

Multimodality Matters:  
Exploring Words, Images, and Design Features  
in a Seventh-Grade English Language Arts Classroom

by

Stephanie Francesca Reid

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Frank Serafini, Chair  
Lindsey Moses  
Josephine Marsh  
Wendy R. Williams

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## ABSTRACT

This interpretive dissertation study sought to understand what happened when a seventh-grade teacher introduced multimodal concepts and texts into his English Language Arts classroom. Multimodal texts contain linguistic features (words and sentences) but also images and graphic design features. The classroom teacher described himself as a novice with regards to multimodal literacies instruction and had previously focused predominantly on written or spoken texts. Motivating his decision to design and enact a multimodal literacies pedagogy was his belief that students needed to garner experience interpreting and composing the kinds of texts that populated his students' social worlds. Therefore, I asked: What happened when multimodal narratives were used as mentor texts in a seventh-grade English Language Arts classroom? Drawing from ethnographic and case study methods, I observed and gathered data regarding how the teacher and his students enacted and experienced an eight-week curriculum unit centered on multimodal concepts and multimodal texts. My findings describe the classroom teacher's design decisions, the messiness that occurred as the classroom was (re)made into a classroom community that valued modes beyond written and spoken language, and the students' experiences of the curriculum as classroom work, lifework, play, and drudgery. Based on my findings, I developed six assertions: (1) when designing and enacting multimodal literacies curriculum for the first time, exposing students to a wide range of multimodal texts took precedence; (2) adapted and new multimodal literacy practices began to emerge, becoming valued practices over time; (3) literacy events occurred without being grounded in literacy practices; (4) in a classroom dedicated to writing, modes of representation and communication and their associated tools and

materials provided students with resources for use in their own writing/making; (5) the roles of the teacher and his students underwent change as modal expertise became sourced from across the classroom community; and (6) students experienced the multimodal literacies curriculum as play, classroom work, lifework, and drudgery. The dissertation study concludes with implications for teachers and researchers looking to converge multimodality theory with pedagogical practices and maps future research possibilities.

## DEDICATION

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

I was born and raised in South East England, and my learning took place within an educational system that sought to separate and track students along the lines of assessed strengths in reading, writing, and mathematics. To succeed academically and pursue my dreams of attending university to study English Literature, I learned the rules of the literacy game I needed to play from an early age. I studied mentor texts and examples of written responses, I practiced the art of the timed five-paragraph essay, and I read and re-read the canonical written language novels that dominated the English curriculum. I made sure that I was adept at the kinds of reading and writing valued within school structures and appreciated by the public examiners responsible for assigning me the grades I needed to enter my university of choice.

Concurrent with my school reading and writing, I practiced different kinds of meaning-making in what little spare time I had. I experimented with written language, writing short stories that garnered recognition locally. However, I always illustrated those stories. I set myself research projects over the summer holidays, producing a series of booklets with written information combined with illustrations and cartoon strips. In school, I jumped at the chance to work on more unorthodox projects, most notably a Classical Civilization coursework assignment that permitted me to examine representations of Venus/Aphrodite in Classical Greek sculpture and Renaissance art. My final project combined images and words, art history, mythology, and literary and art analyses. But those academic moments when I was allowed to use multiple modes of

representation and communication to demonstrate my thinking and interpret texts comprised of modes beyond written language were few and far between.

For the first three years of my teaching career, I taught in England. I spent those years preparing students in grades 6-12 for various public examinations. I taught my students the rules of the literacy game I had learned years before as a student myself, and I earned accolades for helping my students succeed and pass high-stakes examinations. It was difficult to question or deviate from practices that were threefold engrained in students, teachers, and the institution of school. A very narrow set of practices and texts counted as reading and writing.

### **Developing a Multimodal Literacies Approach to Pedagogy**

When I emigrated to the United States in 2004, I was hired as an eighth-grade Reading and English Language Arts teacher in a Wisconsin middle school. With no curriculum in hand and no directives from a public examination body that governed text-choice and sanctioned literacy practices, for the first time in my teaching career, I experienced the freedom and autonomy to create a reading curriculum that I felt students needed to succeed in the world beyond school. Essentially, I began my teaching journey in America as “the world told” through language became “the world shown” through visuals and the image-dominant texts of the screen (Kress, 2003, p. 1). The Internet was fully-established, and digital tools were becoming increasingly available and affordable. Language was still a dominant part of human communication, but modes such as image, moving image, sound, and design features required immediate attention, particularly in this new era of digital technology and online communication.

