HOW STUDENTS USE MULTIMODAL COMPOSITION TO WRITE ABOUT COMMUNITIES

DISSERTATION

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BY

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ABSTRACT

This study of student compositions considers that there are more forms of text than traditional words, sentences and paragraphs of traditional printed text. The participants in this study created multimodal compositions about their communities using photographic text and musical text together with traditional printed text as a way to discuss their notions of community. The students wrote about their own communities as a way to dissect what constitutes a community and what the function of community is. Findings revealed that students considered that community is built on relationships between individuals who have a shared history rather than on geographic spaces or boundaries. Their writing indicated that because of these relationships between people in communities the function of a community is to help, support, and make individuals who they are. The study has implications in scholarly research as it considers construction and function of community. Further this study has implications for classroom pedagogy as it looks at how community can function in the teaching of multimodal composition.
Dedicated to Ed and Deb Smith
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Recently, there have been a few studies that begin to examine how students use different kinds of literacy skills (Fránquiz, 2001; Goodman, 2003; Kelly, 2001; Kist, 2005; Kress, 2003; Laliberty, 2001; Skilton-Sylvester, 2002). With a small exception (Hawisher & Selfe, 2007), these studies exist outside of classroom literacy events (e.g., Fránquiz, 2001; Goodman, 2003; Kelly, 2001). To further the work these scholars have begun, this dissertation looks at the ways that students use multimodal composition in classrooms to talk about their communities in efforts to shift views of multimodal composition (and multiple forms of literacy) as more than extra ways to engage in literacy as a core part of the curriculum and in an effort to close the digital divide.

A second focus of this research was to examine how students define community and their membership in a particular community. Studies of community membership typically view community membership as positive (Egan-Robertson, 1998). However boundaries of membership rely as much on exclusion as well as inclusion. This means that some students can be excluded or that a student who belongs to one community is excluded from another community. There has been some recent research that expresses the alienation
from school communities that students feel and pushes beyond a notion of community that is grounded in geography, group membership, personal relationships, or labels and/or titles (Wenger, 1998). The research of this current study extends that scholarship, however it differs in that it does not define community or community membership for the participants of the study. Instead, this research looks at how students define their communities, what membership means to them, what they view functions of community to be, and finally, how a classroom community that serves them in a way that is valuable to the students can help to close the digital divide often found between economically stable middle class (and upper middle class) suburban schools and economically fragile urban classrooms.

**Research Questions**

Many questions guide this research. Beyond looking at how students write about their communities, this research is particularly concerned with how community is conceptualized, how community is defined, and how community functions for the students, and how these might differ from current academic notions. Key to this research are the following questions:

1. How do students define community?
2. How do students define their communities?
3. What are the attributes of these communities that are of importance to the students who maintain membership in those communities?
4. How do students view the issues of involvement as members of multiple communities? What are the tensions and affordances that may be created by these multiple memberships?

5. How do students view their community or communities in relation to other communities and in relation to other people?

Using a New Literacy Studies (NLS) perspective that accepts all linguistic events to be forms of text, the use of multimodal composition becomes an important factor in how students write about their communities. Therefore, another set of related questions involves the role that multimodal composition plays when students express their thoughts about community and communities:

1. As students define and describe their communities to outsiders, they will be at the same time telling stories of their communities. How do students tell the stories of their communities? What aspects of their communities do students view as important to share with outsiders?

2. Why do students choose their form(s) of technology to define and describe their communities? Do students choose particular modes of technology because it is one that they are familiar with, because of a desire to learn new technology, because they are allowed to do so for this particular presentation, because other members of the class
are using them, because they view the assignment to require it, or for other reasons?

3. How does their chosen technology that describes and defines their community (as opposed to a traditional printed text composition) potentially change the stories that they are telling?

Discovering the ways that students define, analyze, and write about their communities with the intention of sharing them with outsiders is the foundation of this research. However, this knowledge is a useful tool in expanding the body of research into classroom literacy when used to begin thinking about how students’ notions of community impact literacy events in the classroom. This leads to the last series of research questions that this research begins to answer:

1. What is the educational, social, and personal importance of students telling their stories and/or the stories of their community as they describe and define them?

2. How can defining their own community change the way that students view their own agency or power?

3. How can telling their stories and/or the stories of their community change or create a learning community within the classroom?
Theoretical Frameworks

This study draws from a variety of theoretical frames. This research focuses on how students engage in a variety of literacy practices. Because of the focus on multiple literacy usage, an NLS approach is used for thinking about the ways that students use literacy to do academic as well as social work in this classroom. All of the work that the students have done in their 11th-grade English classroom with their literacy skills will deal with students’ ideas of community. This research draws heavily on notions of figured worlds proposed by Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain (1998) to explore the ways that community membership affects people’s ways of being in their world. Central to both notions of literacy and community are the role of discourse and the ways that people interact around language. Therefore, all of these ideas are framed by a microethnographic discourse analysis perspective (Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, & Shuart-Faris, 2005).

New Literacy Studies Approach to Literacy Research

Traditionally, literacy has been thought to be the ability to read and write (Gee, 1996). Street (1984) calls this conception of literacy the autonomous model of literacy. The autonomous model of literacy assumes that literacy is a “neutral technology” which is totally removed from any social context (Street, 1984, p. 1). Under the autonomous model, literacy can be tested, and competence in this technology can be measured. Further, the autonomous model of literacy removes oral language from written language. However, this
basic conception of literacy becomes complicated by questioning what it is that one has to be able to read and/or write to be considered literate. Simply put, thinking of literacy as a set of decoding skills that one is in possession of or is not in possession of creates a binary of literacy and illiteracy. Further, it puts people into binary positions of being literate or illiterate. This categorization is problematic for several reasons. When perceived as a skill, literacy is a continuum of abilities. It is widely accepted that being literate means only that one can read and write and that one is therefore either literate or illiterate. Further, if an individual is considered to be illiterate, this label is not considered to be a ranking of his or her skills, but rather, this person is then thought to have the inability to read and write (Guerra & Farr, 2002).

**Literacy as a Social Practice: The New Literacy Studies**

This discussion of what constitutes literacy and who is literate is important because it helps to illustrate the point that literacy is more than the simple process of decoding symbols on a page in order to make sense of them. This conception of literacy as a set of social skills is one that has been posited by the scholars of NLS. There are several tenets that form the ideas of NLS: the shift from thinking about ‘literacy’ to thinking about ‘literacies,’ the focus of discourse and language on literacy, and finally, the idea that literacy is a shared social practice rather than an individual set of skills that one either has or does not have (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Bloome, 1985; Gee, 1989, 1996, 2004; Hull & Schultz, 2002; Luke & Freebody, 1997; Sheridan, Street, & Bloome, 2000; Street, 1984).
This notion of people having *multiple literacies* (as opposed to being or not being literate) is central to a social practice perspective.

Street (1984) defines literacy as “shorthand for the social practices and conceptions of reading and writing” (p. 1). Even sitting home alone reading a book in a solitary environment is a social practice. According to Luke and Freebody (1997), “reading is a social practice using written text as a means for the construction and reconstruction of statements, messages, and meanings” (p. 186). While no one likely would argue that time spent reading alone is a form of literacy, it may be somewhat arguable that this solitary time is a social event. However, even the act of decoding the symbols on the page is social to some degree. In reading or writing, there is some notion of shared expectations (Sheridan, Street, & Bloome, 2000). That is, there is some sharing among a particular community (this community may be as simple as an English speaking community) as to what the text, the language, and the symbols on the page mean. In reading this particular text, there is some shared notion of how to decode the symbols on the page so that they translate into the same language. This shared sense of language makes it then possible for the readers to share some sense of what this text says. Hence, even a traditional conception of literacy as the ability to decode symbols on a page is rooted in social practice and shared expectations. Literacy cannot be separated from social aspects of life (Gee, 2001).

As a way of rethinking literacy that moves away from an autonomous model, Street describes the *ideological model* of literacy as one that, “stresses
the significance of the socialization process in the construction of the meaning of literacy for participants” (Street, 1984, p. 2). The ideological model acknowledges the relationship between oral and written language. One of the reasons that literacy is so intricately tied to social practices is because of its relationship to language. In fact, literacy cannot be separated from language (Gee, 2001). Texts are a part of social life (Fairclough, 2003). If reading and writing are social processes, then central to all social processes and the negotiation of everyday life is language (Bloome et al., 2005). Further, all social processes are linguistic (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993, 2004; Fairclough, 2003). From this line of reasoning, I argue that all literacy events are also linguistic events and visa versa. Therefore, I further argue that written text is a different form of language and language is a different form of text. This is why a microethnographic discourse analysis perspective is used to frame this study that focuses on students’ literacy practices.

Central to the notion of language as a social event is the way in which it is dialogic. That is to say that people are constantly acting and reacting to one another simultaneously (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993, 2004; Green & Wallat, 1981; Bloome et al. 2005. According to Bakhtin (1981), “In the actual life of speech, every concrete act of understanding is active…. Understanding and response are dialectically merged and mutually condition each other; one is impossible without the other” (p. 282). In thinking about how language and literacy are dialogic, one is constantly and simultaneously hearing, reading, or understanding the person, written text, or both with which they are engaging.
This is why understanding literacy practices as intertextual events is an important part of doing research that is framed by a NLS perspective.

Simply examined, intertextuality is the way two texts are juxtaposed. This juxtaposition can be evidenced when a quotation of one text is found in another (such as in this particular paper), or when the material in one text builds on previous texts, (as in books like the *Harry Potter* series). However, viewed more broadly, intertextuality can be the way that meaning is made and negotiated through language, both oral and written together. It is not limited to, nor dependent on, written texts since intertextuality, like language and literacy, is a social process (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993, 2004; Fairclough, 2003; Lemke, 2004; Shuart-Faris, 2004). This idea of intertextuality considers literacy as a social event beyond that the interactions around text that happen between the people participating in them (i.e. literacy events are social because they happen in school with other people) (Bloome, 2001). I argue that *literacy events are always intertextual events* because the reader or readers engaged in them is always juxtaposing the text with other texts from other times. These texts may be linguistic social interactions, popular media, other texts from school, and so forth.

This view of intertextuality as a social process becomes important when students do not come to school with the cultural ways of knowing around language and text that are expected in school situations. In such instances the ways that students make meaning and juxtapose oral texts and written texts from school in relation to those from home may be different. While students may be
reading the same text, they may be juxtaposing it differently. When framing literacy as a social practice, meaning is made intertextually and it is important to think of literacy practices not as a static set of processes, but rather as evolving social interactions (that is people create, recreate and modify them). Therefore, just as society evolves and changes with the changing trends, politics, economies, cultures, and linguistic styles, literacy changes as well (Sheridan, Street, & Bloome, 2000). When classroom literacy events are viewed as intertextual events, not from a basic autonomous model that is concerned only with the texts on the page, but rather from an ideological model that views it as a social process where both language and text are juxtaposed and dialogic, the way space and time are conceptualized within the literacy event becomes important.

Discussions of space can become complex, making distinctions between geographic, physical, visual, and social space. This discussion of space will not attempt to tease apart these various conceptions. However, these remain central to discussions of literacy. According to Barton and Hamilton (1998),

Literacy events are located in time and space. Reading and writing are things which people do, either alone or with other people, but always in a social context - always in a place and at a time. To make sense of people’s literacy practices we need to situate them within this context. (p. 23)

Space may consider only physical tangible geographic space and objects, however space is often defined by social and political power and ideas (Scollon & Wong Scollon, 2003). To begin to situate people within a context of time and space, it is necessary to begin to at least sketch a rough, working
conceptualization of space for the purposes of this study. Because NLS maintains a focus on literacy as a social process, a notion of social space seems to be an appropriate place to begin. A social space is in part defined by the physical space. That is, one is not typically considered in the space of school until within the confines of school grounds (or at least within sight of authority figures of the school). Once in that physical space, one's role determines the social actions used there (Scollon & Wong Scollon, 2003). For example, first graders are not likely to stand at the door and greet students as they come in or stand at the front of the class saying, “Good morning, boys and girls.” Likewise, seventh grade students do not hand out detentions to teachers for talking in the lunchroom. While these kinds of rules are generally agreed upon (perhaps unhappily by some of the students) they do constitute norms for behavior and interaction. A literacy event may constitute a different kind of space in classrooms than at home. While a student may sit with feet up on a table or lay on the floor to read at home, this kind of behavior may not be deemed appropriate at school.

Ideas of space and the roles that one plays in creating and being a part of a social space are further complicated by notions of time. During recess, teaches and students still share the social space of school. Running and yelling is acceptable during this time. It is not acceptable, however, during Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) time. While the idea of time as the time on the clock is important, I situate time in the historical sense (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). That is to say not only that these shared roles of students and teachers may have
changed from the 1950s until now, but also I also situate this notion of history with the person or community (Enciso, 2007). This idea of time as history encompasses the social interactions within social spaces outside of school that create cultural ways of knowing, particularly as these relate to interaction around language and text as they occur over time. One's own history is likely to be different than that of the teacher and the school community. As the social space is likely to be made up of members with many different ways of knowing, the agreed upon ways of sharing and acting within that social space may also be changed depending on who is present in that space. It is for this reason that the ways that community and literacy are connected are important. I continue this line of thinking about time and space with the notion of figured worlds, (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998) though for the purposes of thinking about community, these concepts are labeled history and position.

Community

There are many possible ways to think about community. Often, notions of community are situated around notions of geographic space. For example, a particular grouping of streets creates a neighborhood community. A collection of students in a classroom creates a classroom or learning community. Without social interactions, these communities are random collections of students in a classroom are drawn from a larger pool and put into classrooms in an effort to maintain equal class sizes. Different numbers of students or different enrolling times would create different classes of students. Likewise, the line that separates Kentucky from Indiana is both arbitrary and imaginary, yet it also
creates a boundary that marks a geographic divide. In other words, if that line were drawn differently the geographic spaces of these two states would also be different. Thinking of communities as simply geographic spaces or geographically marked holdings of people limits the importance of community. This is not a study of where communities are but rather how they are. While geographic space is a part of thinking about community, it is not only physical space that is responsible for shaping a community and defining the people who are a part of it. Pushing beyond what makes a community and marks its members, this study aims to begin thinking not only about how members of a community shape and create their communities but also how communities shape and create individuals. Viewed this way, it becomes necessary when thinking of communities to begin thinking of individuals, identity, and ways of being in the world.

Holland et al. (1998) provide a helpful framework for thinking about community in their discussion of figured worlds. A figured world is a world that people work within and against in social contexts. Figured worlds are built through narrative and language. A different set of social interactions, narratives, and discourses can create a different figured world. Because figured worlds are built with the narratives over time, they are not tangible. The example of Kentucky and Indiana above is helpful for thinking about this intangibility. While the dirt that makes the land we understand as Kentucky is something that one can pick up and hold in her or his hand, it is the narrative of people that transforms that dirt to a political and social entity called Kentucky. If the
discourse around Kentucky were different (maps were drawn differently, people called it Indiana, and so forth) there would be no figured world of Kentucky and no people called Kentuckians. However, while abstract, a figured world is still a very real construct. It comes into being because of the social narratives of the people who create it and live it. Holland et al. posit that the important idea around a figured world is that it is a “socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized” (p. 52). The people who live in Kentucky say they live in Kentucky (not somewhere else), they vote in Kentucky, they pay taxes in Kentucky, and they follow the laws of the state of Kentucky (or pay the consequences).

In this recognition of characters and actors, it is not only the characters that live and work within this figured world that are integral to its definition. Those who may not participate in this world are also crucial. For instance, it is no only residents of Kentucky who recognize Kentucky as a state and those who live there as its residents, the rest of the country does as well. Furthermore, when one figured world is created, its construction creates not only members but also outsiders. The creation of a figured world necessarily creates another figured world that exists at the least because it is not the one that is created. The state of Kentucky creates 49 other states that are not Kentucky.

It is important to note here that figured worlds do not exist only to define geographic spaces and communities. Another familiar example of a figured world is marriage. Marriage is not something that one can touch. A marriage license consists of words on a page. A ceremony is made up of words that the
parties involved and an officiator recite. One is recognized as married not only by the one she or he is married to, but also by society and the figured world of the government in the case of heterosexual marriages. One may act daily within the figured worlds of clubs, nationalities, genders, sexualities, marriage, employment, and so on. The list of possible figured worlds is endless as are the ways that people construct multiple figured worlds and ways they have of interacting with one another.

The figured worlds referred to here are brought about by the interactions that occur between people. Bloome et al. (in press) in their discussion of discourse as a verb, claim that discourse can be a tool that is used to create. That is, abstract ideas may actually be discoursed into being and become reality. If you assume that language is a tool that allows for abstract thought beyond the objects that are found directly in the immediate visual field (Vygotsky, 1978), and that “figured worlds could also be called figurative, narrativized, or dramatized worlds” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 53), it is easy to draw the conclusion that figured worlds are real life constructions of abstract thoughts that are discoursed into being by people and their relationships to one another. Holland et al. describe this narrative process of figured worlds in the following way:

Figurative, according to Webster’s Third International Dictionary, means transferred in sense from literal or plain to abstractor hypothetical; representing or represented by a figure. The production and reproduction of figured worlds involves both abstraction [emphasis added] of significant regularities from everyday life into expectations about how particular types of events unfold and interpretation of the everyday according to these distillation of past experiences. (p. 53)
However, there is more to the creation of a figured world than simply language, talk, or narrative may imply. The shift from language use or talk to discourse must be made because discourse incorporates the notions of interactions between people, their understandings of these interactions, and the role that these contribute to the overall idea of addressivity, all of which are integral in the construction of figured worlds.

People are constantly engaged in interactions with one another. Even when not talking to one another people are still engaged in interaction. In order for these interactions to be used as a tool to build a figured world, there must be some level of understanding as to the meaning of interactions between all of the participants. Bakhtin (1981) talks about it in this way:

Understanding and response are dialectically merged and mutually condition each other; one is impossible without the other. (p.282)

In this way, discourse and social interactions (understanding and response) are intertextual events over time and space in the same way that literacy events are. This combination of understanding and reaction creates the system of actions and reactions that form the heart of the discourse that creates the figured worlds in which participating actors live. This process of acting and reacting to one another is ongoing. As Bloome et al. (2004) write:

People act and react to actions immediately previous; to actions that occurred sometimes earlier; and to sets, groups, and patterns of action. People also react to future actions….the actions and reactions are not necessarily linear. People may act together, and actions and reactions may occur simultaneously. (p. 7)
This is to say that every time an actor engages with another, they are at the same time reacting to the reaction of the actor that they addressed in the first place. This is what is known as addressivity. Addressivity is possible because language is not a unitary tool or process. For this reason, Bakhtin referred to language as a living entity that is:

never unitary. It is unitary only as an abstract grammatical system of normative forms, taken in isolation from the concrete, ideological conceptualizations that fill it, and in isolation from the uninterrupted process of historical becoming that is a characteristic of all living language. Actual social life and historical becoming create within an abstractly unitary national language a multitude of concrete worlds.” (p. 288)

These “concrete worlds,” created from abstraction and constant dialogic interaction, are the figured worlds that have been discussed.

This study redefines community as being synonymous with figured worlds as it allows for examination of how (actors) do work with their language to create them, and because once established, community as a figured world does work in creating identities in individuals. This is where it becomes crucial to think about how individuals author their worlds. Authoring the world is putting words to the world that addresses an individual. Simply stated, authoring the world is the process of naming the figured world(s) that one must live inside, outside, and around. In authoring the world an individual uses language and familiar previous social interactions with this language and juxtaposes them against the new figured worlds (or new parts of familiar figured worlds) that she or he is dealing with. This use of language as a tool to create symbolic meaning is more than a way to identify the world that one is living in. While this identifying is done by
groups and communities, it is also something that is done by individuals. This identification and naming is both a part of the inner voice of the one who is authoring her or his self. The way that the inner voice names its world is more about ‘sense’ whereas the way that the world is defined through spoken language is more about meaning (Holland et al, 1998). That is to say, two individuals may use the same spoken word to identify an object in their world, but the way they interact around that object, and the way that they feel about it (although they would identify it with the same word) may be totally different.

Because social interactions and language are always dialogic, when one authors a world she or he is at the same time also imposing her or his history and ideology through the use of language acting as a tool on the world in which she or he lives. In this way, authoring the world is a dialogic process. When one is authoring the world, she or he must also author her or himself into this world. In this way, an individual also authors the self. In authoring the self, one creates an identity within the figured world in which she or he is living. Likewise, while an individual is busy authoring her or himself into a figured world, others are at the same time authoring them into their respective worlds. As authoring the world is a dialogic process, so too is authoring the self. According to Holland et al. (1998), “…the self is a position that is ‘addressed’ by and ‘answers’ others and the ‘world’ (the physical and cultural environment). In answering (which is the stuff of existence), the self ‘authors’ the world - including itself and others” (p. 173). The process of authoring is continually happening, however, it is not a conscious process. An individual does not sit down and think about how they are
going to think about their day, people they pass, rooms they walk into, meetings they attend, conversations they have. Rather, again according to Holland et al., “the authoring self is invisible to the self” (p. 173). The way that one authors the world determines how she or he will be in the world. This process is not a static one, but is constantly ongoing and changing while at the same time never separated from historical authoring.

Authoring the world and the self are key concepts for this research project not only because it is this process that forms how people think about their own figured worlds and communities and how others do this work, but also because it leads to understanding how individuals and communities become positioned in relation to others. It is this positioning that leads to a discussion of power and agency. According to Holland et al. (1998), positionality is:

inextricably linked to power, status, and rank. Social position has to do with entitlement to social and material resources and so to the higher deference, respect, and legitimacy accorded to those genders, races, ethnic groups, castes, and sexualities privileged by society. (p. 271)

Positionality determines how one actually moves beyond simply naming, authoring, and thinking (whether internally or verbally) her or his life and instead begins the actions of living a life within a particular figured world (or several figured worlds). The way that a person is positioned can restrict her or his way of being in the world not only because of how that person is positioned but also how that person is positioned by others. This is where the notion of figured worlds moves from something that is imagined - something realized and named in an autonomous, “in your own head” kind of way - to a lived reality for individuals and
communities. Central to positioning are the interactions between positioned people: people positioning themselves, people positioning others, people with the same positioning, people with different positioning, and people with different sets of positions in the world. I draw a parallel between the notion that Holland et al posit in their writing about positioning and self authoring and the NLS notion of intertextuality because both are social interactions around language and both are dialogic in nature and dependent on constant social actions and reactions. For these reasons, these concepts are woven together theoretically as different expressions of social interactions that work essentially the same way. This dependence on language and interaction, action and reaction, is further why I choose to include a discussion of microethnographic discourse analysis as more than a tool used in the methodology section, and instead include it as a theoretical construct

**The Microethnographic Discourse Analysis Perspective**

Using a discourse analysis *perspective*, as opposed to doing discourse analysis, requires that the researcher assumes that all important evidence is found in the way that people use language. In order to unpack what this really means, it becomes necessary to begin thinking about what discourse is. Discourse is a word that is used in the vast majority of academic writing in the field of literacy. It is often used without an explicit explanation of the definition of the term. In fact, *discourse* can have multiple uses and can be conceptualized and used in many different yet intertwining ways. Is discourse a simple synonym for talk? Can a discourse be uncovered by the study of grammatical codes for
language? Is discourse less about text on paper and more about conversation between two or more people? Or rather, if we reverse the concept, is discourse only about text on paper? If discourse is about conversations between two or more people, can discourse refer to professional perspectives expressed by academics as they write about similar topics, cite one another, and write scholarly papers in reaction to other scholarly papers? Is this where the term *professional discourse* comes from? If this is the case, how then would one separate the grammar and writing within the text from the real life conversations that take place about the same issues and in similar form around conference tables within universities? Is discourse only scholarly? Is it considered discourse when two middle school students sit on top of their desks before English class begins talking about the school dance the night before? Certainly, this is different from an academic interaction that could be considered discourse. In trying to define discourse, there are frequently more questions about what discourse is than about what discourse is not.

Both *discourse* and *discourse analysis* have different meanings to different scholars within different fields (Schiffrin, Tannen, & Hamilton, 2001). Even to take all of these questions in to account and simply combine them, saying that discourse can many things to many people and that it covers all of the questions discussed above is shortsighted. What is meant by discourse is more complicated that this. For example, while there may be discourse occurring in the school between students, there is also the educational discourse of teachers on a staff and between scholars at universities. All of these are considered
discourse. Each one of these conceptions of discourse is, yet each one is a way to define and think about discourse. People are not limited to the use of only one kind of discourse. A researcher in a school may engage in university discourse at work, teacher discourse while working with teacher researchers, and in conversations with students about the dance in a way that has nothing to do with research, but rather as a person interested in these students’ lives. The use of research discourse followed by a technical discussion of what stage of development these students are in is not appropriate when informally discussing who wore what to the dance with them. However, it may be the only appropriate way to discuss the matter when writing about the conversation in a scholarly paper.

