would like to add to our taped discussion. He immediately responded: "Yes. I wanted to tell you that I just read something old and I actually liked it, which never happens." Intrigued, I asked him what he had read. He replied by reciting from memory the entire poem "Ozymandias" by Percy Bysshe Shelley. At the end of his recitation, he concluded, ". . . so, yeah, I thought that would make a pretty cool (film) project."

Making Room—Vision & (re)Vision
Too many times, I have been in the awkward position of trying to convince students that revision is in their best interest, especially writers who feel they put their best work on the page and that the reader has missed the point. One of the surprises I found in working with students composing visual poetry was the internalization of this process. Students working with film seem to be more willing and eager to revise their

work, returning to a film multiple times to edit their work until they felt satisfied. This continual revision was part of a community dialogue: students are able to show their work to others in a low stakes environment, hear feedback and make the requisite edits in order to maintain the integrity of their vision.

The student who helped me start the Film Club was my second interview, and the process of revision and editing was the focus of our discussion. Our conversation was an opportunity for her to reflect on her experiences in founding the Film Club and our work with the Video Poem. She recalled that while looking through potential source texts for her project, she perused poems from the Poetry Out Loud website. She selected the Pablo Neruda poem "Finale" because she was already a fan of Neruda's work and had never encountered this particular poem.

At the time of the Video Poem project, media coverage of the Syrian refugee crisis had reached its zenith and this influenced KM's reading of the poem. KM created the voiceover narration for her video poem, reading the poem in a measured and unemotional timbre as black and white images of refugees' journeys slowly dissolved into one another. She saw the poem's subject, Matilde, as a "little girl who needs help" and it was Neruda's mention of "hospital beds" (Neruda, 1973/2002) that became her entry point in her analysis of the poem. She was reminded of the images of makeshift UN triage units and refugee camps and how these spaces were often populated by children. The now iconic and horrifying image of the small Syrian boy's body being recovered on a Turkish beach had become seared into the cultural montage of this crisis, and it became the emotional fulcrum in her video. The image of a "child in danger," influenced by the media coverage

of the Syrian Refugee crisis, created the intertextual connection between the text and the world in KM's mind.

Along with the vulnerability of children in the face of danger, KM also saw hope in the poem's final stanza. She knew immediately that she wanted to reflect this hope through a color shift in her film. Much like the iconic color shift in *The Wizard of Oz*, when the stanza which begins with the line "It was beautiful to live when you lived" is stated, the screen transitions to color and we see a beautiful young child in a faraway place blissfully swinging, beaming at the camera. This image dissolves into a first person point of view of KM walking through a park near our high school, slowly tilting the camera up so that the final image that the viewer sees in the tops of the trees and the blue sky, echoing Neruda's line, "The world is bluer . . .." KM describes her reading of this hope as a "chance of goodness" in the world.

When asked to comment on the difference between her experiences in analyzing a poem through film and the more traditional approaches, KM was clear about the space and confidence that writing (and reading) with video provided her: "I don't know how to say it … *there was more room:* when a teacher gives an assignment, there is a way you have to do it— with a video, I start with a point" (emphasis added). She could not recall any specific writing exercises that she had done with poetry in high school, but she often referenced experiencing reading through her ability to see the language in images: "…when I'm reading, I can see everything in my mind visually, or how I would portray it visually and it helps me better understand the text." She expressed the agency that viewing herself as a filmmaker gave her reading and this also provided the basis for her writing: "I write it how I see it … and *then* make it all 'schooley.'" When students are able to

encounter the texts as agents of invention, they don't walk into the text's room, the text walks into their room.

When approaching writing as filmmakers, audience becomes an integral part of the process, especially when it comes to revision. KM described a film project for *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* that she created for her senior English course:

> I didn't have a thesis until the end. It wasn't until I saw their reactions that I knew how it should be put together. Watching people watch what I had made and then react to it—that's when I knew my thesis statement.

Since everything for her video project had already been shot, the revision was all in the editing of those shots in order to frame her ideas, and it was the audience reaction to these shots that informed her editing process. And it wasn't the comments of the audience or peer review or feedback that informed KM's process, it was merely her reading of the audience and the way that she could perceive their reactions to her video that made her elusive thesis statement apparent. She was embodying the recursive nature of composition at this point, showing that writing leads to reading, which leads back to revision.