Thus, I committed myself to developing a multimodal literacies curriculum. My students continued to learn assessment-oriented writing (Gee & Hayes, 2011) that would help them score well on standardized tests, tests that became increasingly important as my 12 years of teaching middle-school progressed into the current era of assessment and accountability. However, I also provided students with opportunities to examine and analyze a range of text-types (films, television commercials, music videos, picturebooks, and art, for example) and created opportunities for multimodal composing (visual podcasts, documentary-making, illustrated texts, and digital storytelling). The learning my students undertook in my classes did not always resemble what was happening in other classrooms or align with the pedagogical choices made by other teachers within my discipline. I sometimes needed to offer a rationale for my instructional decisions to a variety of stakeholders: other teachers, administrators, parents, and, sometimes, even students themselves.

My rationale for taking a multimodal literacies approach to reading and writing was threefold. First, I believed that teachers needed to prepare students for a social world in which multimodal texts proliferate and are ubiquitous. From my perspective, students needed to become discerning and critical reader-viewers (Serafini, 2012) of the texts circulating throughout their world. Students must be prepared to understand how a range of texts work. Second, I felt certain that students needed practice in producing multimodal texts if they are to participate in the kinds of representational and communicational exchanges that exist in their world. Five paragraph essays, for example, have power in schools and are deemed valuable by school personnel and assessment

bodies, but are not relevant to students' lives beyond school structures (J. P. Gee, personal communication, March 24, 2017).

Third, a multimodal literacies approach to curriculum, instruction, and assessment is concerned with education as a democratic, equitable, and inclusive possibility (Cowan & Kress, 2017). Multimodal literacy practices align with the inclusivity and accessibility promoted through the Universal Design for Learning framework by: (a) creating multiple access points to course content by including resources constructed from multiple modes and media; and (b) permitting students to express themselves and represent their thinking using multiple modes, media, and text-types (Kleinfeld, 2019). Furthermore, literacy scholarship has shown that the traditional literacy practices that continue to prevail in schools align with White middle- and upper-class ways of knowing (O'Brien, 2012). When acts of representation and communication are limited to particular modes and genres, such as written language and the five-paragraph essay, only those students experienced in producing valued texts through sanctioned literacy practices are recognized as successful and proficient meaning-makers. As Cowan and Kress (2017) observed, a multimodal approach to literacy education seeks to acknowledge and value all students as meaning-makers who are allowed to represent and share their thinking in a variety of multimodal ways.

### **The Foundations of My Research Agenda**

My work with students in my middle-school reading and English Language Arts classroom is central to my identity as a researcher and my current scholarship. Consistent with my rationale for multimodal literacies pedagogy, my scholarship has first focused on analyzing multimodal texts such as picturebooks (Serafini & Reid, 2019a) and illustrated



novels (Reid & Serafini, 2018) in order to understand how the modes within these texts function both individually and together. My goal in conducting this initial research was to establish knowledge that I can share with classroom practitioners regarding implications for multimodal literacies pedagogy. My scholarship has shown that conventional and language-oriented measures of text complexity do not account for the complexity of multimodal texts, particularly in texts where the images counterpoint the words in the text (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2000) and do not offer strict alignment with the verbal narrative. My scholarship also suggests that multimodal narratives challenge the concept of a single embedded main idea. Expanding interpretation beyond words to include images and design features often results in multiple interpretations, particularly if the mode of image is deemed to be as potentially important as the mode of written language (Jewitt, Bezemer, & O'Halloran, 2016).