Eventually, in thinking about what discourse is, it becomes necessary to simply accept it as messy and complicated (Bloome et al. in press). However, one thing remains central to the notion of discourse: it is the use of language - verbal, written, and non verbal (Bloome et al., 2004,). Fairclough (2003) says that discourse, “Signals the particular view of language in use…as an element of social life which is closely interconnected with other elements” (p. 2). Gee (1989) describes discourse, with a lowercase “d,” as “stretches of language that make sense” (p. 7). This stretch of language could be, under this heuristic of discourse, either written language, spoken language, or non verbal communication. However, Gee goes on to distinguish between these stretches of language that make sense (discourse) and Discourse represented with a capital “D.” According to Gee (1989; 1996), Discourse moves beyond language
as a set of shared grammatical conventions for making meaning with others, and
instead indicates language used as a means to express ways of believing, doing,
valuing and being in the world. He goes on to discuss the further importance of
Discourse as more than a style of talking:

Discourses [emphasis added] are ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs and attitudes, and social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes. A Discourse is a sort of identity kit which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognize. (Gee, 1996, p. 127)

Central to this idea of Discourse is that it suggests people may use Discourse as a way to be identified through language, and that identity may in fact be created by their Discourse. This would be of little importance if people did not interact with one another. As suggested above, the use of any kind of language is always a social process, even when it is seemingly done alone, such as when reading, writing, or thinking in solitary spaces, because understanding language implies a shared experience (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 1989, 1996; Sheridan, Street, & Bloome, 2000; Street, 1984). Language is central to the way we discuss how people interact, particularly when looking to address issues of power, dominance, and oppression. Here, I make the argument that a discourse analysis perspective that is looking at interactions between people is necessary for any kind of critical pedagogy because language is more than simply a part of social life. Rather, language is how social life is created.

According to Gee’s conception of Discourse as an identity kit (Gee 1989, 1996), this use of language, both verbal and nonverbal, is how people get
through their daily lives. It is how they know how to be in the world with others, and how to be with others in the world (which may be different at different times). However, the idea of language used as a way to interact with the world is contingent on that it is a shared construction (even when it only exists inside one’s own thoughts). Vygotsky (1978), makes the case that language in all of its forms (spoken, written, and nonverbal) is the most important tool shared by groups. He argues that language gives individuals and groups a way to think about their ideas, so that even “directed thought is social” (1986, p. 16). Unpacking further the work of Bakhtin (1981) we see that it also suggests that the use of language is never a solitary process. Bakhtin notes that language is:

never unitary. It is unitary only as an abstract grammatical system of normative forms, taken in isolation from the concrete, ideological conceptualizations that fill it, and in isolation from the uninterrupted process of historical becoming that is a characteristic of all living language. Actual social life and historical becoming create within an abstractly unitary national language a multitude of concrete worlds…(1981, pp. 288).

The use of language is always a social process. Therefore, I also argue that social interactions are linguistic processes (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993, 2004).

Key to this notion that language is always a social process and further that all social interactions are linguistic is the notion that people constantly act and react to one another (Bloome, 2004; Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993, 2004). Bakhtin (1981) describes this acting and reacting (addressivity) in this way:

*Understanding and response are dialectically merged and mutually condition each other; one is impossible without the other* [emphasis added]. (p. 282)
At this point, I begin to use language and discourse interchangeably because I am using the notion of language as a social interaction rather than something that can be extracted and studied apart from life. Likewise, I am leaving behind the use of Gee’s heuristics of discourse and Discourse, not as a way to dismiss them, but rather because when viewing all social interactions as linguistic, both functions of discourse and Discourse are present.

This discussion of what discourse is and what it does may seem belabored. However, I argue that this clearly defined understanding that moves beyond the surface level is necessary to this present project. Specifically, this understanding of discourse is inseparably tied to the ideas of community rooted in the work of Holland et al. around figured worlds as well as to a New Literacy Studies approach to the study of literacy.

While the research in this dissertation is critical in nature, considering the way that particular communities are marginalized due to their language and literacy practices, I do not use a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (van Dijk, 1993) perspective. I consider that a microethnographic approach to discourse analysis is a different way of approaching CDA. A CDA approach to discourse analysis focuses not only on social problems rather than political issues, but also explains them in terms of social interactions within the particular social structure (van Dijk, 2003). According to van Dijk:

CDA is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. With such dissident research, critical discourse
analysts take explicit position and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality. (p. 352)

CDA thinks about “the (re)production and challenge of dominance” (van Dijk, 1993, p. 249) as perpetuated by large institutions or groups. These kinds of oppressions make themselves obvious discursively (Wodak & Reisigl, 2003; van Dijk, 1993, 2003).

In thinking about what CDA really is, it is necessary to define some of the key tenets. While these are not sufficient to summarize the entire theoretical basis of CDA, they do seem to form a common thread that runs through discussions of CDA. While these principles are helpful in working within a critical pedagogies frame, they also create some tensions. First of all, CDA takes a particular political stance that should be spelled out. According to van Dijk (1993), this stance is to uncover ways that elite groups abuse power that they hold over oppressed groups. Secondly, CDA explicitly examines the complex theoretical connections between discourse and power. Typically, examination under a CDA perspective is rooted in Marxism and the ways that discourse limits one’s access to various institutions or capitalistic wealth. Third of all, CDA is multidisciplinary. Like most scholarship, CDA draws from many different theoretical backgrounds to examine issues of power and dominance. Fourth, CDA looks for ongoing social problems rather than pressing issues of the day. For example, a CDA approach to racism may look at the way that racism has been historically treated in a group’s discourse, rather than how students of color are marginalized in schools presently. Finally, CDA is concerned with power as
a means toward access (van Dijk, 1993, 1996, 2003). This places particular emphasis on access to institutions, economics, and spaces.

Rather than look at large social structures in a top down manner and ignoring the individual in classic CDA style this present study works from the perspectives of NLS and figured worlds, where the reciprocal nature of individual and self is central. Therefore, instead of CDA, I choose to use a microethnographic discourse analysis perspective. It applies a small scale to small groups of people rather than working at the scale of whole culture studies typically found in anthropological ethnography (Green & Wallat, 1981). This approach to the study of discourse occurs on an individual, face-to-face level (Bloome et al., 2004; Green & Wallat, 1981; Gumperz, 1981; Lutz, 1981). That is, it is the study of small groups rather than the study of entire cultures. Particularly, a microethnographic approach is helpful in that it looks and the interactions between people as they use language (i.e., as they are being social actors). Green and Wallat (1981) make note that, “Micro-ethnographies produce descriptions of what it means to participate in various social situations that occur within a whole culture” (p. xii). In educational studies, this kind of analysis would not tell you what it is like to be African American or even to be an African American in a school. However, it would shed light onto one person’s, or even several people’s, experience with being African American in an American school.

A microethnographic approach to discourse analysis is often thought to be a tool for doing research. Bloome et al. (2004) posit that:
every classroom language and literacy event (indeed, every social event) is the promulgation of a model of power. In sum, educational researchers interested in understanding power relations therefore need to excavate both the power relations in the event(s) being examined as well as the model of power implied. Microethnographic discourse analysis provides one means of doing that. (p. 231)

Where this is different from CDA is that it moves the focus from large social groups to individuals. This shift places power and agency with the person. It recognizes both power and agency that dominant oppressive structures may not recognize. However, it can still serve as a critical way of framing research as well as a tool for doing research. Further, I would argue that because examinations of power within this approach require a focus on interaction between individuals, there needs to be some knowledge of the individuals, their relationships, and their histories both together and apart, rather than on large social structures. It is in this way that a critical microethnographic discourse analysis perspective addresses some of my previous critiques of CDA. First, the focus on the individual negates the “top down” effect that van Dijk (2003) mentions, and instead places agency and power with the individual even if they have been marginalized by a dominant group. Secondly, it is more difficult to mask the oppressive things that happen in people’s lives when the analysis addresses the interactions between individuals (that is, what is really happening in their lives) rather than the interactions between institutions.

**Connecting the Theories to Create a Study: Chapters 2-6**

Central to all of these theories is the notion that social life of all kinds happens around language. A microethnographic perspective is helpful when
using a figured worlds approach for thinking about community because of the focus on individuals and how they are in their communities. It is helpful to look at the small things that each person in a community does in order to look at how the community operates or how the community is. Further, a microethnographic discourse analysis perspective looks at the ways that people communicate in these communities and the role that language use between individuals plays in maintaining, creating, and changing these communities. Key to both the ways that language creates and maintains community using a figured worlds framework, and to a discourse analysis perspective on language is the notion of addressivity, the constant back and forth interaction between those in communication. I consider this to be parallel to the way that NLS thinks about intertextuality. Given that a NLS definition of text considers that a text is a linguistic event, all texts once received, whether heard, read, or viewed, are subject to the experience of the reader. There is a constant back and forth between the reader and the text that is parallel to the back and forth interaction that defines addressivity.

I use these theories together to weave the fabric of this research, to guide the research questions, and to guide the ways that I have analyzed the data. Chapter 2 is a review of recent research that uses theoretical frameworks similar to those used in this dissertation. The studies reviewed have prompted this present research and provided a body of knowledge that this study hopes to push past, building the body of knowledge about community, literacy, and multimodal composition. Chapter 3 of this dissertation outlines the ways that the
theoretical frameworks guide me as I compile, analyze and write about this research. Chapter 4 analyses student multimodal compositions to see how students use various forms of language to compose writing about their own communities. Chapter 5 of this dissertation is a discussion of the findings of this research. Central to this discussion is the importance of thinking about how classroom communities that function in ways students view as valuable can provide a way for students and teachers to support one another as they face a lack of knowledge, a lack of technology staff, and a lack of resources to close the digital divide.
Multiple Literacies, Multiple Forms of Text: Literacy as a Social Practice

Recently, work that falls within a NLS framework has placed language at the forefront of all learning. This has led to a reconsideration of what schools count as literacy and who counts as being literate. The role of language is central to any study using a NLS approach to literacy as the two events are different expressions of shared linguistic endeavors. Bloome et al. (2002) posit that:

In any specific situation people will have shared expectations—a shared cultural model—about what is an appropriate use of written language, how the written language should be interpreted (what interpretive frame should be brought to bear on the writing), who should play what role in the writing event, and the implied social positions and relationships created among the people. Literacy practices are socially established and shared ways of using written language within a specific type or set of events. (p. 51)

Recognizing that language practices exist within power structures both dominant and marginalized, issues of oppression, equality, and agency are at the forefront of work in NLS. From this perspective, when students who enter school systems that view their language use (their way of interacting with their world) as deficient, they enter schools that view them as deficient (Delpit, 2002; Kilgour
Dowdy, 2002; Stubbs, 2002; Meacham, 2002; Wynne, 2002). Studies of this nature assume that students who have been socialized into language in a way that may be different from the dominant will also have a different set of literacy practices, or a different way of engaging in literacy practices, than the dominant modes that schools support. Guerra and Farr (2002), in their study of the writing processes of two Mexicanas, make a compelling case for the ways that the binary of literate vs. illiterate is both incomplete and wrong. In their study, Guerra and Farr looked at the ways that two women use writing in their lives. While one of the women (Malu) is considered to be highly literate, having attended university, the other woman in the study (Don Josephina) was only able to attend school through the second grade. Following the ways that schools define literacy, it would seem as though Don Josephina would be far from highly literate. However, as an active member of her church, the prayers (letters to God) that Don Josephina writes and shares with the fellow members are highly effective, strong in voice, compelling, and highly valued in this community. This is true despite what the letters may lack under a school definition of what constitutes good or literate forms of writing. Further, Don Josephina’s writings were in Spanish, although she had lived for most of her life in Chicago. Is she then literate in Mexico, but not when she is in Chicago? How can her literacy or writing abilities be defined? Clearly, Don Josephina is able to use her command of language in a written form that is effective and is perceived as such by her peers.
In the case of Don Josephina, it is the way in which her writings are shared (her ability to ‘be’ literate) that makes her work as a writer valuable and in fact constitutes her as a writer, or a literate being. Conquergood (2005), in his study of gang members in Chicago, found the same kind of shared expectations between community members in their gang tags. These markings of graffiti would never be an acceptable way to turn in a paper in a classroom. Nevertheless, these tags are not only rule governed, but the gang members who understand the writing conventions involved, collectively share the knowledge involved in these writings in the same ways that one would be able to engage with writing in a book. What is important here is that what constitutes these tags as forms of literacy is that the gang members share the knowledge for how to construct and understand the important messages that they post.

Using a NLS framework, it is easy to see how the conception of illiteracy is false. Don Josephina and the gang members with whom Conquergood worked both hold a kind of literacy. While this literacy may not be considered valuable or even valid in the school setting, it counts as literacy in the context of these peoples’ lives. Further, since Don Josephina views her religious affiliation and activity as a means to salvation, and gang tags posted on walls can serve as a way to keep people safe and abreast of community violence, such forms of literacy are likely more valuable to these people, in the context of their respective lives, than the ability to read a textbook chapter and answer seven science questions.
Heath’s (1983) study of both working class whites and African Americans in the Piedmont region of North Carolina showed how children, though socialized into language very differently, still progress in their language learning at the same rate. In her study, white parents tended to approach children’s language learning from the notion that children need to be taught how to talk. In these communities, parents tended to first tell children the names of objects directly and specifically, then have children repeat the names of the object, and finally quiz children on the information. For example, a parent might point out a cat to her or his child, saying “cat” while pointing to the animal. Next, the parent would tell the child, “Say ‘cat.’” Finally, the parent might ask the child, while still pointing to the cat, “What’s that?” The idea that this approach is the best way for children to learn is much different than what Heath found in nearby African American homes where caregivers were inclined to believe that children simply pick up language and learn it by being in close and constant proximity to adults who are speaking. Children in these homes were not told names of objects for the implicit purpose of learning what they were right then and there. Instead, they learned from watching adults interact around language. While Heath’s study indicated that children still acquire language at the same rate regardless of how they are socialized into using it, different ways of using language, whether explicit or implicit, remain.

When this becomes problematic is when children are assessed according to one way of interacting around language and literacy when they have been socialized into another. In Heath’s study, white children who were used to a drill
and skill method of interacting with language, both printed and not, tended in early years to answer simple comprehension questions well. Later, as these students were required to predict alternate or future outcomes, however, they experienced trouble. Likewise, while the African American students were successful at predicting and speculating, they had trouble with direct drill and skill questioning and tended to answer with more story-like explanations rather than simple answers.

Richardson's work (2002), which draws on her own life experiences as a student who was socialized into African American Vernacular English (AAVE) as her primary discourse and attended predominantly white colleges. Her work couples this with her academic study of Big Ten University basic writing classroom further illustrates how students who use and live AAVE the might experience composition classes. In this study, Richardson taught an African American rhetoric and composition course. She specifically designed the course as a way to find out if African American students' literacy might be improved if they were positioned within African American language and literacy traditions. According to her work, she based the study and the course on these assumptions:

- Form and content are inextricably bound
- Black Discourse is an Academic Discourse in constant flux, in negotiation with other discourses, including the dominant discourse
- Contrastive analysis of AAVE syntax and discourse against standardized syntax and discourse results in students' improved critical language facilities
- Increased historical and cultural self-consciousness and critical awareness can be realized in writing and discourse showing Black discourse features (p. 97)
Richardson, in her study, was able to identify aspects of written language that mimicked and were demonstrative of spoken AAVE. Using this as a framework from which to continue teaching the class, Richardson was able to teach composition with an African American centered focus. Students also reported that being taught composition from an AAVE base helped them to refine their focus, elaborate on their current writing, edit for content and organization, and further helped students develop writing style and voice. Interestingly, after collecting the essays of her students she found that many students, including speakers of AAVE, did not even recognize AAVE as anything besides broken or deficient English, which speaks to the overriding racism of many English classrooms. However, once students began to understand the rules and conventions of their own discourse, understanding traditional academic frames was also easier. With this approach, students found that they were more able to write for particular audiences. By historically discounting students’ use of AAVE, and assessing them according to literacy frames which are different than those into which they have been socialized, African American students have been repeatedly disadvantaged in literacy spaces.

Moje, Willes, and Fassio (2001) note in their research that the way that when seventh grade students are allowed to negotiate not only what they will be doing (i.e. what they will be writing about, the value of personal experiences, and the minimal value of grammar) they are more willing to write in class. Additionally, these researchers looked at the writings that these students did outside of school. Although the negotiation process was helpful in beginning to
engage students in the writing practices of school, their out-of-school writings were often different in content and form from the writings done in schools. This study suggests that students understand that traditionally, only particular kinds of writings are sanctioned and valued by schools.

All of these studies highlight how language and the social interactions that occur around language create and react to distinct kinds of literacy practices. Some of these literacy practices are based within the context of homes and others are housed with the context of schools. These terms do not refer to the geographic spaces that literacy practices are performed in, but rather where these literacy practices have been acquired and supported. When viewed as a social interaction, even the way that these literacy activities are viewed and conducted can be quite different for people who use language differently. For example, in schools reading is most often framed as an individual event. Students are required to read aloud, one at a time, while the rest of the class is expected to listen attentively even when students may really be reading ahead to make sure they don’t make any mistakes when their turn comes (Bloome, 1985). This is much different from a social interaction that assumes reading is a shared event, where opinions, affirmations, and disagreements are shared freely and not viewed as interruptions. Further, the requirement to sit alone and read quietly to oneself can be viewed as something done only by a student who is incapable of interacting socially (Heath, 1983; Morgan, 2002).

Most research into literacy is based on school literacy practices (Bloome, 2001; Kelly, 2001; Shultz, 2002). Recently, however, a small body of research
has been published that focuses on ways that educators are aware of these differences in literacy practices and are attempting bridge home and school literacy practices. The work of Shultz (2002) with students in an urban school situated between an African American and a Latino neighborhood provides an example of the way that an NLS perspective provides “an opportunity to re-imagine education both within and beyond the school walls” (p. 356). In this study, Shultz acknowledged that school, in spite of its high value in wider society, provides only a fraction of the learning that students obtain. In the time that she spent with these students, both in school and out of school, they shared with her the literacy events they participated in within both types of spaces. One of the students in her study, Denise, was labeled “at risk” because of her reluctance to write in school. However, on her own time, Denise was a playwright. In her play, which was begun as a literacy event performed out of school on her own, the writing was not about a previous reading of a school text or lesson. Rather, the focus of her writing was her life outside of school. In short, Denise’s history and her way of knowing was the central focus of this play. When allowed to negotiate how and what she would write, as well as how she would use language to talk about her work, Denise engaged more fully in writing in school. This negotiation was important in helping Denise to be successful in her school literacy practices as well as her home literacy practices. Similarly, Finders (1997) looked at the literate lives of young girls, concentrating particularly on the disparity between their rich literate under lives (that is, their literacy practices that were outside of school and not sanctioned by school) and their school literacy practices. What is
of particular interest to scholars who deal with multiple kinds of literacies is the way that rich use of literacy skills outside of school is often not indicative of high academic literacy performance particularly in schools that are under resourced and where the students come from economically fragile homes.

In efforts to bridge this gap between effective use of literacy outside of school and poor performance in the classroom, scholars have began to examine the ways that popular culture and multiple forms of media might be integrated into literacy lessons. Morrell’s (Morrell, 2002, 2003; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002) work within a critical literacy framework dealing with popular culture and media studies as literacy is particularly helpful in looking at how rap music - seen as a voice of resistance in urban communities of color - and popular film are helpful tools in teaching canonized literature and poetry. Morrell’s work has been significant not only in teaching critical literacies, but also in the way that text is reconceptualized. His work conceptualizes music and film not only as tools to teach canonized literature in a critical way, but also as forms of text themselves. This use of multiple medias and notions of what constitutes text in classroom spaces is central to the shift toward multimodal composition as a legitimized, school sanctioned form of writing for which this present research project is arguing.

**Technology, Composition, and Multimodality**

Thinking about technology and the composition process is not new. For example, Daniels (2004) research into a fifth grade classroom looked at how students' motivation to write changed when computers were involved in the
process. In Daniels’s study, not only were students given access to computers as a means to produce written text, but teachers, too, were given extra training in how to use these technologies. While the texts produced were longer and of a higher quality, the students’ motivation (particularly time spent working on compositions without complaining) to compose written texts seemed to stem not only from opportunities to use computers (each student had access to their own computer) but also from teacher participation and knowledge. However, on the whole, teachers responsible for teaching literacy skills have been reluctant to use technology in their classroom remaining committed to pens and paper, even if such work eventually just gets typed for easier reading, as well as to the books with which they are familiar (Selfe, 1999; Williams, 2007). Technology remains a subject removed from literacy, something that remains a mystery to teachers of literacy instead of something seen as a new way to use literacy practices (Selfe, 1999). However, considering that literacy instruction is rooted in the facilitation of the decoding of texts, it would seem natural that teachers of writing and reading would gravitate toward incorporating multimodal composition instruction into their curriculums (Takayoshi, Hawisher, and Selfe, 2007).

Technology as a Tool to Aid Traditional Composition

Notions of what technology can do for literacy instruction have been the focus of some work in literacy studies. This notion of how multimodal, digital and computer based literacy enhance the literacy event is markedly differently than research which acknowledges multimodal and digital media as further, albeit nontraditional forms of literacy and actually studying those kinds of literacy
events. The *Las Redes* site through the University of California has been serving as a space to delve into how technology in an after school program has created a third space for language and literacy learning (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Turner, 1997; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, Alvarez, & Chiu, 1999; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Alvarez, 2001). Third space as conceptualized in situations is “a place where two *scripts* or normative patterns of interaction intersect, creating the potential for authentic interaction and learning to learning occur” (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Turner, 1997, p. 372). Their study focuses on the social interactions around multimedia technologies such as e-mail, digital composition and gaming. These technologies create spaces where linguistic differences around the privileging of Standard English and literacies are less and therefore the opportunities for literacy learning and social interactions around literacy learning are increased. Related is the similar work done by students and The Wizard (a fictitious non gendered entity that corresponds with students via email) in their computer club time at Fifth Dimension (part of the same larger project that *Las Redes* is a part of). During this computer club time, reading and writing practices were documented. Again, computer technology created a space where children could engage in a social way around more traditional literacy practices in a way that was different from the ways they did literacy in school.

Beyond creating a space for different ways of being social and learning around text, computer literacy research has looked at the ways that students are engaged more fully when technology is included in the process composition. For
example, the STRUGGLE site (site of research being discussed above) is a literacy initiative at an active community center that utilizes “strategy based, technologically attuned literacy instruction.” At STRUGGLE, writers work in pairs with multimedia computer prompts that create an alternative way to approach writing. Further, efforts to expand the use of technology into digital montages and movies are supported in this literacy initiative in a way that it is not often done in traditional literacy instruction. In this instance, the way the people interact around the technology as well as how they use it collaboratively points to the ways that technology allows writers to support personal narratives and identity work in literacy events. Similarly, Fránquiz’s work (2001) in youth community centers looked at how visual medias were used not only to do community work of an activist nature, but also how “culturally relevant literacy projects influence or constrain the emergence, construction, and reconstruction of students’ social and academic identities” (p. 215). Her work extended past technology opening a space for new literacy work and begins to look into the ways that it allows for students to do literacy work they care about in ways that serve a purpose for creating changes in communities.