Problems and Mediation

I want to return to an assertion that I make earlier in this article: in film composition, problems *are* the point. In my experience, when students encounter problems with their written compositions, they tend to experience a dead end. Because they are composing for an audience of one (their teacher), the feedback that they receive is a closed loop, and it becomes a perfunctory exercise in conforming to the standards that the instructor has set for the project. With film, because students are developing their own vision for the project, they

are eager to share their in-process piece with multiple audiences, gauging their reactions and adjusting their work accordingly. In high stakes writing, students are not encouraged to take risks—and are often penalized for doing so. Having multiple audiences for their videos is a different kind of high stakes assessment as their work will be viewed in a much more public way than their traditional academic writings. Yet the students are rewarded for taking creative risks with their videos.

My role in this process is to be a mediator, to help students in the development and implementation of their vision and to help them come up with solutions to the problems they inevitably encounter. Oftentimes, this becomes a communal activity: one student may have the answer to another's issue or another student may be experiencing the same issue, so the problem becomes an opportunity for the class to come together and workshop ideas and techniques. It makes for a messy process but one in which student motivation becomes more intrinsic.

Epilogue—A Moveable Feast

The young man who shared his discovery of Shelley's "Ozymandias" approached me this fall, wanting to show me the progress he had made in creating a stop-motion interpretation of his video poem. The first frames show a green Lego field and the letter "O" beginning to take shape.

"This was how I was first getting the hang of stop-motion," he said, indicating that he would come back and fix the title sequence later. He was more excited for me to hear the song that he paired with the poem: David Bowie's "The Man Who Sold the World." I asked him how he was filming this project at home, and he showed me a picture of a filming stage he had created in his bedroom, with a dark blanket as a

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background surrounded by two moveable desk lamps. He explained how he used a gaming keyboard to program different shutter speeds into his camera, allowing him to manipulate the length of exposure and control the shots needed for each sequence. Playing the video for me once more, I strained to hear his recitation over the music. Before I could point this out to him, he casually stated: "Of course I'm not done . . .."

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Stephen Sorensen (ssorensen@olean.wnyric,org) teaches freshman English at Olean High School. In 2015, he started a Film Club and in 2017, he started an elective Film Class for juniors and seniors. His students present their films at the Southern Tier Area Film Festival, an annual showcase which he helped to found. He is a recipient of the James Moffett Award and has been a member of NCTE since 2012.

The Festival: Video, Audience, and Affirmation

Brendan Heaney
Fillmore Central School

In the spring of 2017 students, their families, and friends from the Southern Tier came to Fillmore Central School to see The Southern Tier Film Festival. Not really knowing what to expect, those in attendance eventually saw more than thirty student films over the course of three wonderful hours.

The idea of a film festival began tentatively as the weeklong summer professional development opportunity, Writing with Video, neared its end. Participants in the institute began asking a series of important questions: wouldn't it be great to have a kind of "red carpet" event? Wouldn't it be great to encourage students to get dressed up and, along with family and friends, see their own work on the big screen? Wouldn't it be proof that what we were doing was meaningful? The energy and the passion were there, but pulling it off meant communication, planning, and commitment. In the end, conviction overcame doubt.

Once the audience was seated they were entertained by student work that showed the intelligence, the passion, and the creativity of young people expressing themselves through the power of film. The audience watched films of various types divided in to three flights of about ten videos per flight. Short intermissions separated flights giving the audience opportunities to share refreshments, discuss the work of these young film-makers, and vote for the ones they liked best. The video with the most votes at the end of the evening won the festival's trophy. But certainly there was more than one winner; people were amazed by the students' work. Student film-makers were given a chance to tell their stories and have

their voices experienced in a way that they had never imagined, culminating in a well-deserved sense of accomplishment which they shared with a group of educators devoted to infusing digital video into classroom practice.