Second, I have sought to understand what happens when English Language Arts teachers have incorporated multimodal texts and concepts into their curriculum. My initial research took place in an eighth-grade classroom (Reid & Dyer, 2018). The unit of study centered on a multimodal novel by Brian Selznick (2015). This study highlighted the importance of challenging assumptions about the students we teach, their needs, and their academic desires. At the beginning of the study, the teacher identified a student who she thought would be enamored with the units of study and the visual aspects because she was an excellent artist. While other student-artists did indeed express pleasure in being able to share their thinking multimodally, the student identified by the teacher did not appear to like many aspects of the unit, highlighting in a reflection written at the end of the unit that she might have enjoyed the multimodal novel had she not come across it in a

school class. This study influenced how I approached my dissertation study and suggested a need to carefully document the perspectives of the teacher who designed and enacted the curriculum, together with the viewpoints of the students who experienced the enacted curriculum.

Furthermore, acutely aware that traditional literacy practices continue to be privileged in school spaces, particularly in this era of standardized assessment and teacher accountability (Mills & Exley, 2014; Siegel, 2012), I wanted to understand how Mr. Bergeron (all participant names are self-selected pseudonyms), an English Language Arts classroom teacher, designed and enacted a multimodal literacies curriculum for the first time. I wished to understand how a range of multimodal texts would be framed and positioned by Mr. Bergeron within a classroom setting, and I wanted to explore how different students interpreted these texts and performed the classroom work assigned by their teacher. I wanted to make multimodal literacies pedagogy, something that was so familiar and so central to my understanding of literacy education, strange again (Erickson, 1986, p. 121). I hoped that this work would benefit classroom teachers or researchers supporting classroom teachers in expanding what counts as literacy in school English Language Arts contexts, particularly those teachers who are creating and enacting multimodal literacies pedagogy for the first time.

### **Overview of the Study and Research Questions**

Beginning in February 2019, this interpretive study examined what happened when a middle school English Language Arts teacher introduced multimodal texts and concepts into his seventh-grade curriculum and classroom context. Mr. Bergeron, the teacher in this study, was passionate about writing instruction and composition and had,

accordingly, emphasized writing and grammar skills in previous curriculum units. He described himself as a novice with regards to multimodal literacy practices and texts, but he was interested in incorporating them explicitly into his curriculum. Thus, in this study, Mr. Bergeron designed and enacted a multimodal literacy curriculum unit intended to support students in exploring and understanding how different modes of communication and representation (for example, image, written language, and design features) contribute to the meaning potential of multimodal texts.

The curriculum unit required students to read and transact with a wide range of multimodal texts, including picturebooks, graphic novels, and multimodal novels. A multimodal novel is a book-length narrative that communicates its story through combinations of words, images, and design elements (Reid & Serafini, 2018). Students needed to explore how words, images, and design features worked together to offer meaning potential. The multimodal texts at the heart of this study demanded that reader-viewers (Serafini, 2012) understood how both words and images work with each other as part of complex narrative wholes or syntagms (Barthes, 1967/1986). Mr. Bergeron also provided students with opportunities to compose with multiple modes of representation and communication. Funds from Arizona State University's Graduate and Professional Student Association, the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College's Learning, Literacies, and Technologies Programming Committee, and the International Literacy Association's Helen M. Robinson Grant supported this study and the purchase of the texts used by Mr. Bergeron in his seventh-grade classroom.

Specifically, I asked the following overarching research question: What happened when multimodal narratives were used as mentor texts in a seventh-grade English

Language Arts classroom? The following sub-questions helped me answer the overarching question. Those sub-questions are:

- What did the classroom teacher do when literacy learning was expanded to include multimodal concepts and texts?
- What did students do when literacy learning was expanded to include multimodal concepts and texts?

### **Theoretical Rationale for the Study**

A social semiotics perspective on multimodality heavily informed my research. From this theoretical perspective, all modes of representation and communication have potential to contribute to the meaning made from multimodal phenomena (Jewitt et al., 2016; Kress, 2010, 2017). Language is still considered a significant source of meaning potential, but no more or less so than other modes (Jewitt, 2017). Multimodal texts are constructed from multiple modes of communication and representation, such as written or spoken language, image, and design features (Kress, 2010; Jewitt, 2017). Picturebooks, graphic novels, web pages, and print advertisements are all examples of multimodal texts.

Multimodality theory has important implications for English Language Arts instructors and literacy education researchers. If our pedagogical goal is to support students in their communication and text interpretation endeavors, then ensuring that students can read and compose texts comprised of multiple modes should be a priority. If English Language Arts instruction is limited to written and spoken language then, from this theoretical perspective, teachers and schools are also limiting students' abilities to interpret a range of multimodal texts and make their thinking material through multimodal composition (Reid & Serafini, 2018; Reid & Moses, 2019).