The research discussed above has been part of efforts to create more equitable spaces where language and ways of being around language, including literacy, that are marginalized in traditional school settings are valued. It is significant to note that much of the research about technology in education speaks to the way that it can be used as a tool in regards to composition; how can it help foster engagement, how can it create a better learning space, and so
on. Further, much of the research with young children and adolescents, particularly where digital media is concerned, is located in non-traditional learning spaces (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López and Turner, 1997; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, Alvarez, & Chiu, 1999; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Alvarez, 2001). These two things speak volumes about the way that technology is viewed in academic spaces. In traditional school settings, the work that is done around digital media is not viewed as legitimized composition, in large part because of the dominance of traditional printed, texts and resistance to other forms as legitimate text. An NLS approach to literacy in use supports the deconstruction of what writing and words are [or what counts as writing and words] in a particular context. From this perspective, it becomes clearer and Wysocki (2005) compares literacy to water as an example of a familiar material that we use in different ways for different purposes. Her analogy argues:

“If our particular uses of water as a weapon-or soup, swimming place, trash receptacle (as the lake on which we live was used in the nineteenth century), energy generator, scarce natural resource-cannot be separated from the relations that hold many people in particular places and times, then how can we believe that whatever we put on paper or the different screens we use-or the paper or screen itself-can be separated? If how we conceive of water is inseparable from place and time, how can our communication materials, for which we can make no similar claim to naturalness as we can with water, be otherwise?” (p. 56)

Wysocki (2005) makes the case that the ways we build even traditional compositions, such as spacing the lines and arranging words on the page, is social and historical. Deconstructing the ways that text is created, what it is created with, and how it is used to be effective communication allows for the ways that images, that which is not a word on a page, can also be used and
created for effective communications in ways that words alone cannot. It further allows for a space to begin examining how traditional texts and digital media can be used to create compositions that are not only legitimized by the makers, the viewers, or the researchers who study them, but also by the school building and classroom teacher who might assign them.

**Multimodal Composition as Legitimate School Composition**

As much theorizing and research exists within the realm of college composition, there is little research in classroom multimodal work in research sites beyond higher education. In this way, it seems that multimodal composition is being used as a gate keeping tool, a secret bit of knowledge reserved for those in higher education or those with the resources to obtain and learn how to use technology on their own. Only recently, have efforts been made to create spaces where multimodal and digital composition exists within the classroom as legitimate composition within the curriculum. Kist’s (2005) work did just this, looking for classrooms where multimodality was a part of, if not all of, the curriculum in public school classrooms. His study addressed the ways that teachers were thinking of literacy beyond words on a page, extending beyond digital media to art and image as forms of language used to transmit messages on a daily basis. This kind of research conceptualizes technology and multimodality as not something to help or enhance literacy, but rather as different forms of literacy that need attention and instruction in the classroom. In short, the classrooms in Kist’s study focused on multimodality as composition legitimized as such by inclusion in everyday school curriculum, an approach
which is vastly different than looking at the ways that multimodality, media, and technology can be used to enhance learning or foster traditional written words-on-page text. The students in Kist’s study were all aware of how their multimodal classes were different that the classes they had experienced previously. The students in this present study were asked to make the same kinds of choices about considerations like focus, voice, audience, and editing in their projects that students are asked to make when creating traditional writing for the classroom.

Nevertheless, although the processes of composing and editing both texts that rely only on word choice and those that rely on word, image, and sound are very similar, they are at the same time different because of the increased complexity of endlessly available choices. Self, Fleischer, and Wright (2007) acknowledge the similarities and differences between traditional composition and multimedia composition in the classroom. While at first glance the shift from solely written text to texts that include visual (whether still or moving) and audio (whether musical or spoken) seems to be clear, as it is possible to think of them as similar in terms of organization, documentation, assessment (Borton & Huot, 2007), revision (Alexander, 2007), and gathering of materials. However, adding these other media into the composition mix adds a whole new set of instructional issues that need to be addressed in the classroom, such as how the topic lends itself to the multimodal resources available, who knows how to use the technology, what material resources are available, whether or not the teacher or the students need to know a new vocabulary (i.e., “download this software” replaces “take out your pencils and a sheet of paper”), and whether the students
have had any direct instruction in multimodal technology (despite living in rich media environments)?

With all of the new issues to address in teaching multimodal composition in the classroom, the tendency may be to forgo attempts to address each issue one by one, but to rather create some kind of template for how multimodal composition is to be done. Much like has been done with many other new ideas in education, the tendency, for students and teachers, is to standardize multimodal composition and therefore limit the choices students have (Sullivan, 2001). However, Hess (2007) argues that leaving assignments and requirements open-ended leads to students expanding what they know and encourages students to think in new ways. Because it is likely that either students or teachers hold limited knowledge into technology and multimodal composition, it is also important to keep in mind that this kind of work is still experimental in nature (Branscum & Toscano, 2007). In short, teachers using multimodal composition can value creativity by allowing students to take risks and try new ways of using technology and composition while relying on the members of the class to help solve the problems that are bound to arise (Branscum & Toscano, 2007; Church & Powell, 2007).

The key, then, in multimodal composition is to set forth enough guidelines to structure and outline very clearly what it is that the students are to learn (what it is they are going to communicate to their audience) so that they are not overwhelmed by the endless choices of ways they can communicate their message and the endless messages they might have to share with their
audience. By also limiting the choices of modalities students are not overwhelmed and again the practice of learning and writing is a simple building process. This is particularly useful for classrooms that are under resourced technologically or for teachers who have limited knowledge. Invaluable as well in the planning and implementing multimodal composition in the classroom, is the significance of collaboration in multimedia composition (Alexander, 2007; Hess, 2007; Pedersen & Skinner, 2007). This is particularly important as technology, though it keeps people connected in some ways, it also allows for further individuation as students sit at computers and interact with the screen rather than one another.

Finally, collaboration has been central to all of the research reviewed here about technology in composition. Collaboration was also a difference that students clearly recognized and appreciated in Kist’s (2005) study. Not only does the collaboration process aid in stretching limited classroom technological resources, but it also allows for students and teachers to pool their intellectual resources and technological skills, and further allows for increased support of individual efforts (Pedersen & Skinner, 2007). Griffin (2007) argues for collaboration not only between students, but also between colleagues who are “blazing the trail” (p. 154) of multimodal composition in the classroom.

Repeatedly, this notion of the critical importance of collaboration being built into multimodal instruction shows up in the research. In multimodal composition, collaboration is integrated into the curriculum for many of the same reasons that it may be integrated into more traditional composition work, for
example to increase learning opportunities, time management, and student engagement. However, students and teachers (both within the same classroom spaces and in far away spaces - such is the nature of technology) can offer support and shared knowledge of process, information, skill, and history. This is of particular importance if embracing the experimental nature of multimodal composition as a part of the curriculum and allows for a teacher to teach content of the subject, rather than the teaching the technical skills one needs to use the computer and the programs associated with multimodal composition (Cooper, 2007).

According to Selfe (2001), introducing new multimodal and digital literacies and composition does not mean making a shift from traditional writing and reading to only visual and auditory rhetoric. Rather, it should be seen as a new frontier on an old horizon; an expansion of new territory from where we are now. It is not a literacy that piles up on top of old ones like books accumulate. Rather, it is like a new chapter in a book, and it is important to note that the previous chapters are part of the existing story. As my own research in this dissertation begins to build upon the existing research, creating a new chapter in what we know about literacy, digital media, and multimodal composition, the goal is to look at how we might better and further facilitate its teaching among adolescents in under resourced spaces. Further, it is important to look at how these spaces are changed and created and the way that students act and react together and against one another with their teacher in these spaces and change the spaces that are created through multimodal composition.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

About the study

This study grew out of a larger study conducted by a research team of three people at three different schools. Each team member was to conduct ethnographic research in a language arts classroom. One of the classrooms was in an expensive private, suburban middle school, while the other two were located in public high schools. One of these high school sites was located in an affluent suburban district. My research site, on the other hand, was directly in the center of the city in a public charter school. The research team was committed to looking at multimodality as a legitimate form of composition; ways to cross the digital divide that exists between middle/upper-middle class schools and economically fragile urban schools; and the ways students think about community and their own agency within these communities.

The classroom teachers and researchers at each site approached their research differently. I knew Rebecca, or Mama R, as she was known in her classroom, (and prefers to be referred to in this document) from a previous class we had taken together. Because of this collegial connection, we approached this project together as a team. Like the other sets of research teams, we conceptualized three units over three different quarters of the academic year.
Because we knew that we would be working with the same class throughout the year, hence the same core group of students, we decided that having the students work on the same project over all three quarters might prove beneficial. Our thinking behind this was that students would be able to not only perfect their projects through editing processes, but that they would also be able to revisit and refine their notions of community by spending this amount of time on them. Further, the class readings that occupied the rest of the students’ time each quarter centered on community. This study focuses on the work the class did during the school year with particular attention to their work around and leading up to their final multimodal projects.

Students were able to work on these multimodal projects for only a few weeks out of every nine week quarter, the last week of which was always dedicated to final exams, since Mama R still had to fulfill her state- mandated requirements during each quarter. Knowing, however, that our work with multimodality would focus on community, Mama R chose literary texts as materials for teaching the state-mandated curriculum that would give us examples of communities to read about and discuss as a class. These texts were not meant to serve as ways to define problematic or model communities that students would compare their communities against, but instead were intended to help the students begin to think about community as more than geographic space. During the first nine week quarter, the class read Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible* (1953) a play set during the time of the Salem Witch trials in the Massachusetts colony. Because of the distant historical and religious
context, it was a good text for the students to begin identifying attributes of a community they identified as far removed from their own. This text served as the foundation for class discussions of their own communities as we transitioned from talking about the Salem community to the people and places they interacted with everyday. The class began to generate lists of communities to which they belong, and the characteristics of community. There were not limitations on whether they considered community in general or specific communities of which they were a part. Composition of the first multimodal project began after reading *The Crucible* as a class.

I began this part of the study by reading aloud a poem that I had written in the class that Mama R and I had taken together. It was a poem that was divided into two parts: one described a friend I had when I was a teenager from my perspective; the other part described him in terms of how other members of society might have viewed him. We talked as a class about the importance of telling our own stories. Both Mama R and I made it very clear that we were interested in their insights into their communities rather than sanitized text book representations. As a way to explain to the students what a multimodal composition might look like, I showed the class a Photo Story (a computer program that allows the user to combine photos, music and text to be used in a slide show presentation with various options for presentation) presentation that I had made describing my friendship community. This presentation was intentionally loose and unorganized. It was a random selection of friends of mine set to one of my favorite songs as a teenager. I then asked the students to
critique my work. They were more than happy to do so. They discussed my lack of organization, how my choice of music didn’t really mean anything or relate to the rest of the Photo Story, and gave suggestions for how I might improve on my composition.

The next day, Mama R showed a Photo Story project to the class that was much more organized than my own. Her project was a linear story of her life with a particular friend of hers. Her composition described how the two women had formed their own friendship community. When presenting this project to her students, she didn’t initially concentrate on what the story was that she was telling, or how she organized it, or what her intended audience was. Rather, she used this opportunity to share with the class the features available on Photo Story and how to put together a Photo Story project of their own. Further, she discussed with the students why they might want to utilize some of these features for emphasis, voice, and focus. The students were then allowed five (approximately) 45 minute class periods to work on their projects. The goal for this unit was for students to think about their communities and begin to define them using multimodal composition tools/practices. These first compositions were treated as rough drafts or even outlines of a possible future project, with the idea that the next quarter we would return to these projects and learn how to edit and restructure them, much like traditional writing classrooms would do with a written composition.

The second quarter of the project was winter quarter at Hank Aaron High School. Winter quarter proved to be problematic with state-mandated testing and
five snow days that both cancelled classes. Despite schedule changes and unexpected days off, the class still read Zora Neal Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1990) in preparation for our upcoming multimodal work. Similar to *The Crucible*, this text provided the class with a community that was distant in its historical time (though closer than *The Crucible*) and varied in its geographic locations though the settings were rural as they compared with the city the students live in. Hurston’s novel begins with the main character, Janie, returning to her home after being away for a time. She tells her life story to her friend as a way to explain her recent absence in the town. Important to the students’ multimodal compositions about their own communities, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* provided us with an example of a character telling her own story. In class we discussed how this same story might have looked if someone else told it, including, perhaps, the absence important details even if the teller did not have malicious intent in such a retelling. Another central feature of this text that related to the students’ upcoming multimodal projects was the way that Janie discussed her time in several different geographic and social communities. After reading *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, we spent several class periods talking about the various communities in which Janie had lived. Further, we discussed how these communities were different, not only in location but also how Janie’s way of being was different in each one. Teachers and students again discussed how the stories looked (or may have looked) different depending on who was telling them. In addition to reading the book, the class also watched the film and
discussed how editing of particular events, even when necessary for time, changed the story being told.

Mama R and I used these discussions as a way for students to begin thinking about what they wanted their audience to see. It was also during this time that we began to think about who our audience for these projects might be beyond other members of the class. Explicit discussions about audience were something neither Mama R nor I had planned in our early conceptions of the multimodal units. However, earlier in the second quarter of study, the class had gone on a field trip to see the film *The Freedom Writers* with the rest of the eleventh grade. The students enjoyed the movie, even asking if we could read that book next. Because of their interest in the book, I began to explore the possibility of the class publishing their work. As the compositions were multimodal in nature, a book seemed inappropriate. However, a public, formal presentation at my university seemed possible. I asked the class about their interest in doing this, and their response was a resounding “Yes!” With these arrangements in place, we now had an audience for whom to compose. The presentations would be made during the third quarter, after the final multimodal projects were completed. The audience, we decided, would be made up of faculty and doctoral students at the university as well as invited friends, family, and Hank Aaron staff members. Thus, the goal of this second quarter, was to think about what community they wanted to represent and what it was that they wanted to say about this community. We asked that they limit their work to just one community for the sake of time. If the first unit was to prepare an outline or
web, the goal of this subsequent unit was to prepare a solid rough draft that students would be able to edit the final quarter into a finished text for publication (presentation).

The third quarter was structured differently than the previous two. For example, there was no foundational or communal text this quarter. Rather, students spent their final nine weeks working on more formal writing than the informal journal writings they had done in the earlier part of the school year. Considering our conception of these projects as multimodal compositions (legitimate school compositions that use a somewhat different medium than only words on paper) our third phase of the research project fit nicely into the curriculum. For this reason, rather than having the multimodal composition project fall at the end of this quarter as it had with the previous two assignments, the final movie maker projects were done in the middle of the quarter after the students completed their first lengthy printed text writing assignment. The students began the quarter by completing a personal narrative. The topic was open; students simply had to tell a descriptive, personal story from their own perspective. This writing assignment served as a springboard for students to begin thinking about how they might revise their previous compositions so that they, told a story for an outside audience. As the class finished the final phase of the project, thinking about the audience for which we were writing was of the utmost importance. Presenting our work in this type of public space would be vastly different than sharing our work with other Hank Aarons whom all the students know fairly well. In regards to writing for a particular audience and
thinking about the stories that the students wanted to tell, we further thought
about topic, voice, impact, and focus. This quarter yielded the richest work by
students and the highest number of projects, (because in all three quarters not all
of the students completed their projects). This quarter yielded eight finished
projects for the quarter as opposed to six for the previous two quarters combined.

Data Collection

This study used ethnographic methods of data collection. Ethnographic methods
are based on more traditional ethnography. The “hallmark of cultural
anthropology” (Spradley, 1981, p. 3), ethnographic field work is when the
researcher “goes to where people live and ‘does field work’” (p. 3). The goal of
ethnography is to describe what happens in a culture by learning from those who
live within it. This study differs from traditional studies that go to a foreign land in
that the research site is in a school in my own hometown. This place is not
foreign in the traditional sense of the word. Nevertheless, what remains the
same is that the researcher goes to a place to learn from other people in their
environments. This research used ethnographic methods, rather than traditional
ethnography, as a means to do re-search. This process looked at something
previously familiar in a new way in an attempt to view it differently. This means
not only someone who has previously been a student and a teacher re-searching
school environments and writing, but also re-searching the data to continually
rethink previous analysis and previous data. The methods described in this
study are primarily borrowed from those used in ethnographic studies, including
long term, systematic, and multi-step data collection and analysis for the purpose of identifying patterns in behavior. A clear distinction must be made, however, between ethnography and a microethnographic study. Traditional ethnographies are thought to be representative of entire cultures (Green & Wallat, 1981). This research did not attempt to study how all students view community or even how all students use multimodal composition to talk about their own communities. Rather, the researcher is looking at how one particular group of students think about and define their communities in relationship to other surrounding communities and how this group uses multimodal composition to discuss this. Microethnography can be thought of as studying “part of a whole” (Green & Wallat, 1981, p. xii). The part and the whole can be defined in many ways: a school is part of the public school system, a class is a part of school, the students who choose to actively participate in the study are a part of the class, and so on. What is central to the idea of microethnography and what should be clearly represented in a microethnographic study is the way that the part and the whole exist together. For this reason, although the whole is not the sole object of study, it is not possible to look at the part without some knowledge of the whole. Further, it is impossible to talk about the part without at the same time also talking about the whole as one would not exist without the other. It is also key to note that while this study used a variety of participant observations and was dependent on the researcher’s observations along with the observations of the other participants for member check purposes, it was not an
observational study (Green & Wallat, 1981). That is to say, there was not a specific set of behaviors that I was looking for as a means to fix or improve a particular method of instruction or curricula in the education of all or a particular group of students. It is possible that during this time, some teaching strategies or curricula or behaviors may begin to reoccur, forming the kind of patterns that ethnographers are interested in finding as effective. However, I was not looking for these kinds of behaviors in the way that a researcher doing an observational study would be. Rather, I was attempting to gain insight into students’ conceptions of community and how they went about their multimodal work.

Design

This research followed Spradley’s (1980) Developmental Research Sequence for participant observation. This is largely because of my intention to work from as close to an emic, (or insider) perspective as possible. The research followed a design model that follows five steps: Grand Tour, Observe Key and/or Recurrent Events, Data Collection and Data Analysis, and Member Checks. The following diagram shows the progression of steps in this method of data analysis. The only deviation from this design within this present study is that I began data analysis as I was collecting data, going back and forth between the two in order to explore findings more thoroughly. Further, I did not pursue a research design that was a series of steps to be completed in order, like a checklist. Rather, I used post hoc analysis. I analyzed the data, talked with the participants, looked at my analysis in relation to previous analysis and often found I was wrong. This
led me to return to previous work (sometimes going back to data that was already analyzed and ‘finished’) rethink and reanalyze it in different ways.
Figure 3.1: Schematic for Research Design

- Grand Tour Observations
- Observe Key and/or Recurring Events
- Data Collection/Data Analysis
- Member Checks
Grand Tour Observations: Before beginning the grand tour component of this study, I spent six weeks visiting in the 11th-grade class that would be participating in this study with me. Although I had arranged access to this site with the classroom teacher, school, and district, I had not yet met the students. Therefore, I would visit the class twice a week, sitting in the back during class time, talking with the teacher or the students when they came into and left the room if they wanted to talk with me. I didn’t approach them or engage in conversation with them unless they prompted me to do so. During this time I wasn’t taking any field notes and I hadn’t given out any consent forms to the students. After several weeks of this, Mama R told the students that Friday I would be doing something special with the class while she was out for the day. While she was out, I spent 45 minutes telling the class about my own history and identity and how that had shaped the research that I hoped to do with them. My thinking behind this was that it was only fair to share with them since I was hoping they would share their time and work with me. After opening up the floor for questions, I explained what it was that we would be doing as a class and that I hoped we could do this project together. I then handed out consent/assent forms.

During this discussion, I talked with the students about who I was and why I hoped to do particular work in their school around community. I told them that I hated it when I was “communitied” by others, either in a seemingly positive or negative light. Although the term “communitied” was something that I just threw out as a spur of the moment way of talking, it was a notion that the class seemed
very aware of. Specifically, we talked about what made me uncomfortable with the use of the word *urban* and deciding who did and did not fit into that label. I decided that I would not use urban to describe my research site nor my areas of research interest. Instead of imposing these labels, I opted to have the students “community” themselves, as a verb, using the research as a way to guide the study. After this informal discussion with the students, I gave them assent and parental consent forms to take home so I could collect the signed copies the next week. At this time, I began official grand tour observations, making note of key and recurrent events.

*Observe Key and/or Recurring Events:* This process ran through the entire data collection process, since the longer I was in the class the more I began to notice subtle nuances beyond the typical daily activities. I watched and videotaped the class. I recorded my field notes in a journal that I kept, making note of how the students interacted with each other, how the teacher interacted with the students as they walked into class, how she brought to their attention that she intended to begin class, and how I was feeling about whatever was going on in the classroom. I became aware of the work they did; what work looked like in that classroom; what was important to the daily proceedings of the class; and how students were able to interact, give opinions, and instigate class discussions freely. In finding key events to focus on, I began to see that a standard grand tour of that particular classroom was not enough. While I was looking for key observations and recurrent observations, I noticed that the students talked again and again about their experiences as members of the whole school and how their
experiences as students were wrapped up in their involvement in the school. From what I was hearing in class discussions, in order to gain a more emic perspective I had to understand this class as a part of the whole of this unique school. This realization was interesting to me and caused me to conduct another grand tour observation involving the entire school rather than just the classroom where I had been spending the bulk of my time. This decision will be discussed more in the Data Analysis section.

Data Collection: According to Spradley (1980), “An ethnographic record consists of field notes, tape recordings, pictures, artifacts, and anything else that documents the social situation” (p. 63). For this reason, observations, field notes and student work collected during the grand tour and focused observations are all part of the Data Collection for this research. I spent a total of 29 days in the classroom beyond the 12 visits that were not an official part of the research. Additionally, I spent time with the students of the school outside of research days. I attended a field trip to see a movie with the class, the school talent show, step team performances, and sporting events including wrestling and boys and girls basketball. These were not official research times and I did not record field notes or tape any of these activities. However, my involvement in the community during these times did change. It was during these times that I became a member of sorts of the school community. Through these activities, I got to know some parents, other staff members, and students in a way that was outside of class time. To have used this time as field work would have changed my involvement in the particular school activity. Rather than being viewed as a
member of the school community who cared about the things the students were doing, I would likely have been viewed still as only a researcher with a job to do. This would have made the relationships I formed seem to have an agenda. This new role I had transferred to my time in the class and gave me a more of an emic perspective as I began to see myself and be seen by others as a fan and member of the school community as I became recognizable and welcomed at these events.

The corpus of data of this research consists of:

- 35 student journals about communities
- 8 final multimodal projects about community
- 45 entries of fields notes, one from each official research visit day
- 32 video tapes of class sessions
- 1 audio recording of an interview with the teacher
- 1 video recording of an interview with the teacher
- 1 audio recording of an interview with a group of 3 students
- 2 video recordings of interviews with a group of 4 students
- 8 video recordings of interviews with students individually about their projects
  (students who turned in projects as a group, interviewed as a group)
- 11 entries from a journal kept by the teacher

Field notes: During classroom observations of the multimodal lessons, I took field notes. During classes where I was involved in classroom discussions or teaching lessons, I wrote field notes after the class session in narrative form.
Most of my notes are of this nature, as I did much of the teaching of the multimodal lessons. These field note entries were used, in part, to help contextualize the audio and video recordings of class sessions. However, they were also used as a separate source of data. Field notes were coded for the following: instances of discussion of communities of any sort, displays of community membership or exclusion, and evidence of community in the classroom. This coding highlighted anything that seemed related to community processes so that I might revisit them at a later time, and allowed me to be able to identify patterns from which to begin further observations in order to analyze the classroom. Further, as I was responsible for teaching many of these lessons, I recorded how the multimodal composition process felt as a teacher to gain later insight into how these kinds of compositions might be used and performed in classrooms in the future.

Student work:

Finalized copies of student multimodal compositions were collected and saved. I recognized that each multimodal composition was made up of three kinds of texts (written, photographic, and musical) that were juxtaposed next to and on top of one another. I began by analyzing the written texts of their projects. To do this I went through each project individually and pulled out the text, paraphrasing it so that the work might be shorter and easier to manage in chart form. From that, I was able to create short paragraphs for each student’s project. Some of the students’ paragraphs are very short as they did not utilize a great deal of written text in their projects. Others, however, chose to include long
sections of text in their multimodal compositions. These texts were each reviewed for recurring ideas and then coded for functions and attributes of community. These written texts yielded the following categories: help, relationships, makes me who I am, history, and not romanticized. Photographic and musical texts were then reviewed as they appeared against the written text. The eight final student multimodal projects completed were saved to hard drives, external jump drives, and DVDs.

Class sessions: Classroom sessions, when the teacher was directly speaking with the class and when students were given time in class to work, were video recorded. These recordings were digitized and saved to a hard drive, with backup copies on DVDs. The researcher viewed these recordings outside of the research site and made note of when students were talking about community or when they were in the process of doing multimodal composition.

Interviews: Formal interviews were conducted individually with students and the classroom teacher both before and after the formal multimodal composition lessons about the work that they did on these projects. Focus group interviews were conducted with groups of students. The students requested that interviews be conducted in this format and were more comfortable this way. The teacher was present when I interviewed the students, and interviews were conducted in the classroom. However, teacher interviews consisted of only the teacher and myself and were conducted outside of school. The final interviews about the compositions were done with the researcher and the student who wrote the
composition. These interviews were video recorded and either transcribed, coded, or both. The interviews were coded for the following categories: how students talked about their work with multimodality, how their work changed over time, what story they wished to tell, the choices they made, how they felt about multimodal work compared to traditional composition, how multimodality changed the story that they wanted to tell or have told, and how their views of community have changed or not. These interviews were also used to conduct member checks regarding the analysis of student work and lessons on multimodality.