The Southern Tier Film Festival turned out to be a watershed moment for the students and teachers who participated. It provided a student showcase clearly demonstrating how meaningful composition through film-making could be. Students who participated in the event expressed an uncommon pride in authorship, often with a heart-felt "that was so cool" or some other enthusiastic and sincere endorsement. They recognized something important about having their art displayed alongside the art of their peers and communicated to an audience outside the usual classroom environment. The experience validated them as artists, like the student who came to me a few days after the event, a quiet kid but one full of ideas. Her video was superb, abstract and personal, an almost perfect homage to the music videos of the 90s. I told her I thought it was as good as an old Blind Melon video called "No Rain." During the Film Festival I knew she must have been very nervous and self-conscious when her video was shown. But she heard the applause, and she humbly acknowledged the compliments of strangers during intermission, including peers from other schools. A few days after the event, she told me it was one of the best moments of her high school career. She was going to graduate in a few weeks, and she told me that she only wished we had done this throughout her high school years.

Many teachers from the institute told me similar stories about students who were equally impacted by the Festival.

"This was cool."

"Keep doing this."

"I can't wait to make videos next year."

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"I already have ideas for my next movie." These statements were all the proof of success we needed, success that we acknowledged at the following summer institute. To say that we were energized by what had happened would be an understatement. We knew we had something good and needed to continue what we had started. We were validated but now came the task of continuing our success and improving upon it. We knew we had a first day of school audience waiting for us, and we knew we were going to be shaping the year's curriculum with the success of the Film Festival in mind. Our institute "family" stayed in touch throughout the year by reuniting at Houghton College at times or simply by exchanging email and text messages, sharing what we were doing in class and comparing notes about how things were going. Ultimately, the festival was at the heart of that contact and communication.

This year's event will be much like last year's with a few changes, like limiting the duration of the videos and redefining the categories. We have also decided to move the festival to another site, Cuba, NY, and will continue to do so, eventually giving all the districts involved a chance to host the event on an alternating basis. In the coming years we hope to widen our circle and expand our institute to new teachers and new schools. The original excitement and energy is still there.

We have seen the powerful impact our work has had on students. The Film Festival has provided us with tangible evidence that what we are doing is meaningful. The Southern Tier Annual Film Festival is poised to be an event that will continue to allow the brilliant work of our students to be seen by captivated audiences for many years to come.

Brendan Heaney is teacher at Fillmore Central School. He has been teaching high school English for close to twenty years. He has been an adjunct instructor at Alfred State College and has taught classes in film studies throughout his career.

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Book Review: Jill Bialosky's
Poetry Will Save Your Life

James Cercone
Buffalo State University

Jill Bialosky's *Poetry Will Save Your Life* merges memories of the author's life with 51 thematically connected poems. Ms. Bialosky includes short biographies of the poets and brief critical commentary on each poem. In doing so Bialowski brings something new to the memoir genre, and reminds us all of the powerful role poetry can play in our lives.

That poetry, a constant in the author's life, is at the forefront here should be no surprise. Bialosky is an accomplished poet in her own right and an executive editor at W.W. Norton & Company. Bialosky's reverence for the poetic form is a constant throughout this book. She describes how poetry intertwines with her experience, commenting "that poetry should take as its subject matter the painful aspects of my existence opens a new way of thinking for me. . . . I realize that through the artfulness of poetic form, one can trap experience and make it palpable to a reader" (p. 117). That "trapping of experience"—the memoir itself—is the strength of the book. Bialosky's vivid recall of childhood—the untimely loss of her father, a childhood friend who moves away—her mother's new marriage, a first love who drives all night to visit her at college—reminds us of the impact the events of our early lives can have on us.

As for the poetry—which she weaves, not so seamlessly at times, throughout her memoir—all the greatest hits are here, Wordsworth, Dickens, Frost, Plath, Brookes, and Hughes among them. Other, less well-known, poems are peppered throughout. Regardless, the back and forth between

memoir and poem is what makes the book unique. When it works, the poems Bialosky chooses enrich her memoir. "The Sisters of Sexual Treasure," by Sharon Olds, for example, deepens an adolescent memory of Bialosky and her friend driving around town with boys they had just met. Through her vignette Bialosky focuses on the new sexual tensions of our early teenage years and Olds' poem deepens and complicates the topic. In the chapter "First Love," Bialosky reflects on her first love and the complications of being in a long-distance relationship, here evoking John Keat's "Bright Star" and James Wright's "A Blessing" as companion pieces.