In recognizing the multimodal nature of texts, scholarship in multimodality also acknowledges the necessity of examining how modes work together and combine to offer meaning potential (Jewitt, 2017). As Jewitt (2017) observed, the meaning potential offered through any given mode of representation and communication is modified and changed by the meaning potential offered by other modes “co-present” or “co-operating” within a given text (Jewitt, 2017, p. 16). Exemplifying this kind of theoretical work, a wide range of children’s literature scholars have explored word-image relationships in picturebooks in order to understand how intermodal combinations of images, language, and design features impact meaning-making (e.g., D. Lewis, 2001; Nikolajeva & Scott, 2000; Serafini, 2012; Sipe, 1998, 2012). Thus, in order to make meaning from a picturebook, readers should draw from both the words and images and consider how both modes contribute to and modify the interpretations under construction.

However, much of this scholarship has remained at the theoretical level and does not explore how teachers and students in classrooms might make use of theories regarding the intersections of modal components within multimodal texts. Due to the multimodal nature of the culture in which teachers and their students are immersed, it is vital that students develop their understanding of how modes work together. Such understanding would likely increase students’ knowledge regarding how multimodal texts work and would help students acquire valuable metalanguage for talking about multimodal texts (Pantaleo, 2011; Serafini, 2014). Additionally, such expertise might also benefit students by expanding their awareness of the range of semiotic resources available to them as they compose for and communicate with the audiences that matter in their own lives (Reid & Moses, 2019).

While calls for English Language Arts educators to address multimodal texts within the secondary curriculum are not new (Albers & Harste, 2007; Considine, 1987; New London Group, 1996), in too many secondary English Language Arts classrooms, students receive very little focused literacy instruction in modes beyond written and spoken language (Khadka & Lee, 2019; Serafini, 2014). School-based institutions tend to practice old paradigms of literacy (O'Brien, 2012; Curwood & Cowell, 2011) and adhere to secondary English Language Arts standards that prioritize spoken or written language (Mills & Exley, 2014). Thus, scholarship in literacy education suggests that reading and writing education in mainstream secondary English Language Arts settings appears wedged in the past, unable to adequately prepare students for a multimodal, digital, and technological world in which image and design play a crucial part. I believe that this study can contribute to conversations regarding potential policy changes and help reconceptualize what counts as text in middle and high school English Language Arts classrooms.

### **Potential of Study to Contribute to Literacy Research and Practice**

This study responded to the continued need for secondary multimodal literacies instruction and is intended to provide insight into how mainstream English Language Arts teachers can address multimodality and help their students interrogate how multiple modes operate within a text—both independently *and* together—in order to become experienced consumers and producers of multimodal texts (Reid & Dyer, 2018; Serafini, 2014). Literacy education researchers should continue to find ways to connect multimodality theory to practice, supporting teachers in introducing multimodal concepts to their students so that all students can develop multimodal interpretative and

compositional expertise. Such expertise would help students access more fully the meaning potential offered by the multimodal texts that fill their world.

This research also has important pedagogical implications. Notably, the curriculum enacted by the classroom teacher and the participating students was built upon a broad conception of representation and communication that honors multiple modes of communication and representation. The curriculum may provide a template or starting point for other teachers or researchers who are looking to extend students' understanding of what it means to read, write, and interpret within the context of mainstream English Language Arts classrooms. This study showcased a curriculum that honored linguistic reading and writing practices while incorporating space for students to acquire knowledge of how images and design features work within multimodal texts. Street (2007) believed that multimodality and the reading and writing of multimodal texts could be embraced within the critical and analytical curricular space that English instruction has always valued. Embracing multimodality could contribute to the rethinking and renewal that Street argued reading and writing instruction needed to undergo.

Third, this study will contribute to my professional development and will inform how I serve and support the teachers and students with whom I will work in the future. Looking to my future as an Assistant Professor of Literacy Education, this research study will support me in building multimodal literacies curricula with teachers and students in different educational contexts. This research will help me focus on the possibilities for different classrooms, potentially laying the future foundation for longer-term formative design work.