The following table explains how I used the data to answer my research questions:
Research Questions | Data Used
--- | ---
How do students define community? | • printed text journals  
• multimodal composition
How do students define their communities? | • printed text journals  
• multimodal composition
What are the attributes of these communities that are of importance to the students who maintain membership in those communities? | • printed text journals  
• multimodal composition  
• student interviews
How do students view the issues of involvement as members of multiple communities? What are the tensions and affordances that may be created by these multiple memberships? | • printed text journals  
• multimodal composition  
• student interviews
How do students view their community or communities in relation to other communities and in relation to other people? | • printed text journals  
• multimodal composition  
• student interviews
As students define and describe their communities to outsiders, they will be at the same time telling stories of their communities. How do students tell the stories of their communities? What aspects of their communities do students view as important to share with outsiders? | • printed text journals  
• multimodal composition  
• student interviews  
• class video recordings  
• field notes
Why do students choose their form(s) of technology to define and describe their communities? Do students choose particular modes of technology because it is one that they are familiar with, because of a desire to learn new technology, because they are allowed to do so for this particular presentation, because other members of the class are using them, because they view the assignment to require it, or for other reasons? | • student interviews  
• class video recordings  
• field notes
How does their chosen technology that describes and defines their community (as opposed to a traditional printed text composition) potentially change the stories that they are telling? | • printed text journals  
• multimodal composition  
• student interviews  
• class video recordings  
• field notes
What is the educational, social, and personal importance of students telling their stories and/or the stories of their community as they describe and define them? | • student interviews  
• class video recordings  
• field notes
How can defining their own community change the way that students view their own agency or power? | • student interviews  
• class video recordings  
• field notes
How can telling their stories and/or the stories of their community change or create a learning community within the classroom? | • printed text journals  
• multimodal composition  
• student interviews  
• class video recordings  
• field notes  
• teacher journal

Table 3.1 Uses of Data
Data Analysis

My first tool for analysis (and my initial intent) was microethnographic discourse analysis. As explained in Chapter 2, this research is framed by the contention that all social processes are linguistic events (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993, 2004; Fairclough, 2003). All of the interactions that I observed, recorded, and analyzed are social linguistic events. Key to the notion of language as a social event is the way in which it is dialogic. That is to say that people are constantly acting and reacting to one another, simultaneously (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993, 2004; Green & Wallat, 1981, Bloome et al., 2004). According to Bakhtin (1981), “In the actual life of speech, every concrete act of understanding is active….Understanding and response are dialectically merged and mutually condition each other; one is impossible without the other” (p. 282). Because of the centrality of language to social events, I argue that it is important to do ethnographic research from a discourse analysis perspective. In doing this, I am continuing my distinction outlined in Chapter 1 between doing discourse analysis and looking at the data from a discourse analysis perspective. This keeps the kinds of principals of discourse analysis discussed in Chapter 1 and incorporates them into the analysis and interpretation of data. Therefore, in this study, all observations, recordings, and collections of student work artifacts were gathered with the intention of looking at how the participants are acting and reacting to one another. Much of the evidence of interaction that I used was from interview data and student projects rather than classroom video. Although with
student work there is no evidence of action and reaction…it is however both an action and a reaction to *something*, whether it is a reaction to one’s personal history, the assignment given by the classroom teacher, or the availability or lack of resources as they relate to the assignment. Again, although these analyses of various texts are not in themselves discourse analysis, they are informed by a discourse analysis perspective.

This approach to research utilizes discourse analysis as not only a theoretical frame from which to collect data and think about the work done in classrooms, but also as tool for analysis. Keeping in mind that literacy is a social practice rather than a set of skills (Street, 1984) and that all social events are linguistic events, then all literacy events are also linguistic events with the intention of communicating some kind of message to some kind of audience. In fact, literacy cannot be separated from language (Gee, 2001). From this line of reasoning, written text is therefore a form of language and language is a form of text. Texts are a part of social life (Fairclough, 2003). Further, any text is another use of language. Using this theoretical frame, all data gathered can be viewed as text and all text as language. Therefore, all data can be analyzed through discourse analysis.
I used the framework in figure 3.1 for analysis. Interviews, and field notes were the primary data sources for Chapter 4. I analyzed the discourse of the content of these data. In analyzing multimodal compositions, I noted that there were three kinds of text in each composition: printed text, photographic text, and musical text. I then analyzed the musical text song by song, exploring the students’ choices for how they edited the songs and what lyrics they decided to
include. Where it was appropriate, I looked at the particular version of the song they included as it related to possible other recordings. For example, in cases where remixed versions of songs were included rather than originals I also consulted the original songs and thought about the differences between the two. I analyzed the musical text as a piece of text that stood alone. That is to say, I looked at the words that were used in the text for the messages that they seemed to be conveying at a surface level. However, as intertextual compositions, I also examined how the musical texts were juxtaposed against other music, in projects where more than one song was included, and against other written texts in the project. My aim was to see how these texts were used to expand, embellish, and explain the text of the written portion of the compositions. Finally, I looked at the photographic text of the compositions and how their juxtaposition against the written and musical texts supported the other writing that the students had done. After analyzing the three levels of the compositions, I sat down with my written analyses and formulated a series of interview questions unique to each composition while reading the compositions with the authors at another time. These interviews focused heavily on the writer’s choice of text, organization and editing. Further, after these interviews, I shared my findings with the authors and used this time to perform member checks to validate my data and my analysis. I looked on a macro level at the way the students were writing about community and then compared it to the way they were using multimodal composition to talk about community, paying particular attention to how they had utilized the extra modes for communication.
that multimodal compositions allows. As spring quarter was the culmination of their multimodal work, these are the projects I analyzed for this particular research, although I looked at all of their journal writings about community.

As is clear in my schematic for analysis, a framework of community became clear in the macro level analysis of the student projects. Then, I used that framework as a tool of analysis to analyze the student projects, interviews, and field notes to begin thinking about the process students used to create their compositions.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the components of the work the students were asked to do for each unit of multimodal composition (they did one in the fall, winter and spring quarter). There is then a broad analysis of the traditional (that is pen to paper) journal writing that the students did each quarter which is then examined across the school year. An analysis of the students’ early projects is done in a similar way. Finally, there is an in depth analysis of the final student projects.

How Students Used Traditional Journal Writing to Talk About Community

As described in chapter 3, the first multimodal project began after reading The Crucible (1953) as a class. Prior to beginning this assignment, students were asked to write a journal entry about community. They responded to the following journal prompt:

“Write an essay in which you define the idea of community and then give two or three reasons why you think community is important to your school. Be sure to explain the reasons for your choices.”

This essay writing was used by Mama R and myself to gauge what students thought about community and how they might begin to think about both
their school as a community and about communities within their school community. This writing assignment was also an opportunity for students to begin thinking in about their community in terms of more concrete, school-like definitions that they might share with an outside audience as a means of explanation rather than thinking about communities as they live in them daily. We (Mama R, myself, and the students) began our exploration by thinking about the school community because it was a community in which all the students in the class shared at least some membership. Further, this journal writing served as a foundation for a class discussion on community prior to officially beginning the multimodal projects.

In the classroom recording of this lesson where they begin to write (pen to paper) about community, one of the students asked for the dictionary definition of community after only a few minutes of independent work time. Mama R got out the class dictionary and read all of the definitions of community to the students. She then left the dictionary out and several students picked it up and read the definitions as a part of their work on this journal response. Therefore, while there was a common thread of community being about people that ran through all of the student journal responses, it is possible (but not necessarily so) that the Webster’s dictionaries in the class were responsible for this trend since the students read these definitions prior to writing their journals (not upon request of Mama R). In any event, each one of the journals mentioned people in their definition of community.
One of the dictionary definitions of community was, “a group of people living together as a smaller social unit within a larger one and having interests, work, etc. in common.” Several other students began by quoting this in one form or another, such as this example from Websters Dictionary (1896): “Community is a social group of any size whose members reside in a specific locality, share government, and often have a common cultural and historical heritage.”

It is possible that the students chose the first definition listed in the dictionary as the basis from which to write about community. For example, Angel and Azure (all student names are pseudonyms), students from the class, began their respective journals in these ways:

“Community is a social group of any size whose members reside in a specific locality, share government, and often have a common cultural and historical heritage. That is the dictionary definition of community. But I beg to differ....” (Angel, 11/06).

“I think the idea of community is important to my school, because community is a group of people having common interests; sharing, participation and fellowship.” (Azure, 11/06)

Writing about people, however, is in contrast to writing about community as being situated around a particular geographic area. This is worth mentioning, as the journal prompt specifically mentioned the physical, geographic bounds of the school, and because it would therefore have been easy for students to use spatial notions to define community because of this. What is important to this discussion is that, for whatever reason, it was the definition of community as a group of people that the students chose to focus on.
As I was highlighting “community is…” statements in students’ journal writing during my data analysis process, I became aware that students had written about activities that people who are members of a community *should* do as well as the things they actually *did*. While these are different kinds of statements, they still indicate that communities and their members serve a purpose and have a job. They also indicate possible functions of community. Because the notion of community being about groups of people was coming through so strongly in my analysis, I also began to highlight these “community does/should do…” kinds of statements in a different color from the color I used to code the “community is…” statements. Based on these student writings, it seemed as though a community, through the actions of its members, has a job to do. In a community, according to the students, the individuals have jobs to do. These collective workings of people create functions that a community does.

When members of a community do the things that they are supposed to do, the function of the community is to meet a need. The significance of writing about their notions of job of individuals and needs of individuals and communities is that it points to the way that the students view communities as more than a way to name the various groupings of people to which the Webster’s Dictionary refers. Rather, the individual efforts of community members focused in the same direction create the work that a community as a whole does. Myah, in her journal, describes it this way: “community is people working together to make a good life for family and friends” (11/06). Danita writes, “A community comes
together as one big family and makes choices for the community” (Danita, 11/06).

As the assignment was laid out, the students had been asked to write about the school community. Since the expectation of journal prompts in that class was that they were suggestions of what to write about rather than strict guidelines that were to be followed, it turned out not all students wrote about their school community. Some of the students, however, did attempt to keep their writing simply about the school community. One student gave specific examples of how parents helped the school community by volunteering at sporting events (Jason, 11/06). Other students were not clear in their journal writing whether they were writing about the school community, another community, several communities, or just the concept of community in general. Because of this, I cannot claim that their notions about community were about any specific communities. Instead, I looked for more general concepts about community that surfaced in my repeated readings of the journals. Whether the students were writing about school communities, family communities, or just communities in general, the notions of help and support were recurrent. Over and over again students mentioned in their journals that one key job of community (as well as the importance of community) is to help and support its other members.

Examples included:

“[communities] watch out for one another [and] help each other in a time of need” (Bill, 11/06)
“[communities] help each other out with any problems they need help with” (Antione, 11/06)
“[communities] help and tutor each other” (Student work Jason, 11/06)
Jamea extended this notion by writing that community “helps one another though the good and bad times” (Jamea, 11/06).

What constituted help and support, however, seemed to differ from student to student. According to Jason, support was more about physical jobs that need to be done on a volunteer basis. He wrote, “Community is important to our school for support….keeping our school safe and clean…fans and volunteers to run concession stands.” Several students mentioned keeping the environments people are in clean and safe.

For other students, however, help and support were more about the caring behind the actions. In thinking about her membership as a student at Hank Aaron High School, Tonya wrote:

…”coming to a community like Hank Aaron is the best thing that has happened to me. It has opened up a lot of doors and has helped me realize a lot of stuff about me that I need to change. I love this community for that…I feel very comfortable and protected when I’m here. (Tonya, 11/06)

Although different from Jason’s vision of volunteering for tasks, from this quote we can see that Tonya’s vision of community also involved notions of help as she talked about how the community opened doors for her, helped her realize things about herself, and made her feel protected.

Following the time line of the class work, the students wrote their first multimodal projects, and then wrote their second printed text journals. I include a brief discussion of their multimodal work, not for analysis purposes, but because their multimodal work might have influenced the what the students had to say
when they wrote their second printed text journals. In the fall, most of the students chose to write about multiple communities for their multimodal compositions. Several of the compositions could have been entitled, “My Communities,” in the plural, as they were structured to showcase several different communities important to each student. While this was not how we had envisioned the projects initially, both Mama R and I were comfortable with this and viewed it as the students beginning to think of themselves as parts of several different communities. As we prepared to begin the second phase of the project, however, we wanted students to focus on only one of their communities and begin to dissect it so that they might share this community with an outside audience. It was in looking towards the second multimodal composition project that we constructed the journal prompt for the winter:

Please choose ONE community represented in your Multimodal Movie Maker composition [from the fall] and name it here.
- What are the conditions for membership?
- What are some of the attributes of this community?
- What have you learned from being a member of this community?

These journals, though intended to have students delve deeper into the notions of community (something most students reported having not thought very much about previously, despite the community focus of Hank Aaron) yielded many of the same ideas and responses as their written journals from the fall quarter. Winter quarter, students began to move beyond text book and dictionary definitions of community as none of the students included dictionary definitions in
their writing. Instead of notions of community being more than groups of people who do things (such as keep places clean and help others) community in this round of writing seemed to be conceptualized by the students in terms of relationships between the members. For example, “To be considered a true Hank Aaron, in the community, you would need to be at the school for a while to have the kind of tight friendships everyone else has (Overton, 1/07). Jamea said that in a community people must have “balanced out friendship[s]” (Jamea, 1/07), and Azure wrote that an attribute of her community were friendship (Azure, 1/07). In these accounts, the jobs of community and the relationships between the people is represented in reciprocal. That is, relationships are built because of the things that members do for one another and, conversely, members help and support one another because of their relationships. You cannot separate at the two in order to see which comes first. They are dialogic in nature.

Winter quarter a new idea around community became clear through the students' writing: “communities making you what you are.” Jamea and Kelly, for example, each decided to write about their best friend community which consisted of the two of them and another girl. They said that part of what they had learned from being a part of that community was that, “without our friendship there is no us” (Jamea and Kelly, 1/07). This set of journals yielded two new ideas about community. First that the people involved in communities not only help and support one another, but also share a common history. Further, students also believed that communities create ways of being in the world and are responsible for attitudes or actions such as being happy with yourself or
being a strong Black man or woman. I included this in my analysis as a “community does…” statement and highlighted it as such. Following up on the notion of shared history, I returned to the fall journals and highlighted any evidence that fit into a “community has…” framework and highlighted it in another color. With the exception of one journal that directly quoted the dictionary none of the autumn journals mentioned the notion of shared history.

To better organize, compare, and view the reoccurring themes, I condensed the highlighted part into a single message unit and organized them into the reoccurring categories listed below. After doing this, I arranged the highlighted bits into the following schematic:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>History</th>
<th>Relationships</th>
<th>Help/Support</th>
<th>Community creates a way of being in the world</th>
<th>Acceptance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Need to be at the school for a while  
• Honor ancestors                   | • Have tight friendships             | • Work together to make each other whole as friends  
• Loving  
• Love one another  
• Without our friendship there is no us  
• Friendship | • Remaining yourself  
• Happy with yourself  
• Be a positive person  
• Being a good person  
• Being a strong black man/woman  
• Be honest  
• Be funny  
• Have laughter  
• Without our friendship there is no us | • Accepting others  
• Friends (her community) are real and don’t discriminate  
• Being yourself |

Table 4:1 Fall Journal Analysis

The final journal that the students were given was not before the final project, but rather after their final project was completed. I analyzed this set of journal entries by itself as it was intended to be a culmination of all the work the students had done for the year. It was our shortest prompt and yielded the shortest, most succinct answers. Again, no students asked for dictionaries to
complete this journal entry. The prompt was: *Given the work that we have done in class this year, what is your definition of community?* The final set of journal entries yielded the following categories after I highlighted the following kinds of statements: community is…, community does…, and community has: groups of people, helping and support, relationships, geographic space, that communities accomplish goals together. Despite our efforts to encourage (require) students to choose only one community to write about in the pre-unit journal prompt, once it came time for students to do their multimodal compositions, students didn’t choose one community to write about. Previously, students chose to group the people they wrote about into different and multiple categories, such as people at school, family and friends. In my initial analysis, I was not able to read their compositions and narrow the information down in order to find one community about which all the students wrote. Rather, in their compositions they labeled their sections, with descriptors such as friends and family but they did not give a name for the entire community. Thus, I was unable to tell if they were writing about one community with many parts, or many communities. In later discussions of their projects when I asked students about my interpretations, they reported to me that they did not want to leave out family and friends from their compositions and that they had, in fact, written about several communities. It was this fact that prompted me to ask the students if they had written about one community or many. Although the goal was for them to write about only one community, Mama R accepted these projects for winter quarter, assigning grades as normal, and overlooking the fact that they did not follow the assignment the
way that had been intended. However, for the final quarter Mama R insisted that they choose only one community; in spring quarter only projects that focused on singular communities would be accepted. More importantly, she announced that these would be the only projects that would be included in the university presentation. For some students, they limited their community presentations begrudgingly. For other students, such as Shanice and Mahogany, found creative ways to reconceptualize particular groups of people into a single community, which I will talk about at a greater length later,

In his journal writing, Bill suggested his definition of community was based in groups of people rather than spaces. He wrote, “My definition of community is the people that you are around and the people that you hang around with” (Bill, 01/07). Overton’s definition pointed to community as a group of people rather than a physical space by saying that it is, “The surrounding people who influence you….” (Overton, 01/07). Azure wrote not only about the importance of people, but also the notion of help and support when she wrote, “My definition of community is a group of people working together and helping each other out” (Student Work Azure, 1/07). She even gave an example of what that might look like by describing her class as a helping, supportive group of people. “Our class helped each other out by observing each other[s] projects, to see what we needed to correct. I think that is a community right there” (Azure, 1/07). Janessa used the principles of the Nguzo Saba (the school rules) to describe the notions of help and support in a community. She wrote, “These principles [the Nguzo
Saba] reflect what a community or village should be, which [is] a family, people helping each other, being there for one another, supportive….” (Janessa, 1/07).

After reducing the kind of statements from the students’ journals above to their message units, I organized them into the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People</th>
<th>Helping /Support</th>
<th>Relationships</th>
<th>Geographic Space</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• One family</td>
<td>• Supported by the care everyone receives</td>
<td>• Common interests</td>
<td>• The environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Group of people</td>
<td>• Able to help one another</td>
<td>• Filled with love and caring people</td>
<td>• A comfortable place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Work of a close group of people</td>
<td>• Help deal with problems</td>
<td>• Positive with each other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Surrounding people who influence you</td>
<td>• Help each other</td>
<td>• Family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>daily</td>
<td>• Comfortable with each other</td>
<td>• Being one</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Family</td>
<td>• People helping each other</td>
<td>• Be myself</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Group of people</td>
<td>• Supportive</td>
<td>• Big family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The people that are around</td>
<td>• Helping each other out</td>
<td>• Vibe around each other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The people you hang out with</td>
<td>• Help people out</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Big family</td>
<td>• Help one another</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2: Winter Journal Analysis
It is important to note that in the students’ final definitions of community their notions of help and support remain central. Three of the ten journals mention working together and five of the 10 mention help or support directly. They also focus heavily on notions of groups of people. All 10 journals directly mention groups of people in their definitions of community rather than geographic space. None of them mention geographic space or boundaries in their definitions. Further, the journals make note of the importance of the relationships between people. One journal mentions love, two more mention that the people in a community make you feel comfortable, and three report community as being like a family). Particularly remarkable about these final journals is the ways that the students framed their notions of help/support. While these themes appeared in the journals each quarter, the ideas were talked about somewhat differently from winter quarter to spring quarter. In fall quarter, the students framed help and support as something communities do almost autonomously and automatically without thought. It was as if the natural result of people being around one another in a community would be to create help and support. In this instance it seems as if help and support is given or created without regard to the receiver. This is evidenced in statements such as, “Community is when you have good neighbors that help” (Student workAngel, 11/06), or “[Hank Aaron] is a very close knitted people who helps one another” (Janessa, 11/06). However, most of the language used around help and support in the spring quarter framed it as reciprocated. That is, help and support are things that community members do for one another. D’Anthony reported that the people in a community, “Are
positive with each other, help each other out...." (D'Anthony,5/06). Aletha described the helping that occurs in her classroom as “hav[ing] teamwork stronger than any class I know. Helping everyone keep up on what must be done in class” (Aletha, 5/06). Such perspectives are distinctly different than a classroom where just one person, usually the teacher, is the one responsible for this kind of help.

Also significant to the spring community definitions was the overwhelming inclusion of the notion that in a community the people not only help and support one another in a dialogic way, but that they also do so for a purpose. This help and support from the community seems to be done to better the community, the environment it is in, or the people there.

How Students Use Multimodal Composition to Write About Their Communities

After analyzing all of the journals for evidence of what community does, has, and is, I next looked at the multimodal compositions. Originally, I was looking for the same kind of statements in the multimodal compositions. However, being a digital media, with not only written text but also photographs and music, the analysis had to proceed in a different way. Because the various kinds of text, which could serve textual purposes apart from one another, but here are juxtaposed intentionally on top of and next to one another to create an entirely new meaning, it is imperative to consider the projects texts as a whole and not simply other forms of media that contain a bit of text within them. In
other words, the movie maker compositions are intertextual literacy artifacts that cannot be fully understood as dissected units separate from one another. Instead, they should be understood as they are read - or, in more traditional terms, watched - intertextually. This approach is significant because the students deliberately juxtaposed several kinds of texts in one composition which was meant to be viewed in that way. In short, a multimodal composition is not meant to be dissected and thought about as three kinds of text. Rather, it is meant to be thought of as one text viewed at one time. However, as explained in my methodology chapter, for the purposes of data analysis I came to understand their compositions as containing the following different forms of text: music, photographs, and students’ own written text. In recognizing the compositions as intentionally intertextual works, it was important to realize that while they contained three kinds of texts, no one type could be understood outside of the other kinds of texts with which they were juxtaposed.

I began by analyzing the written texts of their projects. I did this not to separate texts that were intended by the authors to be viewed as a singular work at the same time (like a collage made with many different pictures), but rather as a place to begin analyzing their compositions. To do this I went through each project individually and pulled out the text, paraphrasing it so that the message units might be shorter. A full replication of the print form of text from Mahogany’s multimodal project looked like this:

“The love of my life is not....(series of pictures of material things and famous actors) The love of my life is Geri Toney (picture of person). My mother is
important to me because she cares about me. She has been there for me since day one. She also taught me right from wrong. Thanks to my mother she made me into the great and wonderful person that I am today. Even though we don’t agree on everything, I will always love and respect you no matter what! I am glad and proud to say that I am your daughter. I love you mom!