There is an undercurrent of loss throughout the book, generated first by her father's death and later in Bialosky's adulthood with her sister's suicide (an event focused on in Bialosky's previous memoir, *History of a Suicide, My Sister's Unfinished Life*) as well as the loss of two babies, both born prematurely. In writing about her sister's suicide, and the pain and confusion of that loss, Bialosky turns to Sylvia Plath's "Tulips." The poem, written after Plath had attempted suicide is powerful and heart breaking. She follows with "Waking in the Blue" by Robert Lowell, whose poems often dealt with his own struggles with depression. Her mother's personal struggles with depression and her need for attention from men after Bialosky's father dies, looms large here as well. It's at times heart breaking, but Bialosky uses her reflections to come to terms with her past, to make peace with her mother and find some solace in the memories she has of her.

There are points when the poems Bialosky includes seem disconnected, sitting awkwardly alongside the narrative—puzzle pieces that just don't quite fit. Most problematic were passages in the book that attempted to deal with race and social class. In "Shame," a memory of a field trip from the suburbs to downtown Cleveland, Bialosky uses

Langston Hughes' "You and Your Whole Race," and "I Too," to illuminate her childhood exposure to poverty. Here she describes seeing "black children dressed in thin, torn coats," (p.27) and worries that with all the bills piling up at home if "we'll end up one day in the ghetto" (p. 28). The section reminded me of Nikki Giovanni's "Nikki-Rosa," where the poet laments the narrow, deficit-driven view many white people have of growing up poor and black. I was hoping to see Bialosky include that poem here, was hoping to see her work through and interrogate the memory and the telling of it. For the most part the author does not work to deeply examine issues of race, class. While the author's own life and very real personal tragedies are, without question, impactful and make for a sometimes absorbing read, taking a more critical stance on the themes she explores would have made the book deeper and more compelling.

The literary overview, biographies, and critical interpretation seemed like appendages at times and distracted from the movement of the memoir, but then that is what the book has set out to do. There have been some accusations that Bialosky borrowed too liberally from other sources for these biographical and critical passages. While I will not address the issue directly I will say that the biographical and critical commentary are secondary to the author's attempts to weave poetry throughout the memoir.

While not as tightly wound as I would hope, that weaving can be an important reminder for English teachers. Poetry, regulated at times to the month of April, a poetry unit after the state tests are over, or cooped up in a 300 level English course, belongs to all of us. How we work to engage students with it is incredibly important. That in fourth grade, when introduced to Robert Frost by her teacher, something clicked, connected, helped Bialosky make sense of the

emerging world around her, should not be lost on English teachers. We must work to help students connect poetry to their lives, help them to use poetry to experience and think through the world, to question their sense of self and of the other selves around them. Bialosky's book is an important reminder of that charge.

James Cercone is an Assistant Professor and Program Coordinator of English Education at SUNY Buffalo State. Dr. Cercone's research focuses on teacher learning within communities of practice, the impact such communities have on teacher identity development, classroom instruction, and student learning. James' work also focuses on the ecologies of meaningful English classrooms and English teacher preparation programs. James has presented and published on the subjects of English teacher professional networks, digital video composing, diversity, high-stakes testing, curriculum development and clinically rich models of teacher education. James is a co-founder and director of the Western New York Network of English Teachers (wnynet.org), a professional social network linking English teachers across the Buffalo-Niagara region.