## Overview of the Dissertation

Five chapters comprise this dissertation. Chapter one acted as an introduction to the study. In chapter one, I explained how my own education, teaching, and research experiences formed the foundation for my dissertation study. I also provided an overview of the study and my rationale for undertaking the study. I concluded this chapter by discussing the significance of the study and identifying how I intend to contribute to the field of literacy education research.

In chapter two, I explicate the conceptual framework that guides and frames this study. I explain how multimodality intersects with sociocultural approaches to literacy and learning, and I examine how the concept of design has been taken up by scholars working across these theoretical intersections. These theoretical perspectives inform my understanding of literacy and learning as always situated in specific communities of practice comprised of particular social actors (Erickson, 1986; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Street, 1984). As this study explores what happened when visual and multimodal texts and concepts were introduced into a seventh-grade English classroom, I also examine the complexity of visual texts and problematize the traditional categorization of visual texts as academically inferior texts (Jiménez & Meyer, 2016). Finally, as the teacher in this study considered himself an expert in written composition, I conclude this chapter by investigating the intersection of multimodality with the field of rhetoric and composition.

Chapter three contains a detailed description of the study site, the participants (one classroom teacher and four focal students), and the role of the researcher within the study. I also explain my data collection and data analysis strategies, identifying how data



analysis occurred throughout the study. I conclude this chapter by sharing how I developed six assertions (Erickson, 1986) through data analysis.

In chapter four, I detail my findings. As a result of my second-cycle coding, I constructed three key categories. First, I explore the pedagogical decisions and resources designed by the teacher. Second, from the data collected and analyzed, I determine that “messiness” featured in the enactment of the curriculum and was characterized by the classroom being (re)made through shifts in prioritized literacy practices, authority, and power. Third, I examine how students viewed the multimodal literacies instruction differently, accepting the texts, tasks, and concepts into their lives as classroom work, lifework, play, and drudgery.

In chapter five, I look across my data and findings to offer six key assertions (Erickson, 1986) that can be further examined and understood through future research in different classroom contexts. I also consider the significance of each assertion to multimodal literacies pedagogy. I conclude this study by detailing its limitations but also its implications for future efforts to implement a multimodal literacies approach in classroom places.

## CHAPTER 2

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In his examination of school English Language Arts, Street (2007) called for “deepening and broadening what counts as English” (p. 126). He argued that this kind of expansion requires researchers and practitioners to “engage with a hybrid array of traditions” (p. 139) and theoretical perspectives relevant to reading and writing pedagogy. For Street, literacy education requires teachers and researchers to exhibit “complex theoretical awareness” (p. 140) together with a willingness to challenge given notions of what constitutes English as a school subject.

Street’s call for bringing together diverse theoretical perspectives in service of redefining English Language Arts content, goals, and pedagogy aligns with van Leeuwen’s (2005) declaration that social semiotics always needs combining with at least one other field of inquiry to be valuable or useful to researchers. Thus, when examining what happened when one classroom practitioner designed and enacted a multimodal literacies curriculum, it was necessary for me to construct a conceptual framework drawn from multiple fields of inquiry or disciplines in addition to adopting a social semiotics approach to multimodality: literacy education (Street, 1984; New London Group, 1996), visual culture studies (Barthes, 1977), children’s literature (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2000; Serafini, 2014; Sipe, 2012), and rhetoric and composition (Khadka & Lee, 2019).

In response to both Street (2007) and van Leeuwen (2005), in chapter two, I explore the theoretical perspectives and scholarship that guided this study and supported me in understanding what happened when a teacher introduced multimodal texts and concepts into his seventh-grade English Language Arts classroom. In the first section, I

examine how sociocultural approaches to learning and literacy provide insight into the classroom as a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and explain how notions of literacy as reading and writing written language have been expanded to multimodal literacies (Kress & Jewitt, 2003; Flewitt, 2008). In the second section, I detail vital components of the New London Group's argument for a multiliteracies approach to pedagogy, focusing in particular on their and others' (Janks, 2010; Sheridan & Rowsell, 2010) presentation of design. In the final section, I explore curriculum matters and show how multimodal and visual text interpretation and composition might be incorporated into English Language Arts classrooms.