I used these full-version printed texts that the students’ used in their projects to highlight “community does…”, “community is…”, and “community should…” statements. I condensed these highlighted bits into more manageable message units so that they were more easily transferred into the same kind of graph that was used to analyze the journals. From that, I was able to create short paragraphs to represent each student’s project. Some of the students’ paragraphs are very short as they did not utilize a great deal of written text in their projects. Others, however, chose to include long sections of text in their movie maker compositions. For example, Mahogany’s project yielded the following message units: the love of my life, cares about me, been there since day one, helped me, taught me, made me into the person I am today, even though we don’t agree I will always love and respect you, and I love you. Using a series of message units for each of the projects, I sorted each message unit into a category as it related to notions of community, identifying three reoccurring categories: communities help members, communities are built on relationships, and communities are built on a shared history and finally community makes me who I am.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Help/Support</th>
<th>Relationships</th>
<th>Makes me who I am</th>
<th>History</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • been there since day one  
• helped me  
• taught me  
• we try our best to be role models for the children  
• who’s next to carry on the tradition at our school  
• we are committed to carrying on these academic and cultural traditions  
• My family is an inspiration, lessons and tough love paid off and made me who I am  
• but my friends have accepted me in and out  
• All these people have stuck with me  
• I would still do anything for them  
• We complete each other with our different personalities  
• taught me so much  
• taught me so much  
• set a good example  
• helped me, always there for me  
• helped me find who I am  
• being there for me  
• treating me like a sister  
• Many of my friends have helped me become who I am today | • the love of my life  
• cares about me  
• I will always love and respect you  
• I love you and am thankful for you  
• I love these people enough to call them my sisters. | • Made me into the person I am today  
• Without the people in this presentation, I would not be the person I am  
• My family is an inspiration, lessons and tough love paid off and made me who I am  
• without our friendship there is no Us  
• peers have influenced me the most  
• many things have made me a role model  
• Africentric instilled in me something my parents couldn’t, it gave me life experience to move on to bigger and better things  
• Africentric played a huge part in who obey davis is,  
• I am Hank Aaron.  
• Many of my friends have helped me become who I am today | • been there since day one  
• I will always love and respect you  
• who’s next to carry on the tradition at our school  
• we are committed to carrying on these academic and cultural traditions  
• Starting at a young age  
• future aspirations  
• retirement  
• they have moved  
• A-hi is where we met, (length of time girls been at the school)  
• My journey began 1995  
• has a complex history  
• some have been here since the beginning  
• its not often you can spend K-12 at a school  
• I have so many memories  
• so many memories  
• A-hi a school of dreams heritage and family  
• When I was younger I never knew the role my sisters would play in my life  
• Over the years we have grown into a family. |

Table 4.3: Printed Text Analysis
As discussed in the previous analysis of the students’ journal writings, one of the things that communities do is help and support the members. In their multimodal projects, this notion was again clear. However, in their multimodal compositions the students were more explicit about what that help looked like or what it meant to help someone (there are a number of reasons for this that I will discuss in chapter 5). For example, we saw in the previous analysis that help and support can come in the form of teaching, setting a good example, tough love, carrying on traditions, being good role models, sticking by one another, and being there for one another. In the multimodal compositions students explained what these forms might look like in practice. For example, in her multimodal composition, Mahogony didn’t merely say that her mother had been a teacher in her life, she gave a specific example, “She taught me right from wrong” (Mahogony, 5/07).

In their multimodal compositions, the students also made note of their own personal willingness to reciprocate in the helping process. They wrote things like, “I would do anything for these people” (Myah, 5/07), and, “We try to be good role models for the children” (DeAnthony, Bill, and DeYaun, 5/07). Another notion that was very strong in all of the spring quarter multimodal compositions was the notion of how communities make the students who they are. They used their written text portion of their compositions to say things such as, “My friends have helped me become who I am today” (Shanice, 5/07), and, “My family is an inspiration, lessons and tough love paid off and made me who I am” (Overton, date),” and also, “Hank Aaron played a huge part in who Overton B. Davis [is], I am Hank Aaron” (Overton, 5/07).
The musical texts proved more difficult to analyze on a macro level because each song has many lyrics and the exact meanings of these lyrics are open to interpretation. I do a more complete content analysis of the songs chosen by two students later in this chapter. To begin thinking about the musical texts, I began by watching the projects. Most of the songs, when analyzed through the lyrics, seemed to support the messages expressed through the other parts of their projects. For example, Mahogony chose “A Song for Mama” (1997) by Boyz II Men for her composition about her mother. In thinking about analyzing the lyrics as a text, I gathered all the lyrics. I only analyzed the lyrics that were included in the multimodal projects. I did not analyze the lyrics of the entire songs. I then highlighted the lyrics in the song that might have fit the “community is/does/should be…” framework I had constructed. Also included in this list of lyrics were lyrics about individual people since the songs were typically about people and the students had already written about the idea that community was about people. I then used the same type of schematic to organize these lyrics that I used for the other forms of text, looking for evidence of relationships, shared history, shared geographic space, help and support, groups of people, makes me who I am. I chose to highlight these notions as they were the ones that stood out in the journal writing and the written texts in the multimodal projects that I had already examined. The chart with the sorted lyrics is included below. Because song lyrics are very repetitive, this chart represents the lyrical text from all of the projects.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationships</th>
<th>Help/Support</th>
<th>Geography</th>
<th>People</th>
<th>History</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• But at your best you are love You're a positive motivating force within my life</td>
<td>• Count on me through thick and thin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• This is for them girls who stay fly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I'll Be More Than A Lover More Than A Woman</td>
<td>• When you are weak I will be strong</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In you I found my everything And I trust in you</td>
<td>• Helping you to carry on</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can't you see, look at my face it's glowing And it's all because of you</td>
<td>• Call on me, I will be there</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• You are my everything</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A friendship that will never end</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4 Musical Text Analysis
Clearly, the notions of relationships and help/support were represented by the lyrics of the music the students chose to accompany their projects.

The photographs that the students chose were harder still to analyze. All of my prior analysis had involved printed words on a page that could be interpreted, organized, and analyzed. The analysis of photographic text, being visual, required a somewhat different method. I decided to watch the students’ multimodal projects and look for evidence of community that had been expressed in their printed texts. When analyzing the printed text I had highlighted “community does…”,”community is…”, or “community should be…” kinds of statements, but this method didn’t seem to carry over effectively into the pictures that the students included. However, when I viewed their multimodal compositions looking for evidence of shared history, relationships, and help and support, the photographs lent themselves well to this kind of analysis.

My finding that students considered communities to be on relationships between people was further confirmed by the fact that none of the pictures in the multimodal composition were focused on a geographic landmark. Myah’s project even made note of the fact that some of her community had moved away so they did not occupy the same geographic space, but she still considered them to be a cohesive community. Although her project and two others that featured Hank Aaron as their community were the only ones to mention geography at all, all but two of the projects had pictures of people who lived in places that were far away. Photographs in these compositions tended to be one of three kinds: pictures showcasing one particular person, pictures that included the author with the
showcased person, or pictures of a small group. In the pictures that were of only one person, it was obvious that the focus of the picture was the individual (instead of a location or the landscape, for example).

As I was making note of instances of help and support in the photographs, group pictures seemed to show up most often this category. Support/help was represented by body language exhibited in the pictures such as where the participants leaned on one another or one person held another. Shared history was represented by other group pictures where the participants were doing something that identifies them as members of the same group. In these group pictures, the participants would often strike the same pose or be dressed the same way such as in formal attire, school uniforms, or team uniforms. Many pictures features students holding up (or flashing) their fingers in particular ways that were commonly understood to represent groups such as Hank Aaron High or the Class of ’08. Relationships were clearly represented by pictures of participants in loving embrace, kissing or hugging one another. Finally, there was evidence of the importance of people to community as many of the pictures were single shots of people where the person in the picture was the focus of the picture.

Therefore, the students showed consistency in their writings about community not only in the way they used their written text, but also in the way that they used music and photographic text. They used pictures that depicted people in postures that signified love and support through their nonverbal cues, they used pictures that depicted singular people as important and central to their
communities, and finally, they utilized photographs that represented themselves as members of groups who do the same things (dressing, posing, communicating through signs) which demonstrates how their communities made them who they are as individuals.

It is important to note, in wrapping up the macro analysis of the various texts (printed, musical, photographic and printed text journal), that each corpus of data yielded slightly different categories. This may be because each form of text serves a different purpose, or it may be because each form of text allows students to express themselves differently. That is each form of text may allow the writer not only to convey a message differently, but may also allow the writer to convey a different message. This will be discussed again briefly in Chapter 5.

**A closer look at eight multimodal projects**

I developed a framework for community by melding all of the previous schematics together that emerged as I looked for reoccurring themes about community. The goal from this was to use students' conceptions of community to analyze their work rather than take a previously constructed academic notion of community and try to make it fit their notions and their communities. I was attempting not only to gain a more emic perspective in gathering the corpus of data, but also a more emic perspective in the analysis of the data. I developed and used the following framework for community to analyze these two projects on a micro level.
Looking for evidence of community talk and what it may consist of is different than analyzing a multimodal composition that consists of many types of text put together with the intention of creating one text. What becomes complicated is not fishing out all of the types of texts for analysis. Rather, the complicated and rather exciting part of analyzing multimodal compositions is recognizing the multiple texts which could exist independently of one another and then working to analyze them as the singular text they were intended to be. Ideally, an analysis of multimodal composition would analyze the text as it is seen, multimodally and in its entirety. However, it is impossible to use a singular media - in this case, the printed words of a dissertation - in order to represent the use of multiple media. Therefore, this analysis recognized the different kinds of texts and attempted to
understand how they worked together to create meaning. Schematically, the analysis looked like this:

![Figure 4.2 Schematic for Multimodal Composition Analysis](image)

This schematic provides recognition and brief understanding of each of the texts as they might be outside of one another, from there, looking at how each one relates to an appropriate other is the work of this analysis.

**Shanice’s Spring Quarter Multimodal Composition**

Shanice organized her final multimodal project by using three kinds of texts: music, writing, and photographs. Shanice used her printed text to organize the rest of her composition. Her composition followed this structure, shown below, which repeated throughout the composition and had music over top of it.
Figure 4.3: Standard Multimodal Composition Organization

Figure 4.3 represents a particular organizational structure that all but one of the projects followed. A composition organized using this framework begins with a frame of printed text in one color on a different colored background. It then moves to a series of pictures followed by another frame of text, another series of pictures, and so on. While this pattern is being played out on the media player, there is music that plays for the duration of the entire composition. There may be several series of text, and the number of pictures varies for each song. However, for this schematic, in all projects when there is a song change, it occurs as a new frame of printed text appears. When a new song begins, this schematic repeats. Each new frame or frames of text grouped together with the following pictures are new sections and are meant to be read intertextually with
the music that is playing at the time. If an analysis were really like the reading experience, the songs would not be separate from each section of text however, in order to analyze the projects, I broke them down into separate parts.

I began first by analyzing Shanice’s written text. What made this a more simple process was that her text frames included only text on a blank background, which is vastly different than text which is superimposed on a picture to create a mosaic of meaning. I replicated these frames of text for this analysis in an effort to show more fully the way that Shanice composed this project. Her project begins with the following frame of text:

Example 4.1: Shanice Number 1

When I was younger I
never knew what type of
role my sisters would play
in my life.

Example 4.1: Shanice Number 1
After a few pictures, the following text frame (below) comes into view. In these two frames of text, which together with the pictures and music serve as an introduction, Shanice is letting her audience know her topic: sisters. She has also explained the significance of this topic by letting them know that they have played an active role in her life. Again, there are intertextual dynamics at play as the music has started at this time and the reader is not simply reading the above text alone, but also hearing the music and lyrics. However, in an analysis of this project I think it is helpful to first discuss the text alone, the photographs alone, and the music alone, before moving to a discussion of how they all work together intertextually.
Example 4.2: Shanice Number 2

These two frames of introductory text both indicate through the use of the word “role” that Shanice is aware that these people within her community have a way of being or a thing they do, like a job. That is important to her membership in this community. This is reinforced by the following statement that says her community members have “taught [her] so much.” This directs the audience to expand the notions of what a role is to encompass being a teacher. One of the jobs of the members of Shanice’s sisterhood community, therefore, is that they are teachers. Such an understanding is similar to the “community does…” statements in the other multimodal projects and the journals. However, in
describing this community, Shanice allocates this job of teacher to specific
people. The next frame of text begins to explain what being a teacher entails as
she uses the composition to directly address her older sister, Unique.

Example 4.3: Shanice Number 3

In this frame of text, Shanice begins to by acknowledging her sister as an
individual within the community. This acknowledgement of an individual is
indicated by the central location of her name, in all capital letters and on a line of text by itself. It shows that in her community of sisters, Unique’s role has been that of a teacher and that role model. This directs us again to the belief that in a community the members have a job to do. In this community, according to Shanice, Unique’s job is to be a teacher.

Example 4.4: Shanice Number 4

Johnna (Percious)
You really helped me with a lot of things. You help me find myself. You are always there for me whenever I need you. I hope you will never change. Thanks for always being there for me. You’ve treated me like a sister thank you so much.
In this new frame of printed text, Shanice has noted the importance of the job that this person does in her community of sisters - to be there whenever Shanice needs her - while also placing a high importance on the idea that Johnna does this job as a singular person within this community. This is evidenced by the way her name is placed alone at the top of this text. Shanice acknowledges that Johnna has “always [been] there for [her].” The word “always” indicates a long period of time in Shanice’s life, this is a reference to the notion of the shared history between this young woman and herself. In this line, Shanice also refers to the support by with her statement that Johnna has always “been there for her.” This concept of “being there” for someone is one of the notions of help and support that the students wrote about in their journals.

In her next statement, “You’ve treated me like a sister,” Shanice marks the relationship between the two of them as being important even though, as Shanice told me, Johnna is her God-sister rather than a biologic sister like the previous two young women discussed. It is the way that Johnna has treated her that creates the bond or community between them rather than legal or blood ties. This non-biological connection is further evidence of the notion of community as being built on relationships between individuals rather than geographic spaces.
At first glance, the introduction of this new text frame about friends seems as though Shanice is changing direction and going off onto a new tangent talking about her friends, but the notion of helping remains in the statement, “many of my friends have helped me become who I am today.” Similarly, the idea that these people are important is reiterated here though not through the placement of names or individual acknowledgements, but by plainly saying it: “they are very important to me.” Shanice clearly notes the importance of community members as helpers and supporters. Further, by using the word friends as opposed to “other people” or another nondescript word, she emphasizes again the relationship between herself and the members of her community. In the next
section of text, Shanice make clear why she has included friends in her composition.

Example 4.6: Shanice Number 6

In this frame of text, Shanice reveals to the reader that she has indeed reconceptualized her notions of sisterhood to incorporate both chosen sisters and sisters who are related to her. In this frame she has reiterated that the community that she is writing about is her sisterhood community. She makes it clear in her previous text frames that the criteria for this community membership
revolve around an individuals’ job in a community (by using the word ‘role’) and that that role is to be a helper, supporter, or a teacher. In this frame she returns to the notion of shared history among community members by talking about how they have grown together to become this community over the years.

Shanice ends her composition in the final frame below by bringing her message full circle, tying it back into the introduction much like the concluding paragraph in a five-paragraph essay by repeating briefly to the reader that she has just shared with them about her community of sisters. She reminds the reader by stating that she loves the members of her community and that the relationships between members are centrally important to community membership.
I analyzed the pictures in Shanice’s composition by noting evidence of help, support, relationships, and the importance of individuals that I found in the macro-level analysis of the compositions. In doing this analysis of the visual texts it became clear that the pictures fit into categories of individual people or groups of people. Such an analysis seems to be simplistic at first. Clearly, if a picture isn’t of an individual person it must be of a group of people. However, this is distinctly different from pictures where people are absent altogether or where it is the geographic space or an object that is the central focus of a photograph. Likewise, it is notable that Shanice chose not to include any clip art,
word art, or logos in the graphic text of her presentation. This decision points to Shanice’s notion of community as being about people rather than geographic space. She points to the notion of community being about people by only using photographs of people.

What is of further significance is that there are only two photographs of Shanice that featured her alone. These pictures followed the first frame of text that stated, “When I was younger I never knew what type of role my sisters would play in my life.” Both are baby pictures of Shanice, taken during the first months of her life. These pictures represent the notion of her being young and not understanding the importance of her sisters due to her young age. Likewise, showing pictures of herself as an infant and as a junior in high school are direct reference to a long period of time. These photographs further reiterate her previous notion of the importance of history to her notions of community. There are other pictures in this section of the composition that are of Shanice when she is a small child, but these pictures also feature her biological sisters. The notion of support is visible even at this young age. In both pictures she is sitting for a studio shot with her sister in a way that she is leaning with her back against her sister. These pictures signify not only that her older sister has been supportive of her, but also that she has taken on this role for many years which is another reference to the shared history that the girls have.

These pictures are preceded by the written text, “But very soon I learned that they would play a huge role in my life. They have taught me so much. I really don’t know what my life would be like without them and I don’t want to find
This is followed by a shot of Shanice’s sister that is totally focused on her face. This is the first picture of a person alone besides the two of Shanice as an infant. This indicated that this person is singularly important because she is alone and particularly important because she is the first to be represented in such a way. This photo is followed by a series of fairly recent pictures of the girls together and a series of shots of her youngest sister by herself. I asked Shanice why she didn’t have a special frame of text for this sister. Shanice laughed and told me that everybody already knows who she is as they are always together. This indicates that this person is so recognizable that she needs no introduction, much like a famous celebrity. This indirectly points again to the importance of the relationship between the girls. Further, all of the pictures of these two sisters feature them in some sort of loving posture. They are either leaning on one another or they have their arms around each other. In one photograph, Shanice is kissing her sister on the check, another symbol of the girls’ relationship.

The next frame of written text is the one which reads, “UNIQUE You have taught me so much and I want to thank you. I think that you set a good example for me. I know we have our differences but I do really love and am very thankful for having a beautiful person like you in my life. Your name really fits you.......” This frame of text is followed by a series of pictures similar to those described above, shots of just one young woman who is showcased alone. Shanice told me that these were the only pictures she had of Unique. This is why she included them so this may or may not have been an indication of the singular importance of this girl in Shanice’s community. Had she had pictures of
the two girls together, she may have chosen to include them. The same is true of the next series of pictures that follows the text about Johna. In these cases, the choices of pictures were not as much about the message that they relayed, but rather about the resources available to Shanice and her desire to represent these two young women. Significant about these two sections of pictures is that these girls attend a University in a nearby state. Including students who are Hank Aaron students in her composition as well as students who do not attend the school (and are living in a different city and state) indicates that her community is not bound by particular geographic space.

Shanice’s last section of pictures is the longest. Her photos in this section are all of friends. Most of them are from Hank Aaron. She precedes this section of pictures with the text “Many of my friends have helped me become who I am today. They are very important to me. It seems like we have grown over the years to be a family.” In many of the pictures, there is evidence of the way they stay fly, meaning cool (as referenced in her musical choice that will be discussed in more detail later) when the girls are wearing sunglasses or high heels and posed in model-style poses. There are also pictures from previous school years where you can tell that students are younger, which, of course, is a way of demonstrating their history together. In these pictures, notions of relationships are also physically visible as ladies in group pictures have their arms around one another and are sharing various loving embraces.

Finally, Shanice’s musical text not only supported her written text, but, as another layer of text upon a previous one is intended to do, further explains her
composition. She began her composition by opening with the text, “When I was younger I never knew what type of role my sisters would play in my life,” and at the same time she had set her composition up to play the song, “Everything” (1997) by Mary J. Blige. Looking at the lyrics of this song that she included is helpful in analyzing it as a text and thinking about the role it plays in Shanice’s project as a whole.

This song, sung in its entirety, is about a woman’s romantic relationship with a man. Shanice, however, chose to include only specific parts of this song. She includes only this part of the song in her composition:

You are my everything
You are my everything
You, my everything
Everything, everything, everything
(Vs. 1)
It’s all because of you
I’m never sad and blue
You’ve brightened up my day
In your own special way
Whenever you’re around
I’m never feeling down
You are my trusted friend
On you I can depend
(Bridge)
You take me away
From the pain

Her editing of the text of this song changes it for her purposes from a romantic love song to a non-gendered song about a “trusted friend.” That she played this song during her introduction and her discussion of Unique is key. Though it is obvious from her written text that Unique is her older sister, Shanice uses this musical text to extend her discussion of Unique. This song indicates that Unique,
in addition to being a sister, is a friend. This move blurs the traditional notion of sister as a simple biological sibling which, in the overall scheme of Shanice’s composition, is one of her main points. Again, the choice of this song is important in that it continues to further expand Shanice’s contention that members of her sisterhood community have a role as helpers and supporters.

- It’s all because of you
- I’m never sad and blue
- You’ve brightened up my day
- In your own special way
- Whenever you’re around
- I’m never feeling down

These lyrics help Shanice explain some of her writing about what it means to “be there for me.” Members of her sisterhood community do not allow one another to be sad alone and they make efforts to cheer one another up. It is their job or role in the community to help others not feel down. The beginning line “You are my everything” further supports Shanice’s statements of the importance of an individual and their work in doing their job of helping and supporting one another.

“Everything” fades out as this frame of text appears,

- “Johnna (Percious). You really helped me with a lot of things. You help me find myself. You are always there for me whenever I need you. I hope you will never change. Thanks for always being there for me. You’ve treated me like a sister thank you so much.

At the same time, Whitney Houston’s song, “Count on Me” (1995) begins to play. It begins with the chorus at the beginning of the song. These two songs play back-to-back and, for a second, they play on top of one another, almost as if they are the same song. While this song is clearly about friendship (and editing is not
needed to change the text) there is a slight difference in how Houston’s song’s musical text is framed that adds much to Shanice’s composition. Shanice edits this song and it is only used for the Johnna section. As such, not even the entire chorus is played in her composition, only the first 9 lines:

```
Count on me through thick and thin
A friendship that will never end
When you are weak
I will be strong
Helping you to carry on
Call on me, I will be there
Don't be afraid
Please believe me when I say
Count on...
```

The musical text is used to reinforce what the author has already said regarding the members’ way of being within a community as being there for other members and helping. According to this text, what constitutes ‘being there for another’ results in the members of Shanice’s sister community having a role where they must ‘pick up the slack’ when other members are unable to do this which is another reference to helping. Likewise, although the audience has read in the written text that this composition is about sisters, this musical piece of text, in the same way that the previous musical text did, reminds the reader that sisterhood is about more than biological relation and is also about friendship. This represents chosen relationships that reach beyond the assigned relationships of biological family. This is reinforced, too, by the written text where this music starts and Shanice thanks Johnna for “treating her like a sister.” This notion of family seems to almost foreshadow her final writing that reveals her inclusion of her friends as fellow sisters. This again emphasizes the notion of relationships.
The perspective from which this text is written makes it different than the other texts whether musical, visual, or written, and signals a very important idea of community as Shanice represents it. The lyrics of this song explicitly state “you can count on me,” which is markedly different than the idea “I can count on you.” This tells the reader that in Shanice’s sisterhood community, she is also a responsible member of the community with a job to do just like her sisters. And further, her job is the same as the other members and therefore just as important. These dual messages indicate that the role of being a helper is reciprocal and that it is something that she would do for her community also, thereby telling the reader about her own role in the community.

Shanice uses one last musical text to wrap up her composition “Okay Remix” (2005) by Nivia. This one is markedly different than the others in tone and content. It begins as the previous song is wrapping up, just as in the previous shift from one song to another. This final song begins as the text appears that reads, “Many of my friends have helped me become who I am today. They are very important to me...” The original version of this final song is a club song. That is to say, it is a dance song played in clubs. It is bass driven and fast paced rather than being paced in a slow and meaningful way. As with the other songs, Shanice did not feature the entire song. This choice is significant because the original version of this song features a dominant and central male voice. In the version Shanice chose, the male voice not central and even absent from most of the song Shanice featured this portion of the song:
[Chorus]
That's it now shawty peep this my girls with me on the floor to get 'em with that
remix that say
Okay (okay) Okay (okay) Okay (okay) Okay (okay) (Shawty)
So spend it back Mr. DJ and get that radio station tell 'em to replay that Okay
(okay) Okay (okay)
Okay (okay) Okay (okay) (Shawty)

[Verse 1]
I see you watchin' me lookin' like you wanna be all up on me.
Them rims are lookin' clean I really wanna get to know ya baby
Will I be wastin' my time you better make up your mind
Come here and talk to me make me feel like one of a kind

[Bridge]
This is for them girls who stay fly (stay fly)
Make them boys say you so fine (so fine)
22's on that 05' (that 05') Put that red cup in tha sky and raise it high

[Chorus]
That's it now shawty peep this my girls with me on the floor to get 'em with that
remix that say
Okay (okay) Okay (okay) Okay (okay) Okay (okay) (Shawty)
So spend it back Mr. DJ and get that radio station tell 'em to replay that Okay
(okay) Okay (okay)
Okay (okay) Okay (okay) (Shawty)

While this musical text does not speak of the ways that her sisterhood
community helps and supports her, nor how she helps and supports them, it
does however explain her ideas of how friends can be sisters through the use of
the words “my girls.” This is a term that implies a tight and close friendship
between women that is outside of male relationships in a way that other words
for friends and even the word “girlfriends” does. To be someone’s girl is different
that simply being their friend. Further, this song is evidence of the way that Shanice’s membership in her community of sisters, young women like herself, has formed who she is today. She has also made note of this in her written text as she began this session when she said, “Many of my friends have helped me become who I am today. They are very important to me...” She also makes note of the ways these young women have grown together to gain a similar way of being in their community. “It seems like we have grown over the years to be a family.” Some of these “who I am” things are evidenced in the references to hip hop and urban culture that can be found in the musical text such as “girls who stay fly” which references a particular style of dress and appearance, which Shanice also mentioned in our interview. Another example is the reference to “22’s” which are a size of wheel rims found on highly stylized cars on rap videos that allow for more chrome and more flash on a customized car. Shanice is identifying herself and her girls (her sisters) as girls who stay fly (are cool enough that young boys want to chase them). Furthermore, they have together as a part of their growing up and being a community of sisters together, indicating again the shared history the young women have together.