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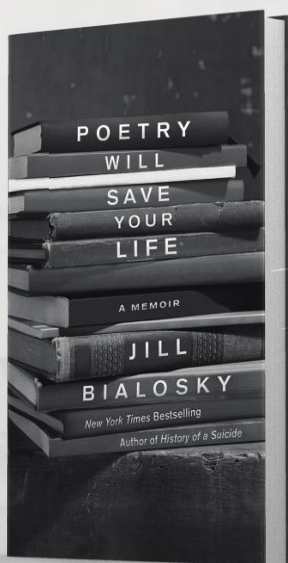
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Bialosky's erudite and instructive approach to poetry [is] itself
a refreshing tonic." —*Chicago Tribune*

Book Review: Liz Rosenberg's
House of Dreams

Katie Ralston
Cuba-Rushford Central School

House of Dreams, by Liz Rosenberg, brings to light the true struggles, successes, and intimate experiences of L.M Montgomery. Prior to this work, little was known or understood about the life of Montgomery, the author of the well-known and timeless novel, *Anne of Green Gables*.

Although written for young readers, Rosenberg's writing elicits relatable emotion relevant to readers of any age. The book opens with a description of the escape Maud finds in her own writing, evoking motivation and inspiration to any young, aspiring writer. Throughout her life, her struggles and successes, both personally and professionally, build as underlying themes to which children and adults can relate. As a middle school principal, I can see the many challenges Maud faced as relevant and strong "teachable moments" through bibliotherapy. Maud suffered the feelings of abandonment and loneliness after the death of her mother and distance from her father, yet she perseveres through her writing and love of learning. The struggle of being raised by her grandparents with little more than financial support from them left Maud empty and longing for emotion, but not lacking in motivation to grow academically. The awkward and unsure stage of friendship versus early love that she encounters with Nate Lockhart are the first of many insights into Montgomery's strong and independent nature in the field of courtship. Her battles with depression and anxiety were real, and are beautifully captured in Rosenberg's descriptive writing, "Her moods were like the weather—brilliant one minute, overcast the next," and "Along

with cold weather, came Maud's usual winter depression and fatigue."

Most importantly, the lesson for any young reader to learn from the life of L.M Montgomery is that success, fame, fortune, and love are, in the words of Montgomery, "No guarantee against life's sorrows." Maud struggled with abandonment, loneliness, depression, a "content" marriage that lacked passion. She was sometimes put down and discouraged by readers, and other times she was overwhelmed and suffocated by their claim to be her kindred spirit. Despite all of this, regardless of circumstance, Montgomery found comfort in her way of life as a writer, was able to provide joy to others through her art, and still found much marvel in life.

Rosenberg's descriptive writing, ability to evoke real emotion from the reader and true depiction of the events in Maude's life make this biography, more like a story that will engage and intrigue young readers. To see a student reading this book would open the door for authentic conversation around real events that, regardless of era, ring true. It sets the stage for teachable moments, academically and socially. It welcomes opportunity for deep thinking and text-to-self connections, and still, it leaves many questions and puzzles that allow for prediction, further questioning, and intrigue.

As readers, we are often so taken by a story that we neglect to learn or understand the life of the author. Students are taught to focus on the writing, the themes, the characterization, plot development, and text-based evidence, so much so that we fail to acknowledge the character behind the story: the artist that created or lived the story they're relishing or analyzing. *House of Dreams* allows readers, young and old, to see into the life of an author, to understand there is a real person behind every character and a real story behind each chapter. *House of Dreams* perfectly captures the reality of life's

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hardest moments as well as the beauty of life's blessings of which no one is exempt . . . even an author, even L.M. Montgomery.

Katie Ralston is the principal of Cuba-Rushford Middle School in Cuba, NY. Previously, Katie was a middle school special education teacher in Olean City School District. Katie also serves on the board for the New York State Middle School Association as a Regional Director.

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Liz Rosenberg
author of

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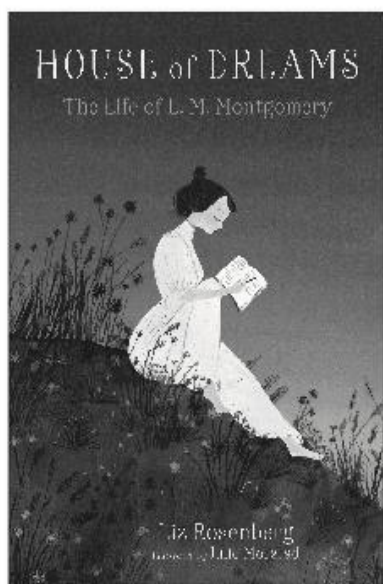
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