**Mahogany’s Spring Quarter Multimodal Composition**

Mahogany’s project followed the same overall framework that Shanice’s did: a frame of printed text followed by a series of photographic texts with music laid on top of both. Her composition began with the following frame
Example 4.8: Mahogany Number 1

She is letting the reader know that she is going to talk about something she loves. Though her first frame does not indicate which community she is going to talk about, she does begin by letting the reader know that the relationship is what is going to be important. She next has a series of pictures. Unlike most of the other compositions, these are not pictures of people she knows. Instead, there is a picture of a stack of money, an expensive car, an expensive suit of clothing, and a popular actor who is known for being especially attractive. These pictures are followed by the next two back-to-back frames of printed text:
Example 4.9: Mahogany Number 2

It is with this frame text that Mahogany lets the students know that she is writing about of her relationship with one person. Her notion of community as a group of people can even be defined as two people who have a relationship. In this case, she has twice described this relationship as a loving one and in the previous text pointed out the importance of one person not only by naming her, but also by giving her one frame of text that only features her name. This frame of text is followed by a close up picture of this person. The transition from text to photograph utilizes a heart which contains the picture of Gerri. Again, Mahogany is directing the reader to the loving relationship between the two. This picture is followed by another frame of text.
Example 4.10: Mahogany Number 3

In saying that her mother is important to her and particularly important to her for
caring about her, we see again the notion of relationships between people. By
stating that her mother is important to her and that her mother cares about her
we also see the notion of how the notion of relationship is dialogic. Again, when
Mahogony states that her mother has been there “since day one,” there is
evidence for the shared history between the two. This frame of text is followed
by a picture of Mahogony as a preschool-aged child, which notes that the history
is a long one in terms of Mahogony’s life span. This single picture is followed by
a new frame of printed text.
Example 4.11: Mahogany Number 4

As with the other compositions, Mahogany also discusses her community as one that has helped her. In this case, her mother has helped to get her ready for school. This frame of text is followed by several additional frames of text and images combined. They are school pictures that she has labeled as kindergarten, first grade, and second grade. This not only tells the reader that her mom has helped her get ready for her first day of school, but that she has done it consistently over a series of years, again making the reader aware of their shared history. These school photos are followed by a new frame of printed text.

"She even helped me get ready for my first day of school."
Example 4.12: Mahogany Number 5

As with other authors, Mahogony also writes about how a member of community is a teacher. In this she is very specific about what her mom has taught her: right from wrong. Her following photographic texts are not pictures of people as the previous two sections have been. Instead, they tell the reader exactly what lessons of right from wrong her mother has taught her. There is a picture of a No Smoking sign, a clip art image that prohibits drinking and driving, a Danger! Do not enter sign, and finally another Do Not Enter sign. These clip art frames of photographic text are followed by a frame of printed text.

She also taught me right from wrong.
Thanks to my mother she made me into the great and wonderful person that I am today.

Example 4.13: Mahogany Number 6

As many of the other authors did, Mahogany also writes about how one of the functions of a community is to make a member who they are. In this case, she credits one person with this work. This frame of printed text is followed by a series of pictures of Mahogany. Some of them are studio pictures of Mahogany where she is the singular focus of the shot. In these photos she is dressed in a suit and is clearly looking her best. These shots are followed by pictures of Mahogany playing basketball, a skill in which she is accomplished and known for in the school. These basketball images are followed by a picture of her mother looking at an arrangement on the wall of Mahogany’s basketball awards. This final picture not only shows Mahogany’s accomplishment in the sport, but also her mother’s appreciation and support for her daughters’ accomplishment. This photograph is followed by another frame of text.
Example 4.14: Mahogony Number 7

While the last frame of photographic text pointed to Mahogony’s mother’s appreciation for her daughter’s accomplishments and her support of them, this piece of printed text points to Mahogony’s commitment to the community she is talking about. She pledges to always (which points not only to past history but to the notion of a future for a shared history) love and respect (which points to the relationship they have) her mother. This frame is followed by a picture of her mother reading. This singular picture is followed by a frame of printed text in which Mahogony identifies herself by her community membership.
Example 4.15: Mahogony Number 8

Mahogony not only identifies herself by her membership in the community that she and her mother make up together, but she again refers to the relationship that the two have by stating that it makes her glad and proud to be her mother’s daughter. This frame of text is followed by a singular close-up black and white photo that Mahogony took of her and her mother in a close embrace. Their close embrace again points to the notion of relationships, while the focus on their faces (even the wall behind them is almost blocked out) points to the importance of the two people that created their community. In a final frame of text, Mahogony reiterates the relationship that they have by talking about her love for her mother, which is different from the earlier frame where she makes note of the fact that her mother cares for her.
Example 4.16: Mahogony Number 9

Mahogony utilizes only one song in her composition, Boyz II Men’s “A Song for Mama” (1997). This is clearly appropriate for a composition about a mother. However, when treating the song as another form a text meant to impart meaning (rather than just emphasize the tone of the text, which would be another appropriate use for musical text within an intertextual multimodal composition) it gives the reader still more insight into the notion of community that Mahogony is sharing.

Rather than crop her song, like many of the other students chose to do, she begins with the beginning of the song so the musical introduction plays. The vocals begin after her mother’s name is shown. She includes the following lyrics:

"I love you mom!"
You taught me everything
And everything you’ve given me
I always keep it inside
You’re the driving force in my life, yeah
There isn’t anything
Or anyone I can be
And it just wouldn’t feel right
If I didn’t have you by my side
You were there for me to love and care for me
When skies were grey
Whenever I was down
You were always there to comfort me
And no one else can be what you have been to me
You’ll always be you always will be the girl
In my life for all times

Chorus:
Mama, mama you know I love you
Oh you know I love you
Mama, mama you’re the queen of my heart
Your love is like
Tears from the stars
Mama, I just want you to know
Lovin’ you is like food to my soul

The lyrics of this song reiterate Mahogany’s previous statements of her community being based on people, as the song is directed at one particular person, but its lyrical text adds another layer to her notion of the way her mother has been a teacher to her by saying “you taught me everything.” The notion of help and support is clear through this text: “you were there for me to love and care for me, you were always there to comfort me, you’re the driving force in my life.” Comfort is a significant way to help as is serving as a motivator or driving force. The lyrical text of this song also mentions Mahogany’s notion of a significant portion of shared history: “you’ll always be you always will be the girl in my life for all times,” delineated by the use of the words always and all times
which suggest historical time frames. And finally, the notion of the relationship between the two is directly written about in this lyrical text every time the writer mentions his love for his mother.

**Antione’s Spring Quarter Multimodal Composition**

This project is the shortest project and also has the fewest words on each frame of printed text. It follows the format of combining printed text and photographs in a serial fashion while music plays throughout like many of the other projects. It is also one of only two projects that utilized instrumental music rather than music that has lyrical text to analyze. Antione chose to conceptualize his community around his activity with football. While a focus on relationships is not part of his community composition, history, support, and the presence of people come through clearly.

He begins his presentation with a frame of printed text that immediately refers the reader to the notion of history.
“Starting” indicates a journey or a frame of time. “Young age” directs the reader to a period of time that is quite some time ago considering that Antione is nearly finished with high school at this time. He follows this frame with another frame of text, however it is in a different font and color scheme than the previous text. It is intended to look like a logo of the team that it represents.
Example 4.18: Antione Number2

This frame is followed by a team picture of Antione’s youth league football team. That they are a football team is clear through not only the uniforms but also the championship banners that declare their team the youth football champs. At this time, the history of just how long Antione has been involved in this community is revealed as the year 2000 is displayed in the picture. That Antione included a team picture rather than some other kind of clip art or a picture only of himself, indicates that the people involved in his football community are of importance to his understanding of community. His next frame of printed text again directs the reader to how notions of history are involved in the way Antione frames his community.
Example 4.19: Antione Number 3

The pictures that follow this frame of text are of dumbbells and weight sets. While it is clear that physical fitness and strength are important to playing football, when these pictures are read along with the following photographs, how this ties in with his notion of community is clear. After the photographs of weight sets is a picture of the Hank Aaron logo (which also shows how his history with his football community has progressed from a youth league to a high school team). This is directly followed by a photo of a football scoreboard where Hank Aaron has won the game by a 40 point margin. This section is closed out with two Hank Aaron football team photographs. When these are read together, it is clear that the people in his football community are important in high school just as they were in his youth league days, and success is highlighted by the scoreboard that is not only a winning score but a smashing win by Hank Aaron. The weights at the beginning suggest a job of community members, though it isn’t
clear whether it is Antione’s job, the other players’ job, or the job of all members of the community to stay fit and train for this success.

The next section is a print text frame.

Example 4.20: Antione Number 4

The notion “future” suggests the continuation of history or plans to remain involved in this community of football. A series of downloaded photos from Ball State appear that feature their football team. Antione is being recruited to play football and attend college there. These are followed by the NFL logo, the NFL draft logo, and the Atlanta Falcon logo, as well as a picture of their stadium. These photos are followed by the final frame of text in Antione’s composition.
Example 4.21: Antione Number 5

Wrapping up his composition with the notion of retirement shows his intention to be involved with football for a great span of his life. He further sees his involvement with the community as a way to get to the end of his football journey by retiring, marking the end of a long journey within the composition that he began with the statement “starting at a young age.” The notion of history is particularly strong in Antione’s composition along with the notion of achieving goals, which is evidenced through the winning score board and use of vocabulary like “aspirations.”
Janessa’s Spring Quarter Multimodal Compositon

Janessa wanted her project to be all about her. However, the assignment specifically required that the project focus on a community. Janessa chose to write about how her community of friends and family made her into who she is today. Instead of mixing her print text and photographs, Janessa instead chose to follow the popular format of written text followed by photographs with music laid overtop. She also utilized very lengthy printed texts to frame her photographic text. Her first frame of print has a lot to say.

As you can see, I AM very happy and pleased with the person who’ve I’ve grown into. Every person has their flaws, but without the special people in my life that I present to you I don’t know where I’d be and I wouldn’t be ME. Hate It or Love It…

Example 4.22: Janessa Number 1
The use of ‘grown’ suggests a process that happens over an amount of time, indicating a shared history with the people she is going to present to the audience. She also makes note of the fact that the people in her composition are special, which not only indicates her relationship with them, but also the importance of them individually. She also clearly states that the people in her community have made her who she is, which points to some kind of job that they have in her life. She directs the reader again to the notion of history that is a part of her community by following the previous frame of printed text with a series of pictures of herself from her very early years, newborn to preschool and early elementary age.

There was no music at the beginning of Janessa’s project, but that appears to have been an editing mistake. Once the sound kicks in the reader hears Jill Scott’s “Family Reunion” (2004). Janessa primarily utilizes the chorus, which says, “It’s family, what can you say,” which seems appropriate as she is talking about her family at this time. Janessa (interview, 5/07) told me that she chose this song because it can always be heard at family reunions. This speaks to the shared history she writes about in other parts of her composition.

Janessa begins describing the people in her community in her next frame of printed text.
Example 4.23: Janessa Number 2

Janessa writes that her family has inspired her to be who she is today. This is a way that her family has helped her to be who she is today. Further, by saying that the lessons and tough love have paid off, she is again writing about the helping role of a teacher (lessons) that other students have written about and referring to the relationship that they have (tough love). Janessa then includes a lengthy section of photos of her family. Some of them are group shots and others feature only one person. None of the shots are scenery shots that include people. That is, the photographer’s intent in all of the shots is to focus on the people. It is central to the discussion of the photographic text in this section to note that Janessa is only in four of the photographs and in all of the pictures that include her in this section, she is not the featured person in the shot, rather, she

My family is my inspiration.  
All the lessons and tough love has paid off and turned me into the beautiful and happy young lady I am today.
is simply a part of the group. She then goes on to write about another part of her community.

Example 4.24: Janessa Number 3

Here, she not only refers to friends, directing the reader again to the importance of the relationships between herself and her community, but she also refers to “closest friends,” explaining the depth of the relationships of those involved in her community. She maintains that while they may come and go they are still a blessing to her (i.e., similar geography is not important to her community) and have accepted her in and out (i.e., they have fulfilled their role as a support system to her). This frame of text is followed by a series of pictures of Janessa and her friends. Only one of the photographs is of a single person. The rest of
the photographs are intended to show at least two people. This is an indication of the relationships between herself and her friends. All of the photos except the one singular one of Mahogany feature the participants in poses where they are close together and often in loving embraces which also refers the reader to the relationship between those featured. During this time, “Family Reunion” has stopped playing and “Best Friend” (1994) by Monica and Brandy begins playing. She utilizes only a particular section of lyrics (leaving out the introduction to the song) which suggests that the lyrics of the song are important. When looking at the lyrics as a text, her notions of community are reiterated.

Whenever I'm down, I call on you my friend
Helping hand you've been, in my time of need and so I'm
I'm calling you now, just to make it clear
What else can I do, won't you hear my plea

Friends may come and friends may go
But you should know that, I've got your back
It's automatic so, never hesitate to call
Cuz I'm your sister, and always for ya.

Don't know what I'd ever do without ya
From the beginning to the end
You've always been here right beside me
So I call you my best friend
Through the good times and the bad
Whether I lose or if I win
I know one thing that never changes
And thats you as my best friend.

Whenever I'm done with all thats going on
It's when I'm going through just one of those days
You say the right thing to keep me moving on
To keep me going strong, what else can I say

Friends are there through thick and thin
Cuz I've been told that and I believe that
It's automatic
Call me when you need a friend  
Cuz I'm your sister, and always for ya

In this musical text, the notion of community as a helper or supporter is referenced by the direct statement of “helping hand.” Further, this form of text shows what a helping hand looks like in real life when it says that, a friend is there in “times of need” and that a friend “has your back.” Additionally the notion of help as encouragement is suggested here in the lyrics, “You say the right thing to keep me moving on” because to keep someone moving on suggests encouraging them to keep going when it is difficult. There is also evidence of the importance of shared history in the lyrics: “always” (which suggests a long period of time), “that’s one thing that never changes” (“never,” which suggests not only history but future). Finally, the importance of relationships is apparent in the song every time friendship is referenced.

The next text begins the concluding remarks of Janessa’s composition and directly returns to the notion of her community as holding the role of teaching her lessons. In the beginning of her conclusion, she tells the audience that she has learned (and it is easy to assume that this is as a result of some of the lessons from her community) to appreciate and not take life for granted.
Example 4.25: Janessa Number 4

This frame is followed by three photos that are only of Janessa. One of them has even been cropped to purposely feature only her. These are the last frames of her composition. They refer the reader back to her previous statements claiming that she would not be who she is without her community. Further, as Janessa is the focus of her composition, it is clear that her community is built on a relationship with her. And her initial thoughts that she would not be the person that she is without her community are reiterated as the song “More Than a Woman”(2001) plays. Although this song is about how the artist could be more than just a woman to her romantic mate, Janessa uses only the chorus to end her composition:

I'll Be
I'll Be More Than A Lover
More Than A Woman

Life isn’t always great or fair, but I’ve learned to appreciate and not take for granted.
More Than Your Lover
I'll Be
I'll Be More Than Another
More Than A Woman
More Than Another

These lyrics are not to describe her plans for future romantic relationships, but to express that she will be more than an ordinary person, or an ordinary woman.

(Interview, 05/07).

Kelly and Jamea’s Spring Quarter Multimodal Composition

Kelly and Jamea chose to write their project together. They wrote about their group of best friends which was the two of them along with another friend who was in another English class at Hank Aaron. The girls note in their composition the importance of members of a community occupying the same geographic spaces, particularly the city where they live and their high school. They make it particularly clear that their shared history and their relationships are what created and maintained their community, but that the geographic space simply afforded the opportunity for them to meet, especially since the girls live on different sides of town. Kelly and Jamea followed the same written text and photographs with music laid over it as the previous two projects. However, they also laid some text over photographs. The girls also did many color changes of their text frames where the previous two projects stuck with the same color theme throughout their projects. The first frame of Kelly and Jamea’s text was printed text only. It introduced the composition to the reader much like a title.
Example 4.26: Kelly and Jamea Number 1

In their title, the students let the reader know that they are going to be talking about an important relationship, that of best friends. Further, they are letting the reader know that they are going to be talking about the shared history between the friends as they begin with “how we became,” which suggests a journey or shared time.
Example 4.27: Kelly and Jamea Number 2

The above frame directly follows the first one. Its text is also a frame of print only. It situates their community within a specific geographic location, Hank Aaron High School. It however doesn’t necessarily situate their community as a part or sub-community of the larger community of Hank Aaron. They use the word “at,” rather than the word “in,” which suggests a location, not another community membership. It does, however, suggest that Hank Aaron is a community by saying that their community is a smaller community and therefore suggesting that Hank Aaron is larger. Again, the notion of history is suggested as the authors use the word “started” which suggests either a journey or a frame of time that has a beginning.
The two authors further examine the larger community that Hank Aaron is a part of in the next frame which is a photograph of the city’s skyline. That image is animated to spin out quickly, and the picture comes into focus again, this time as if it were in a newspaper. Such an animation scheme is one of the features on Movie Maker. By using this feature, an author can add text to the newspaper in the form of a headline. Kelly and Jamea utilized this feature by adding the following headline to their paper: “[The city] is where it all started.” Again, the girls are suggesting the notion of a frame of time with a beginning by using “started” and they are locating their community as the geographic location of their community. However, it is important to note in their discussions of geography from the previous frames, that they have not located themselves as part of the geographic communities, rather they have just situated themselves in particular spaces.

After this frame of intertextual text, the photograph of the skyline of the city comes into view again. It is immediately followed by a picture of the school, which again locates the community within the walls of Hank Aaron. This time there is text on top of the photograph that directs the reader to the importance of the people in the community and reiterates the importance of the geographic space as the opportunity for the girls to become a community by meeting one another. “Hank Aaron is where we all met. Kelly been here since 4th grade. Angelica been here since 6th grade. Jamea been here since 1st grade.” This not only shows the importance of the individuals who make up their community, but also refers the reader again to their shared history. Considering the students are
presently in 11th grade, they have known one another for significant portions of their lives and share this by telling the reader just how long they have been together, rather than just saying they have been friends for a long time. The words fade off the picture of the high school and the reader is left to view the picture of the school for a time. This photo of Hank Aaron is followed by a photograph of the girls taken for the purpose of this project. The girls are dressed similarly, which is something they consciously do (Interview, 05/07). They are also giving the “Class of ’08” sign with their hands and fingers. This signifies that they not only have a history but will continue to have a history together as 2008 is their graduation year and won’t take place until the following year. Laid overtop of all of these frames of text is the song “” (2006) by Fergie. While the lyrics included in the girls’ project seem to suggest the “get money” notion prevalent in much rap and dance music, Jamea told me she chose that song because she felt like it signified them as being more as they have gotten older together, moving from young elementary-aged tomboys to young women (interview, 5/07) who take care in their style of dress (even though the school has a uniform policy) and pay particular attention to being feminine in their appearance.

This song ends with the next frame of text.
Example 4.28: Kelly and Jamea Number 3

Here, Kelly and Jamea are sharing another bit of history with the reader through this frame. Homecoming was at the beginning of the year, as opposed to the spring when this was written. The fact that they got ready together again points to their relationship existing outside of the geographic space of the school, as does their statement that they take their friendship everywhere they go. While they met at the school and within the city limits of where they live, they are not limited to that geographic space in their community membership. Using the term “friendship” again points to their contention that it is the relationships between the girls that is important rather than where they are situated. At this time, a dance song, “Pop, Lock, and Drop It” (2006) plays. Again, while the lyrics to this song don’t suggest any particular community ties or relationships, Jamea told me that
it was the song that played over and over again on homecoming night. With this song, she added a memory of their history together to her composition. They added to this section two pictures of the girls from their friend community at homecoming. Again, they were dressed alike in the same color dresses, using their clothing as an outward expression of their community membership.

The music returns to “Glamorous” (2006) with the next frame of text. Again the notion of friendship (relationships) is important to the community, represented by the statement, "Without our friendship there is no us."

Example 4.29: Kelly and Jamea Number 4

It is not clear whether the girls mean that without the relationship there is not community or perhaps instead it is a statement of identity. Either fits the
framework for community and could be further emphasized by the following series of pictures that the girls have included of themselves posing in similar ways and wearing the same clothes. Regardless of what the intention was, it is clear the girls identify themselves as a community through their matching clothing and postures in the pictures.

However, the girls make it clear that despite their efforts to dress similarly and identify as a community, it is their individual personalities that make their community in the next frame of text.

**Example 4.30: Kelly and Jamea Number 5**

We complete each other with our different PERSONALITIES
This returns to the notion of individual people being of importance to community creation and function rather than geographic space. Further, by writing about the way that the ladies complete one another, it returns us to the notion of support as a function of community and something done by the individuals there. Each one of the ladies has a particular way that they go about completing the community. This is evidenced by the next series of pictures. First is one of Kelly with her head in a school book bag. The text laid on top of that says, “Kelly, the laid back one.” Next is a photo of Jamea sitting on a sink in the bathroom. Its print says, “Jamea: the one with ALL the attitude.” The final picture in this section is of Angelica, who is posing with her fingers like six shooters and smiling. This caption says, “Angelica: The goofy One!” Again, these different descriptions indicate that the girls fulfill their duties, as laid out by their different personalities, in the community and complete one another outside of a particular geographic space. Next, there is a picture of all three girls together, each one talking on her cell phone. Jamea told me this was because they are always on the phone with one another (Interview, 05/07). The next picture is of all three girls with the two on the outside kissing the middle one. All are laughing in the picture, and this again indicates the level of the girls’ relationship. These are followed by more pictures that feature the girls close together and leaning on one another. The next two frames reiterate this notion of the importance of relationships.
Example 4.31: Kelly and Jamea Number 6

This is followed by one final, more serious picture of the girls leaning close and smiling. The final frame closes the text and simply says, “The End.” Kelly and Jamea used this composition to talk about the way that although geographic space allowed the girls to meet when they might not have otherwise gotten to do so, their friendship community is not dependent on their affiliations with the school, nor their city. Rather, it depends on the ways the girls spent time together both in and out of the school, and the relationships that have formed because of their individual personalities and what each person brings to the community.
Myah’s Spring Quarter Multimodal Composition

Myah wrote her composition about her friendship group. Of particular interest to this composition is that her friendship group exists outside of Hank Aaron high school and other geographic locations. She also follows frames of text with pictures with music laid on top of them as the framework for her composition. However, in some of the photographs she has combined text with her photographs. She begins with a text frame that says, “All of these people have stuck by me through...” In this partial sentence there is evidence for the importance of people, as she is clearly going to be identifying people in following frames, and the notion of help, which is indicated by the phrase, “stuck by me.” She then has three frames of photographic text with pictures of herself. The first is a picture of Myah in a bridesmaid gown looking very pretty. This picture contains text that reads, “the good.” The next is a blurry photograph where you can hardly tell who the picture is of, and it says, “the bad.” The final picture is an admittedly unflattering picture of Myah (interview, 5/07) that says, “the ugly.” During this time, Ciara’s song, “I’m Just Me”(2006) is playing. She only includes the chorus, which features the lines:

And you see
A little G to the H
E to the T
T to the O
Now tell me what you see
I'm just Ghetto
I'm just me

A little G to the H
E to the T
T to the O
I'm just Ghetto
I'm just me
I'm just me

She has combined the pictures of herself with descriptions of circumstances, which not only adds effect to her composition, but also shows that it is the relationship with her that is important. Additionally, the lyrics in her song indicate that she is central to her community regardless of who or how she is when it says, “I'm just me.” And, by stating that possibly she is “a little ghetto,” Myah adds another reference to the notions of good and bad, as “ghetto” is a term that is often used to position people as deficient, but can be a source of pride to those who position themselves in this way. As she uses her musical text to layer her notions of good, bad, and ugly, she is emphasizing the importance of the fact that these people have stuck by her through these times in her life. This also suggests a notion of history between herself and the people she is going to write about, since being around for the various stages or times of her life suggests duration of time. These four frames of text are followed by two pictures of Myah with her friends. In these pictures the friends are touching closely, as if they were stuck together. This again emphasizes her relationship with the people in her community.

At this time, a new song is cued. It is Monica’s “For You I Will” (1996).

The lyrical text of this song tells much about Myah’s community:

When you're feeling lost in the night,
When you feel your world just ain't right
Call on me, I will be waiting
Count on me, I will be there
Anytime the times get too tough,
Anytime your best ain't enough
I'll be the one to make it better,
I'll be there to protect you,
See you through,
I'll be there and there is nothing
I won't do.

I will cross the ocean for you
I will go and bring you the moon
I will be your hero your strength
Anything you need
I will be the sun in your sky
I will light your way for all time
Promise you,
For you I will.

I will shield your heart from the rain
I will let no harm come your way
Oh these arms will be your shelter
No these arms won't let you down,
If there is a mountain to move
I will move that mountain for you
I'm here for you, I'm here forever
I will be your fortress, tall and strong
I'll keep you safe,
I'll stand beside you, right or wrong

I will cross the ocean for you
I will go and bring you the moon (yeah, yeah)
I will be your hero your strength
anything you need (I will be..)
I will be the sun in your sky
I will light your way for all time
Promise you
For you I will

This entire song is about the singer's role as a helper. However, what is
significant about the lyrical text of this song is that it sheds insight into what the
action of helping looks like. Much of this song is figurative, as it seems fair to
assume that the author won’t really bring the person in question the moon nor
bring them the sun and sky, however, the notion of a helper as someone who
would do anything that a member of their community needs them to do comes through clearly not only in the figurative language used but also directly in the lines that say, “anything you need” and “there’s nothing I won’t do.” Mirrored in the lyrics of this song, is Myah’s previous notion that her community members “stick” by her when it says “I’ll stand beside you.” The notion of emotional support is evident throughout the lyrics (for example, “count on me,” “call on me,” and “when times get tough”) and a new notion of help is provided as one of protector (“protect you” and “no harm will come your way”), though it is unclear whether this is emotional or physical harm or both.

The next frame of text says only “Jasmine” and is followed by several pictures of Jasmine. Only one picture is not a lone photograph of Jasmine and that picture features Jasmine and Myah with their faces squeezed together (again, as if they were stuck together). By having a frame of text with only Jasmine’s name on it and several pictures of Jasmine, Myah is signaling the importance of this individual and discussing the way that she has filled a role as supporter in their community. Including one picture of the two of them together indicates the relationship between the two as being of key importance. The next frame of printed text is like the prior one, but it has a different name. It also features singular pictures of the friend named along with one shot of the friend with Myah where they are huddled close as if they were glued together.

These two sections are followed by a new frame of printed text that says, “They have moved away, yet I would still do anything for them.” This proposes that not only does Myah consider that geographic space is not an indicator of
community; she doesn’t even think it is necessary. Further, that she would still do anything for her community members suggest that they have a history where she has done anything for them in the past. And finally, she not only is writing about how her friends have helped and supported her, but by stating that she would do “anything for these friends,” she is identifying her role as a helper and supporter in her friendship community. As she did with the previous section, she organizes this section by first showing a frame of printed text with someone’s name on it and following it by a series of singular pictures of that person. What makes this section different from the last is that it does not feature any pictures of the friends with Myah. Whether she was using the pictures of herself and her friends touching as a way to emphasize the “stuck together” notion, that perhaps she was more of a supporter of these friends than they were to her, or simply because she didn’t have these pictures is unclear.

The next frame of text is a frame of printed text that fades into view. Myah told me she chose this because she wanted it to look like blood indicating the closeness of the relationship. It says, “and I would do anything for these people.” Again, there is indication of the importance of people to her community and she is pointing out her role as a helper in her community. This frame is followed pictures of individuals who are not featured in the rest of the composition. They are all singular and are primarily close up face shots, which indicates the importance of the individual rather than the location. Her last frame of text is a printed one that is a clear indication of the relationship between her and her community members, “they are like my family.”
Overton’s Spring Quarter Multimodal Composition

Overton chose to write about Hank Aaron. Like the analysis of the other compositions, I analyzed the written text, musical text and pictorial images. However, because Overton’s text is superimposed on top of pictures (which none of the other students did) I do take the photo that the written text is on into consideration as I think about the writing. Overton’s intent was for all of his media to be experienced - meaning seen, read, and heard - simultaneously as one piece much like a collage is meant to be viewed all at once rather than each photograph individually. He told me that he wanted his movie maker project to be like a documentary (Interview, 05/07) that is something that needed to be watched from beginning to end to make sense. Therefore, while I still used the same framework for community as a tool for analysis in Overton’s project as I did with the others, I did not view his work one frame at a time or even message unit by message unit. For this reason, I have chosen to look at the written text, photographic text, and musical text of his movie maker project as they occur.

Overton’s written composition begins with a black and white photo of Hank Aaron that can be found on the school’s website. He chose black and white to signify the sense of history that the audience should have (Interview, 05/07). The next screen is this statement. “My journey at Hank Aaron Began on August 2, 1995.” This is Overton’s first day of school at Hank Aaron. Again, he is returning to this notion of a historical account of his own personal story though the use of the words, “my journey,” which suggests the passage of time. This text is
juxtaposed on top of a picture that looks through the doorway of Mama R’s classroom into the hallway and lockers outside. This shows a return from where he currently is (Mama R’ 11th grade English classroom) to where he was previously. This frame is followed by several shots of younger students in the elementary school during lunch time. While these are not shots of him, they are shots of younger, elementary-aged students in the Hank Aaron cafeteria. This was a way that he could use the available resources (present-day timing and my camera) in order to represent his younger days at Hank Aaron when he didn’t have any other way to do so. By juxtaposing his text on top of a picture of the class where he did this project and focusing on the door, it is almost as if he is physically taking the audience on a journey from where he is now, to the earlier time when he first attended Africentric.

The written text of the frame that follows the pictures in the cafeteria says, “My peers have influenced me the most” and is juxtaposed on top of a photo of the showcase that is in the foyer area of the high school when you walk in the front doors. In this showcase are things like Hank Aaron hats and flags with African artwork behind it. This is one of the first things you see when you walk into Hank Aaron everyday. These artifacts are also used by the students, staff and supporters of the school identify themselves at sporting events and within the community. He is again reiterating that his community is located within the walls of Hank Aaron, however, he immediately segues into pictures of individual students. Although he has a several times located his community within the geographic bounds of the school, he has at the same time emphasized the role
of individuals and their relationships. This text frame is followed by a series of photos that Overton of Hank Aaron students. All of the pictures are taken either within the walls of Hank Aaron or when the students are on their way to a Hank Aaron function, such as the homecoming dance. In some of these pictures, Overton is with his friends; in others the focus is on just the friends. Several of the pictures feature Overton and his friends representing the class of 08 or Hank Aaron with their hands and fingers. All of the photographs in this series feature more than one person, and in every picture there is some kind of loving embrace. Students have arms around one another, they are hugging, leaning on one another, or arms linked in every photo. The notion of relationships is visible through the nonverbal cues of the students. This coupled with the fact that there are no singular pictures of anyone one signifies that no one carries any particular importance (except Overton who is in most of the shots) and that the important notion is the relationship between Overton as a member of the group is what is important for the reader to know. Obey is identifying himself as a member of this community, but is giving credit to his peers for influencing him (their role) and making him a member of the community. This is markedly different from saying that his teachers, coaches, administration or other members of the Hank Aaron staff are responsible for this.

The next frame of text is juxtaposed onto a photograph of student artwork hanging in the hallway. The writing on top of the photograph says, “Hank Aaron has a complex and difficult history. Our school building is over 50 years old. But the school Hank Aaron is only 11 years old. Some have been here since the
very first day it opened.” This statement leaves little to the scholarly imagination as far as interpretation goes. Overton is being clear and concise about the importance of history. He is speaking of not only the history of the geographic space, but also of the students in the building who make up the community of Hank Aaron. Rather than this piece of text being used to introduce a new topic, as written text has previously done, he uses this one to close out a section of his composition before moving on to a new one.

From the opening picture until the end of this frame, Mary J. Blige’s song, “I found My Everything” has been playing. It is a slow soulful ballad that features just a piano and snare drum along with the vocals. The song has a very “old school” or “old time” feel to it, adding to Overton’s desire to convey as sense of history. Like “Everything” (also a Mary J. Blige song) that Shanice used in her composition, this song is actually a love song sung from the perspective of a woman about a man. However, Overton only included these lyrics:

In you (mmmm)  
I found my everything (mmmm)  
And I trust in you (mmmm)  
I found my...

Can't you see, look at my face it's glowing  
And it's all because of you  
(Everything)

Everything about ya, ya see I need  
And I thank God for sending you through

[CHORUS]  
(I found my everything)  
Ya see I found, my everything (in you)  
In you  
(I found my everything)
Ya see I found everything and I (and I trust in you)
I trust in you
(I found my everything)

The songwriter's happiness in their “everything” (in this case Hank Aaron) is due to trust. This also points to the notion of community as a supportive structure on which one can count.

It is as this last frame of text is fading that Overton chooses to change his music. This song, although a recent Kanye West rap song “Gone” (2005), samples Otis Redding's song, “Its Too Late” (1965). This gives this song an old feel (adding to the notion of history) as Otis Redding was popular in the early 60’s. My initial thought was that he had chosen this song because of the “old-time” feel at the beginning of the song. When I asked Overton about this, however, I learned that the primary significance of this song is that it is the song he likes to run to when he is running track. This in its entirety is about striving for success and having it, despite haters, an under resourced up bringing, and other problems. Overton only plays the beginning of the song, which showcases how successful Kanye is and how he is someone with clout, someone who is admired and envied by all.

But it's too late, it's too late
He, gone

[Kanye West]
You sweat her, and I ain't talkin 'bout a Coogi
You a big L, and I ain't talkin 'bout Cool J
See me at the airport, at least 20 Louis
Treat me like the Prince and this my sweet brother Numpsay
BROTHER NUMPSAY! Groupies sound too choosy
Take 'em to the show and talk all through the movies
Says she want diamonds, I took her to Ruby Tuesdays
If we up in Friday's, I still have it my way

[Chorus]
Too late, we, gone - we strivin home
Gone - we ride on chrome
It's too late

[Kanye West]
Y'all don't want no prob from me
What you rappers could get is a job from me
Maybe you could be my intern, and in turn
I'll show you how I cook up summer, in the win-turr
Aaron love the raw dog, when will he learn
Caught somethin on the Usher tour he had to "Let it Burn"
Plus he already got three chil'run
Arguin over babysitters like, "Bitch - it's yo' turn!"
Damn 'Ye, it'd be stupid to ditch you
Even your superficial raps is super official

To “sweat” someone is to be jealous of them, and in the lyrics above
Kanye is pointing to his ability to be in public with a woman whom others would
only wish to be with. He points to his material wealth, the stupidity of other
rappers (indicating he is not stupid) and how he is so far advanced that other
rappers should work for him. While this seems to be just another rap song about
rims, hoes (groupies), and lavish lifestyles, when you look at the text of the music
that Overton selected and know that this is where he begins his section talking
about the track team and that he uses a graphic of a crown with the words “the
Dynasty” as the music starts, followed by track team pictures, it is clear not only
why he chose this particular song for this piece of text, but also why this is his
theme song when he runs competitively as sports often have a “we’re the best”
trash talking focus. He is positioning himself (and his track team, by using ‘the
Dynasty” graphic) as superior to other track teams. The Dynasty graphic is used in conjunction with the second song to open the next section and is followed by series photographs of the track team.

I initially struggled to see how picture of The Dynasty graphic represented community under the framework I was using. It seemed to only be a song about having “juice” or clout (skills, money, and fame) like many other rap songs. With Overton dismissing my contention that the song was chosen for its old-timey feel, I was totally stumped as to how it related to the rest of the community project. However, keeping in mind that these musical selections were not meant to be considered outside of the photographic as it is combined with the text, I re-searched this section again in a new way. There are two kinds of photos in this section: some where those being photographed are aware that their picture is being taken (for instance while they are waiting for their event), and others that are shots of activity and motion. However, even in these shots where the runners aren’t posing, there are shots of students with arms around each other, leaning on one another, and helping one another with their stretching. The members of the track team are obviously supporting and helping one another in these photos. In helping with things like stretching, they are helping so that the one being helped might be more prepared for their event and perform better. Particularly in track where individuals get team points for winning or placing high in events, each person who does well is also helping the rest of the team. As each individual becomes someone to be envied by having more clout and
performing at a higher level, which they’ve done in part with the help of another
member, the entire team is supported. Overton closes out this section of his
composition (like he did the last section) with a piece of text, “Track has taught
me so much and it is an honor to run for Hank Aaron.” This writing is
superimposed on a picture of a track meet and is a wide-spanning picture that
shows the track and stadium of the school where they are running. Here,
Overton makes note that the track team has “taught him so much” and is pointing
directly to the notion of a community as a helping and supportive structure.
However, he also makes note that it is “an honor to run *for* Hank Aaron”
[emphasis added]. He doesn’t say that he runs with the team or on the team. He
plainly says that he runs *for* the school. He has a job to do to support and help
the school. Further, he is not separating the track team from the Hank Aaron
community by mentioning the team specifically. Rather, he runs for Hank Aaron.
It is not just something that he does outside of his school involvement.

The next frame comes into view as the previous one fades. The
background is the red, black and green stripes of the Black Liberation flag. This
is not only a strong political statement and a way for Overton to identify as a
strong Black man (a very important notion at Hank Aaron) but also a member of
the step team since their colors are those of the Black Liberation flag and they fly
the flag at shows. Juxtaposed on top of this graphic is the following text, “[Hank
Aaron] has a much deeper meaning that other High Schools have. But its not
often that you can be in the same building for most of your life. I have so many
memories.” Again he points to the importance of a shared history. However, beyond talking about history in a particular geographic space, he is showing a complicated idea of history as something that is both a long period of time (spending most of your life at a particular place) and the important events that occur during this time (“so many memories”).

As he has with the previous two sections of his composition, Overton begins his final one by beginning a new song, Let Me Know by Aliyah. This song, admittedly, confused me before talking to Overton about it. There is the line about being your best (success is an important idea at Hank Aaron) and another that references learning what “you think you know” so in some ways it may be fitting to talk about a school experience when edited this way. Nevertheless, it seemed an odd choice considering he is foreshadowing sharing his memories. However, when I asked Overton why he chose this song, especially given how old the song is, he told me that this was the most popular song when was in his early years at Hank Aaron. Since this section was about memories, he thought it seemed to fit. He is sharing a memory with the audience in this song. He follows this piece of written text with several photographs from around the school. He features banners, signs, artwork, and display cases that you would see daily walking around the school, as well as pictures from outside the school. There was a picture of the Happy Dragon (a Chinese restaurant across the street from the school) in one of the frames that comes after this series of pictures that says, “So many memories…” across it. Overton told me
that was because he has so many memories of skipping class and going to have lunch with friends at that restaurant. This frame is followed by several shots of display cases full of trophies and sports paraphernalia. This section is full of Overton’s memories that include times with his friends at Hank Aaron - though the pictures of the people are missing, his memories include his friends - which he is sharing with the audience.

He then returns to the shot that he used in the beginning of his composition of Mama R’s classroom looking out into the hallway and the lockers outside her room. The text appears slowly, letter by letter across the screen on this picture as if someone were typing it as the reader was watching: “There are so many components that make me a leader and role-model for my peers. Hank Aaron instilled in me something that my parents couldn’t. It gave me the real world experience that I needed to move onto bigger and better things in life…” Again, Overton is referring to the way that Hank Aaron, because of the people there and the relationships he is involved in, has given him something to support him as he moves on to another phase of his life. At the same time, he is pointing to dialogic notion of help in a community, mentioning his job as a role model and leader.

The next frame is the same picture of Hank Aaron that the composition opened with only this time it is in color to signify current times, as Overton told me, and the text above its says, “Hank Aaron, a school of dreams, heritage, and family.” He is giving his community an identity in this frame. He then switches to
the next frame. The background of this frame is filled with art work of Overton’s. It is a map of Africa and the following text appears, “When asked to narrow down all the communities that I am involved in life was hard. Then I began to think about how my communities started. They had to start somewhere! Hank Aaron is a huge part of who the real Overton [Middle Name Last Name] is.” The background remains the same while the text fades away, creating a new frame as new words come into focus: “I am a HANK AARON [mascot]!!!” Overton uses this final frame to explain, as so many of the other students in the class did, how his community was responsible for making him who he was. Not only is Hank Aaron responsible for who he is, he considers himself Hank Aaron.

In his composition, Overton has not only told an audience about a community that he is a member of; he has at the same time told a story about himself. He gives the audience a historical account of his time at Hank Aaron (speaking of when his journey begins), he identifies himself as one with a job to do at Hank Aaron as a role model and runner for the track team (helper and supporter). He identifies the way his community has supported him, and finally, he makes the case for his community making him who he is.

With a first (and even second or third) reading of Overton’s composition, it seems clear that he is writing about a geographic space. Indeed, his project is about Hank Aaron, which is a geographic space that is not only discoursed into being by the way people speak about it, but is also housed within brick and mortar walls. A space does not get much more encapsulated by geography than when it is housed with in constructed walls. Even during my analysis as the
patterns of a conception of community constructed by relationships between people with a shared history, (where geography was not a constructor of community) Overton’s project stood out as not fitting my mold. However, when I applied the framework for community (Chapter 3) to the analysis of Overton’s project it became clear that although his community was located in a specific geographic space, what his community composition was about was the relationship there and that was what created the community not simply a group of people occupying the same space. Overton included geographic spaces that were the sights of significant memories that he shared with people he was close to in the school. He ate lunch most days in the cafeteria with his friends for his many years at Hank Aaron, he skipped class with some of these friends to eat at the Chinese restaurant across the street. The songs he included were songs that reminded him of these relationships. In short, although the walls of Hank Aaron provided a geographic space (and perhaps even a reason) for Overton’s community to exist, in actuality it is the relationships that form the community that is meaningful to Overton.

**Brief Summary of Analysis**

Analysis of students’ initial journal writing revealed that students structured their notions of community around the people who make up their community rather than around more tangible organizational structures such as geographic boundaries, organization membership, or even biologic connections. Further, journal writings suggested that community was responsible for fulfilling a need. That is, a community (and the people who make up that community) has a job to
do. In these discussions of community as a structure of people with a job to do, the notion of help and support surfaced repeatedly. According to the students’ journal writings, the job of community is to help the members of said community. Of further significance to the notion of community was the idea that what created community was not the proximity of people. That is, people standing together, working near one another, or attending daily classes together do not necessarily constitute a community. Instead, what creates a community among people are the relationships between the people. In that way, community is something that can transcend geographic space. Furthermore, what began to surface was that not only were the relationships between the people central, but so were their shared histories.

Analyzing the multimodal projects gave deeper insight into what relationships that create community look like, and what helping and supporting look like, along with who is responsible for helping and supporting in a community. The students reported in their multimodal compositions that helping and support could be doing one’s best for a team, giving and receiving loving embraces, always being there for one another, cheering a loved one up, and so forth. Again, the notion of shared history was incorporated to the notion of help and support. This idea of history does not assume a similar up bringing or background, but rather a history of experiences that the people have shared together over time. That is, the people involved in the community have spent an extended period of time together while helping and supporting each other. Finally, in the multimodal compositions the authors positioned themselves not
only as the recipients of help and support, but also as helpers and supporters. They mention this in ways that indicate that the reciprocal process of helping and supporting is what makes a community. This is markedly different from the notion that suggests people become a part of a community exclusively by getting help without giving it.

These multimodal compositions provided rich data for analysis on many levels. First of all, they provided textual data for analysis and interesting examples of how students used an opportunity in a language arts class to explore multimodal composition. Second of all, this analysis of data also permitted insight into the ways that multiple forms of texts which could stand alone to provide meaning or relay a message, can, when manipulated in a particular way with other kinds of stand-alone texts, create new and different meanings that are only understood together. Finally, these compositions provided a new way to examine students’ conceptions of community and created a new framework from which to analyze a study of community.

Each of these ideas has important implications for the area of education, both theoretically as it provides direction for future research and pedagogically as it relates to the teaching of writing in schools. In chapter 5 I will discuss all of these implications as they relate to the analysis of data.
Chapter 5

CONSTRUCTION OF COMMUNITY AND IMPLICATIONS

Findings revealed that students defined their communities by the people who were in them rather than by defining them as geographic locations that consisted of people. Key to the way that people organized themselves into their communities, according to the students, was not their close proximity, similar lifestyle, or even blood relationships. Rather, it was the relationships between the people involved and their shared history within these close relationships, which is markedly different from having a similar background or upbringing. These community-creating relationships were built on the help and support of members. The students wrote about community members as those who helped and supported one another. Through their multimodal compositions it became apparent that such help and support was particularly of an emotional nature, as many students wrote about how their community members could be counted on to extend support in trying times, helping them to not be sad or motivating them to perform at a higher level. Many of the students also wrote about a willingness on the part of community members to “do anything” for one another. This
suggests a willingness to be a helper and supporter on a level that goes beyond pep talks and pats on the back. Most important to this discussion of community, however, is the way that the help and support provided throughout a significant period of time is reciprocated. That is, members build these relationships (i.e., build community) through helping and supporting one another. It is not one sided. Their compositions and journals suggest that this reciprocal process is what builds not only the relationships but, by building the relationships, actually builds the community. This notion of community as built on relationships made by helping and supporting one another has not only implications for classroom pedagogy but particularly for the teaching of multimodal composition.

**How Multimodal Composition Creates a Classroom Community**

To begin thinking about how engaging in multimodal composition can create a space where classroom communities move beyond rhetorical conceptions to become the kinds of functioning communities that the students have written about, it is necessary to look at the classroom community as it was before we began this work.

While many teachers attempt to blur the lines between teachers and students by approaching education in more democratic ways and letting students create learning in ways that are meaningful to them, the fact remains that in most school situations the teachers retains control over both teaching and management of their classes. Teachers are responsible for facilitating the learning. It is helpful, then, to look at how teachers conceptualize what is
important, what is knowledge, and how that knowledge is learned in the classroom space. In this particular project, then, it is helpful to see how Mama R conceptualizes her class, her approach to writing and English instruction more generally, and, further, what the classroom instruction looked like before we began multimodal projects. This lends insight into how the classroom looked before multimodal composition so that it is possible to see how including a multimodal unit might change the classroom environment, the students’ work or perceptions of community. Likewise, it also allows for an examination into how the teacher’s teaching style and how her decisions might impact what multimodality looks like in this classroom.

Mama R’s classroom was one where students find support from the teacher. Students reported that she was a good teacher because of her ability to help them understand the material, as well as because of her consideration for their learning. They made note of the way that her class and her approach to teaching was different than what they find in many other classes. During one interview, the students regularly talked to me informally about how in many other classes they felt as though once information was presented they had limited opportunities to grasp the information, skill, or concept before the class would move on to something new, with or without them. As Aliyah put it, “If you don’t get it, you don’t get it” (interview 11/06). Students also recognize that it is more than just her taking additional time to explain information that set Mama R’ class apart from other classes; it is also the way she tried to find ways to connect the material to their lives and to their style of learning. As Aliyah says, “[It’s] just that
with certain teachers, some teachers, you get in their classroom and they’re like, ‘We’re going to do this.’” (interview, 11/06). But David pointed out, “Mama R explains a text xxx and we learn a lot” (David, Interview, 11/06).

Helping and supporting one another is a recurrent job of members of a community. However, students wrote in their community compositions that they had roles as helpers. Although Mama R helps and supports her students, when applying the framework for community developed from the body of students’ work to the classroom, the most noticeable deficiency is the need for the dialogic nature of help, love and support within community that the students have written about, there still needs to be a way for the students to also be members who help, and support. As much as Mama R tried to support and help her students, there was still very little space allowed for them to help and support her. While they had a role in her class - to be students - they did not have the space to be in the role that they have written about as centrally important to their communities, that of reciprocator of help and support. Further, while it is possible that students helped one another with assignments, helping and supporting was not a part of the curriculum. While it is certain that help, support, and love occur between classmates, perhaps even within the geographic space of the classroom, it is likely that this help occurs as a result of the community memberships that exist outside of the classroom. However, engaging in multimodal compositions changed the classroom community. It created a curriculum that made the relationship between classroom community members as helpers and supporters dialogic in nature. Further, these opportunities for reciprocal support provided by
the multimodal composition process became a part of the curriculum and the school-based literacy events themselves.

**Multimodal Composition as a Way to Create Classroom Community: In an Under Resourced Classroom**

Mama R and I shared the responsibility for planning, teaching and interacting with the students during the first two quarters of this project. I was solely responsible for teaching the unit the final quarter. This forced me to confess my lack of technical skill to the students. Prior to this project, I had never done any kind of digital media work. Mama R was familiar with Photo Story and knew that it was a program that we could download for free -- an important consideration since we had no funds for purchasing a program. Our plan was that students would use this program for their own work. I enlisted the help of my tech-savvy brother and partner, and learned how to put together a basic Photo Story project. This is the composition which I shared with the class to kick off our first multimodal unit. The assignment that night was for students to download Photo Story. The following day, the students brought it to our attention that because of the restrictions and firewalls placed on the students' laptops by the school district they were unable to download the necessary software. They did, however, already have Movie Maker on their computers. A few of the students informed us they could just use that program and one student brought his nearly-completed Movie Maker project to show us. This proved somewhat problematic, as neither Mama R nor I were familiar with Movie Maker. With no support staff, no knowledge of Movie Maker, and little computer knowledge beyond writing
papers for school and checking email, we wondered how we were going to teach these students how to use Movie Maker. Our project was now significantly under-resourced in the skills and knowledge department.

We found that lack of knowledge was not the only difficulty in our first multimodal unit that we ran across. Access to fully functional equipment was also an issue. We had access to three digital cameras for students to use that we checked out from the school library. Excitedly, we brought them in and proceeded to hand them out to students. Unfortunately, each camera was missing something significant. Although we had students who brought in pictures they wanted to use for their Movie Maker projects, the school did not have a scanner to convert those physical photos to digital images. Some students did not have access to computers that they could use outside of school. We realized as we began to think about photographs that we were working with very limited resources and were beginning to worry. However, this adversity also provided opportunity, since this is also when the classroom space turned into a classroom community and the students took roles as helpers and supporters.

Instead of being frustrated, the students helped to unpack the cameras, looked for various missing parts, and then decided what was missing and what we needed to get going. Mama R and I didn’t explicitly ask them to, but they helped us with this. The students then cannibalized cords and manuals and battery chargers from each camera to try rebuild one functioning camera. Without our asking, students grouped up and took turns using the one camera we had to take pictures they needed for their projects. I brought my camera from
home and the students treated it the same way, taking turns and teaming up to get the pictures they needed. Students shared pictures they had on their computers to aid fellow students in completing projects. A student worked with me for a large part of a class period because we could not find - even with the manual - a way to hook the digital camera up to a computer. The students’ computers wouldn’t allow my camera to hook up, again because of district blocks, so we emailed photos back and forth.

The students supported our efforts to teach a multimodal unit in many other ways. For example, I didn’t know how to set up the LCD projector even though I needed it to show projects and teach lessons. One of the days that I was doing such a lesson, Mama R was absent. DaYaun, of the students who began to be identified as technically inclined, hooked it up for me and eventually taught me how to do it myself, even teasing me that something looked wrong the first time I did it myself. Overton finished his project quickly, also identifying himself in this way as a student who had a great knowledge of computers. He then helped Mama R and I how to learn how to use Movie Maker. These lessons were never particularly formal, and were often conducted on a need-to-know basis. One day after class, a small group of students and teachers were gathered around Mama R’ desk watching Overton’s project. While we were watching, I asked him how he got two songs to be part of his composition because I only knew how to use a single song. He was able to show me how he had done so.

Beyond helping their teachers, the students also helped one another throughout this composition unit, particularly during the spring. Because the
class was perfecting their multimodal compositions for a presentation, there were additional pressures on the class during this time. The students not only felt pressure to finish the project by a particular deadline - something we had been much more flexible on the previous two quarters - but also to get their projects exactly the way they wanted them. By this time, I had recognized that some of the students were much more advanced in this process than I was. Being responsible for the teaching during the final quarter, I decided to make helping an explicit part of our process. I pointed out who had various skills and, echoing the students’ own conceptions of community as being like a family, told the students that for this project, we needed to be a family and help one another out. The students filled their roles as helpers and supporters. The process of getting these projects done was now as important as the product. I helped the students with editing and organizing; they helped one another with technology and other aspects of getting the projects done. In several of the conferences I had with students to talk about organization and editing, other students sat in to watch and help. The students shared power cords, mp3 players, photos, songs, and knowledge. When I asked students in the exit interviews who had helped them, it was never a sibling, friend outside of class, or parent who helped them; rather, it was always a fellow student that they reported as helping them finish.

There are many reasons why the students might have helped one another in the way that they did. Because Hank Aaron is a K-12 school, many of the students had been in the building together for many years. Perhaps it was their length of time together to which their helpful nature could be attributed. It may
have been the structure of the school which considers members of the school to be like a family and responsible for one another. It might be a cultural way of being, as all the students were African American in an African centered school with predominantly African American teachers. I doubt that the ‘why’ can be accounted for (or is singular) when thinking about why the students helped one another in the ways they did. However, in teaching/facilitating a multimodal lesson, the process in which the members of the classroom were engaged to create compositions - not necessarily the topic of the compositions or the finished products themselves - was what was important to the creation of a classroom community that functioned as a helping/supportive space.

**Creating Multimodal Composition**

As students were working together and sharing resources, helping not only one another but also their teachers in this multimodal composition work, it became apparent that it was the process of doing multimodal composition that was as important as the product. Limited resources changed the options that students had to work with and how they might convey their message, while personal choice heavily influenced how the students represented their projects.

Our class was very limited in the resources it had. Even though the students worked together to cannibalize parts to get one camera that was functional and worked together in order to manage the time each person got to use it, there was still limited time and availability of photographs. As previously mentioned, there was no scanner to digitize images and school computers had very strict filters. Taken together, these restrictions meant students were also
limited in the ways they could incorporate older and different photographs (i.e.,
those taken on school grounds during school hours).

In order to understand how the students chose to utilize their photographic
text to convey their messages, especially in light of the restrictions they faced, I
asked them to tell me about their choices. The students told me that the choices
in pictures came from what they had. Again, there was much sharing among
members of the classroom community. This was also evidenced in the final
projects, as the same photographs were visible in many different projects. In the
projects about friends and family, for example, the students used the pictures of
friends that they had available to them. In Mahogany’s composition about her
mom, she took a few pictures of her mom, included some that she already had of
herself, and downloaded some others to fill in gaps. For example, she begins
her project with the written text, “the love of my life is not,” and then follows it by
downloaded photographs of money, cars, handsome men, and expensive
clothing. This was something that Mahogany and I talked about in the
conference we had during in class work days. She didn’t feel that she had
enough pictures of her mom to do an entire project about her. So we talked
about ways we could structure her project to include the pictures she did have on
her computer and possibly integrate some from the Internet to complete her task
and tell a story. Antoine faced a similar situation with his football composition, as
he only had three pictures, all of which had been shared with him by members of
the class.
Three groups of students borrowed my digital camera to take pictures around the school. Overton took pictures of school features and incorporated the pictures that he had in his computer previously of students from the school. David, D’Anthony, DuJaun, and Bill pictures that were similar to the photos Overton took, but also posed with staff, friends, and by themselves in order to tell their story pictorially. Jamea and Kelly had a fourth party take pictures of them with their other best friend while they took on particular poses that they felt would relay particular messages to the audience. For example, they took one photograph of all three girls talking on their cell phones because, as Jamea says, they talk on the phone with one another all the time. They added those to pictures that they had in their computer and some pictures of the skyline of the city where the school is located along with a picture of the school from the school’s website to make it “different” so that they didn’t have only pictures of themselves.

Part of using digital media is thinking about how the photographs and pictures work together to convey a message. This is not a discussion of intertextuality, but rather an awareness of teaching students how to make all their modalities work together: how to decide what pictures, music or text to use to relay the message that they are hoping to relay to a particular audience. Again, the musical text was limited to what the students had available on their mp3 players or on their computers. However, the choices that the students made were heavily influenced by their own personal histories. This was particularly true for the musical selections. With the exception of three projects, all of the
students chose several different songs for their compositions. When I would ask them to tell me about their music, it was common for the students to talk about how they just liked their song choices. However, they would then begin to explain their choices in more depth. Jamea and Kelly chose “Glamorous” (2006) by Fergie because they felt it showed how they were growing up from tomboyish girls into young ladies who have made the decision to not only wear more feminine clothes, but also to dress in similar styles on most days. Huey’s “Pop, Lock, and Drop It” (2007) was a song I recognized as a club song. Jamea told me that she chose that song when she talked about the Homecoming dance in her song because they played that song over and over again. Overton made some musical choices in similar ways. When I first met Overton in the fall, he talked about being tired of being in the same building and frustrated with Hank Aaron High. However, over the course of the year, Overton began stepping with the school’s step team and had spent more time learning the principals of the school and working as a team with members of his step line. He told me that this gave him a newfound pride in his school and caused him to recognize that he was lucky to have been in the same building for most of his school career. This was one reason he chose to write about Hank Aaron for his final community project. His choice of Mary J Blige’s “I Found My Everything” (2005) reflects his recent passion for his school community. However, Aaliyah’s “At Your Best”, (2005) was a love song, and he did not edit it in a way that really changed it. Further, this song was released in 1994. At this time, Overton would have been five. However, in 2002, after Aaliyah’s untimely death, it was re-released on the
All My Love album. Overton told me that he chose this song not for the lyrics really, but because when he was in sixth grade, this was the song that was on all the time and it reminded him of being a younger student at Hank Aaron. Further, the Kanye West song “Gone” (2005) he chose to play when he wrote the section about the track team was the song he listened to when he ran. His choice of that music didn’t have anything to do with lyrical message either. Rather, these songs were representations of Overton as a person and his experience at Hank Aaron. Janessa chose Jill Scott’s Family Reunion (2004) to play when she wrote about her family as it was the song she said they always played at family reunions.

Although the resources were very limited and these compositions were no longer than four minutes, students were making many decisions about the various kinds of texts (written, musical, and photographic) that they were using. This brings to light a conversation that needs to occur regarding multimodal composition. Both the teaching community and the research community need to work together to consider if the rules and conventions are different for multimodal composition than they are for standard printed text. Does the audience change how a composition is written? How do you grade or critique the way that multiple forms of text work together in a new way once they are combined. How do you teach students to make these kinds of combinations? How can a member of a particular audience read a composition that includes the more cultural conventions and reference that are imbedded in modalities like photographs, art,
and music? I argue that these questions confirm that multimodal composition has different conventions and rules, but these are yet to be discovered.

Theoretical and Research Implications

This study used Holland et al.’s (1998) framework for figured worlds as a means to discuss community. A figured world is a world that people work within and against in social contexts. Figured worlds are built through narrative and the use of language. That is, figured worlds are created through people’s social linguistic interactions. While abstract, a figured world is still a very real construct. It comes into being because of the social narratives of the people who create it and live it. Holland et al. posit that the important idea around a figured world is that it is a “socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized” (1998, p. 52). Central to this is the recognition of characters and actors. It is not only the characters that live and work within this world that are integral in the definition of this figured world. Those who may not participate in this world as are also crucial.

When one figured world is created, its construction creates not only members but also outsiders. The creation of a figured world necessarily creates another figured world that exists at least because it is not the one that was just created. A different set of social interactions, actors, narratives, and discourses can create a different figured world. Because figured worlds are built with narratives over time, they are not tangible. By focusing on their communities as being defined by the people in them and the relationships between these people,
the students used the literacy event of a multimodal composition unit to verbalize figured worlds of which they are a part. These communities exist in the students’ real lives because of their interactions around language with the people who are a part of those lives. The students wrote about the constructs of figured worlds in their multimodal compositions. They wrote about the actors in their figured worlds by naming people, either by using printed text to name them or by including pictures of them. They discussed in their texts, their journals, and their interviews the way that these communities are created by the social interactions between the actors in their discussions of community members as helpers and supporters.

In the both the pen-to-paper journals and the multimodal compositions that were analyzed, students’ ideas of what a community is, what is important about community, and what community does were clear. Students wrote about their communities by writing about people, their relationships with people, and the actions of others. They defined their own ways of being in these communities as helpers and supporters as they have illustrated the roles of special individuals who do the same for them. They have further discussed the need for a shared history, which I interpret to mean not a similar history or similar upbringing, but rather a shared history of being in contact with one another. They have chosen not to focus on the negative, leaving out messages such as “this is what is dysfunctional” or “this is what I hate” about my community. Instead, they are using these multimodal compositions as a means to author their communities as they would want them to be, ideally, and as they no doubt are at times. Taking
into consideration that the students recognize that their communities make them who they are, they are also authoring themselves as they think they should be or as they see themselves.

Authoring the world is putting words to the world that addresses an individual. Simply stated, authoring the world is the process of naming the figured world(s) that one must live inside, outside, and around. In authoring the world, an individual uses the language and their familiar previous social interactions with this language and juxtaposes them against the new figured worlds (or new parts of familiar figured worlds) that she or he is dealing with. This use of language as a tool to create symbolic meaning is more than a way to identify the world that one is living in. This identification and naming is a part of the inner voice of the one who is authoring her or his self. The way that the inner voice names its world is more about sense, whereas the way that the world is defined through spoken language is more about meaning (Holland et al.1998). That is to say, two individuals may use the same spoken word to identify an object in their world, but the way they interact around that object, and the way that they feel about it – even though they would identify it with the same word - may be totally different. In authoring the world, an individual uses language and his or her familiar previous social interactions with language in order to juxtapose the language and prior experiences against the new figured worlds (or new parts of familiar figured worlds) that she or he is dealing with. Because social interactions and language are always dialogic, when one authors her or his world, she or he is at the same time through this process also imposing their
history and ideology through the use of language as a tool on the world in which she or he lives while also taking in the history and ideology of those they are interacting with. In this way, authoring the world is a dialogic process. In the act of authoring the world, a person must also author her or himself into this world. In this way, an individual also authors the self. In authoring the self, one creates an identity within the figured world that she or he is living. Likewise, while an individual is busy authoring her or himself into a figured world, others are at the same time authoring them. As authoring the world is a dialogic process, so too is authoring the self. According to Holland et al. (1998) “…the self is a position that is ‘addressed’ by and ‘answers’ others and the ‘world’ (the physical and cultural environment). In answering (which is the stuff of existence), the self ‘authors’ the world-including itself and others” (p. 173). The process of authoring is continually happening, although it is not a conscious process. An individual does not sit down and think about how they are going to go about their day, people they pass, rooms they walk into, meetings they attend, conversations they have. Rather, “the authoring self is invisible to the self” (p. 173). The way that one authors the world determines how she or he will be in the world. This process, however, is not a static one but is rather constantly ongoing and changing but at the same time is never separated from historical authoring.

The analysis of the students’ traditional pen-to-paper journal writings about community and their multimodal writing about community yielded similar results. In both the pen-to-paper journal writings and the multimodal projects, students made note of the significance of shared history and the work that
communities do. Their ideas of community were recurrent in both kinds of writing. In both kinds of writing students used an open space of composition to express their own ideas as a way to author their communities as they should be. Many of the same attributes and functions of community were present in both multimodal and printed text writing. What stands out about the way that students have authored their communities using multimodal composition is the authors wrote themselves into their communities when they used multimodal composition and they didn’t in printed text. In writing about their communities using traditional journal writing, students wrote about communities as though they were outside of them, although they did acknowledge the reciprocal nature of the actions of the people by highlighting how members of a community help each other. They demonstrated that they were expressing their own ideas by using language such as, “To me community is….” However, they did not write about what they did in their communities or what their communities did for them specifically or who they were as a result of their community. Overton did make note of this in his final journal after writing his multimodal composition and after my interview with him where we talked about this, though he was the only one.

In their multimodal compositions, on the other hand, students authored themselves as centrally located in their compositions. They talked about their communities as being important because of their membership. The same notions of history, support, help, love, and identity came through clearly, however, these functions and attributes directly applied to themselves as well as others in their multimodal compositions. They talked not only about the shared
history of the members of their communities, but they also talked about their own history in that community. Students not only wrote about how the members of their communities helped, loved, and supported one another, but also about how the members of their communities helped, loved, and supported them. Finally, what is of key importance is the way that in their Movie Maker compositions the students wrote about their own roles in their communities as helpers, supporters, and lovers of community members. Movie maker allowed the students to put themselves in their compositions. The students were aware of this distinction, giving it as their answer again and again when I asked them what distinguished composing in Movie Maker from writing a paper.

**Limitations and Critique**

This study paints a rather idyllic picture of my time, the research, and the compositions produced at Hank Aaron. Admittedly, much of my time there was a rosy idyllic teacher/researcher experience. I was working a geographic community that was home to me. Additionally I love the school, the work and the kids. I made no to attempt to detach myself from the participants and a critical analysis of this work might argue that the analysis of the research (and likewise the students analysis of their own communities) is romantic in nature. This work was not without stress, (often near panic wondering if the study would be able to continue) aggravation and problems. Some of the frustration that Mama R and I had was over the same issues that seem to keep most teachers away from attempting multimodality in the classroom. We were constantly at a loss for
knowledge (how to work the equipment, how to work the program, etc) and there was never enough time. Because we were always a bit behind in figuring how to deal with equipment (finding it, fixing it, figuring it out) everything took longer than we expected. Concessions had to be made time wise and keeping a teacher journal and taking field notes actually in the field were cuts that we made as a team.

The students felt that frustration also and we often extended deadlines as far as possible. This became more frustrating and full of pressure when state curriculums became pressing. With all of the benchmarks and state testing constantly hanging over Mama R’s head (and over the whole district) spending weeks at a time to complete one multimodal composition (which would not be on the exam) was a risk to take. On more than one occasion, I wondered if Mama R would finally announce that we had to get to ‘real’ school work. I became particularly concerned about this as a researcher considering the other two sites participating in this research project did just that.

The utter reliance on technology became a problem as well in that there was little tangible work for me to collect. Failure on my part, or on another student’s part to save something correctly (again, our lack of technology skills were a deficit for gathering research and multimodal instruction) could result in losing volumes of work. This happened early in our research and we lost several projects. Likewise, while being so involved in the classroom and hustling to find things and get them to work was invaluable in giving me a more emic perspective into teaching multimodal composition, it also took away from my field
notes. I was forced to write them after the class sessions using memory and my video recordings of classroom sessions. This is where I again felt the frustration of working with multimodality in an under resourced building. Hank Aaron is an old building. I found out that the electrical sockets (and there were not many) don’t always hold a plug. Anytime that happened, my video of classroom data was erased. It took us half the school year to figure out why we were losing data. It was particularly frustrating because we were using the electrical cord as a back up so that we wouldn’t have to worry about a battery dying. It seemed that no matter how hard we tried to anticipate things that might go wrong, we fell short. All of our typical ‘teacher tricks’ to make up for lost time and stay on schedule, etc. did not seem to work as we were using multimodal composition. This frustration was further compounded by students’ failure to turn assignments in. I am still unsure as to if this was because students did not themselves view multimodal composition as a valid assignment, but rather something fun to do instead of real class work or if it was just the climate of the classroom that caused so few students to turn these assignments in. This practice continued throughout the school year and was a source of aggravation for both Mama R and myself. My goal, with multimodality being something that teachers do not embrace for exactly the same reasons mentioned above, was to show that multimodality is still valuable as a way to create composition and to build community, particularly in an under resourced school and with teachers who are novice. Indeed, I would argue that the value and community building was found within the struggle and aggravation.
My work was not the only work that was perhaps romantic in nature. The students also presented particularly romantic views of the communities that they chose to write about. In none of the final projects was there any discussion of problems with community, that the authors didn’t like their communities, or why they wanted to leave or change their communities. There are several possibilities for this. It is possible that students didn't want to write an account like this for a public audience (much like why I didn’t focus my research on how very difficult it was to actually do multimodal composition in the classroom for fear that others would be turned off from attempting it). Another possibility is that the students were authoring worlds not as they were but as they wanted them to be which in is an act of agency and a first step toward creating change in their community.

In this study, both in the act of researching and in teaching multimodal composition the heart of the learning exists in the tensions. The community of our classroom was built around the lack of resources and knowledge and the need to help one another. The learning grew out of sharing knowledge with one another. The projects were created as students shared things they did not have. My analysis of that data exists in its current form only as I struggled to make sense of what felt like lacking and incomplete data. Students filled in the gaps for me as I found them and corrected me when need be. Although in a sense they seem secondary to the focus of my research, the pieces of this research that might be considered overly romantic wouldn’t exist without the tensions this type of work creates.
Closing Remarks

Framing literacy as a social practice leads to research in the ways that students interact around text, the ways that they interact with one another around text, and the ways they interact with their own cultural models and histories around texts. These perspectives create a very different way of approach writing instruction. When conceptualizing literacy as a set of decoding skills, research revolves around quantitative data and grammatical errors. When conceptualizing the way that people are social around literacy, researchers study literacy events. For researchers to concentrate on what happens in a classroom rather than what finished products exist in a classroom is not a new concept in educational research. This research instead concentrates on literacy events. Bloome et al. (2004) define an event as, “a bounded series of actions and reactions that people make in response to each other at the level of face to face interactions” (p.6).

However, researching the process of doing multimodal composition creates a new way to think about the face-to-face actions and reactions that students have around literacy events. Because the students are working with multiple (and endless) media, the way they choose to put their compositions together is altogether different than the choices of which words to use to organize a composition. Instead of interacting only around the words on a page, they are interacting around available resources, whether photographs, audio, text, and/or the knowledge that they are able to pool together as a group. While the editing process, brainstorming, and thinking about audience are similar, in multimodal composition writers must not only think about the different artifacts they include
(be they graphics, words, photographs, music, or video) but they must also think about how these artifacts are juxtaposed on top of one another. Further, the notion of what constitutes a face-to-face interaction is different when students are engaging in multimodal composition. Multimodal composition creates new social interactions that, while still part of the educational process, may not be face-to-face interactions (for example, such interactions in this study included a series of emails between a student and myself about a means to transmit his project).

The students who participated in this research project noted repeatedly about how they felt they were able to include themselves in these projects in a way that traditional composition did not allow. This creates a series of questions about how the process of writing these multimodal compositions brings to light the personhood, identity, and agency that may be invisible in more traditional forms of writing. This brings to light a discussion of intertextuality. In chapter 1, I discussed intertextuality as “texts are juxtaposed.” This juxtaposition can be the references used in this dissertation in the form of quotes, or the way that this work builds on earlier research. In a classroom, it might be the way that historical fiction is used in conjunction with a traditional history text to tell the story of history more fully. However, assuming a New Literacy Studies stance, these texts may be linguistic social interactions, popular media, other texts from school, and so forth. This is where intertextuality becomes important to a discussion of the teaching of multimodal composition.

Using this framework for intertextuality, compositions would be considered intertextual pieces because of the way that they are juxtaposed within students’
cultural history and the school space. However, this assumes that multimodal compositions are intertextual as a process. It is significant to remember that unlike traditional printed text compositions, multimodal compositions are writings that are intentionally intertextual as a product. In these projects, students work with many media, carefully constructing the positioning of each one to create a finished product. How they make the decisions to do this are social events. They are thinking about what they want to say and the best way, with the resources allowed, conveying that message to a particular audience. With these ways of thinking about multimodal composition, the processes that are involved in creating the final product are the focus of attention when considering the literacy event. There also needs to be some recognition of the way the product is intertextual and how the product reads to different audiences. That is, in the same way traditional printed text compositions are proofread to see if they make sense according to standard conventions of writing, these multimodal compositions need to be examined for their intertextual sense.

Beyond all of the thinking about what to include, what not to include, and where to put each piece that goes into making a multimodal project, the students also have to deal with learning the technology. This is a new set of processes in itself. In chapter 2, the review of literature pointed to how multimodal composition is viewed as a supplement to traditional instruction. Very little research looks at how multimodality has been incorporated into classrooms as a legitimate form of composition instruction. Most research into multimodality is located in after school programs. However, when teachers are confronted with
digital media in the classroom one major issue in is the teaching of technology. This becomes complicated because just as the options for what to include are virtually unlimited, so too are the uses of technology. In this particular study, it seemed to Mama R and me that the students had mastered Movie Maker. However, even after the projects were finished and I was conducting the final interviews, one of the students asked me if I knew it was possible to add video to a project. He had tried it, no doubt during a class, to see if it would work and was excited that it would. This led to a conversation between me and his partners about what kind of new project they could do with my video camera or even video they could get from the internet and Movie Maker. The process of learning the new technology is central to the way multimodal composition can create a classroom community (as conceptualized by the students). There are endless applications of technology that the students can use in this kind of composition. No one knows it all in this kind of a setting. Rather, some know more about some things and others know more about others. For everyone to do the work that they want to do, there needs to be some sharing of resources, some help and support, which creates the kind of community that students find so important in other parts of their lives. The teacher, in this case, is not dispensing the knowledge because the teacher often does not know the most about technology, music, or particular graphics that may be available. Instead, multimodal compositions put the many layers of students’ worlds, their perspectives on those worlds, and their knowledge about technology squarely into the language arts classroom.
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