### **Multimodality and Sociocultural Theories of Learning and Literacy**

In this section, I explicate how a social semiotics perspective on multimodality intersects with sociocultural approaches to learning and literacy. For theoretical perspectives to intersect, there must exist theoretical points of contact that help establish a degree of compatibility (Dicks, 2014). The point of contact here is that the social is central to social semiotic approaches to multimodality and sociocultural theories of learning. However, for the intersection to be a beneficial one, theoretical perspectives must also complement the other perspectives in the intersection (Kress, 2015), providing understandings that different perspectives do not. Therefore, I will also show how the theories illuminate each other, each bringing into consideration aspects of learning and literacy that might otherwise remain more obscured.

### **Multimodality and Sociocultural Theories of Learning**

In sharing an emphasis on the social nature of learning and meaning-making, both sociocultural and social semiotic theories challenged transmission (Lave & Wenger,

1991) or banking models of education (Freire, 1968/2018) by denying the notion that teachers impart knowledge to students without any changes to the transmitted information. Context matters, as do the social actors involved in any learning exchange. Knowledge is mediated by cultural and semiotic tools (Wertsch, 1998) and always made anew (Bezemer & Kress, 2016; Kress, 2010). While sociocultural theories of learning reveal “a wider picture of development” (Burgess, 2007, p. 31), when combined with a social semiotic approach to multimodality, the conjoining of the theoretical perspectives brings into focus the range of semiotic resources available to participants within specific educational contexts. Thus, a broad understanding of the social nature of learning is combined with a theoretical perspective that investigates the cultural tools and meaning-making resources people use.

Jewitt (2006), for example, showed how multimodal learning resources impacted learning in English Language Arts classrooms. She analyzed the multimodal character of new technologies, the interaction of modes on screens, and the designs and use of various sites of display. Jewitt’s research showed that multimodal technologies reshaped knowledge, literacy, and pedagogy in the English classrooms in her study. Similarly, Kress et al. (2005) attended to how the modes of oral and written language, image, gesture, gaze, and spatial organization constructed the school subject English in three urban classrooms in three different schools. Most importantly, their social semiotic and multimodal analysis revealed that students in different classrooms experienced different versions of English. The sociocultural context of learning—the social actors, the classroom environment, and the tools and resources available—impacted the content learned and the knowledge students constructed.

Furthermore, Bezemer and Kress (2016) stated that their social semiotics framework for communication and learning resonated with Lave and Wenger's (1991) work on communities of practice. Lave and Wenger (1991) focused on the learner as a member of a sociocultural community of practice who, through participation in that community over time and interactions with near-peers and old-timers, acquires the knowledge and cultural tools required to achieve full membership. Legitimate peripheral participation implies that "learning involves the construction of identities" (p. 53). The identity work that learners undertake finds affinity with the idea that social semiotic work always involves changes to the identities of the semiotic workers involved in the interaction (Bezemer & Kress, 2016; Kress, 2015). Social semioticians can support communities of practice theories by documenting communities' use of semiotic resources and modes over time and uncovering the sedimented identities of meaning-makers within the texts they make (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010; Rowsell & Pahl, 2007).

### **Multimodality and Sociocultural Approaches to Literacy**

New Literacy Studies scholars recognized reading and writing as socially-situated literacy practices (Gee, 2015). Therefore, just as there exist many different social, cultural, institutional, and historical organizations of people, so, too, exist multiple literacy practices and, therefore, multiple versions of appropriate ways to read and write (Gee, 2015). A community of practice determines the value of any given literacy practice.

Street (1984) proposed that literacy should be understood in terms of two models. The autonomous model presented literacy skills as universal, context-independent, and neutral skills that can be learned and acquired by anyone. In opposition to the

autonomous model, Street (1984) proposed an ideological model of literacy. The ideological model of literacy presents literacy as social practice and does not separate reading and writing from the contexts in which it is practiced. Thus, what counts as valued reading and writing in one context, might not count as reading and writing in another context. As Street (1984, 2016) argued, social actors bring their literacy experiences and understandings regarding what counts as literacy to specific literacy events, defined by Heath (1982) as trivial everyday events involving print language (p. 93). Each literacy event is situated in a social context that may or may not align with event participants' literacy experiences elsewhere (Heath & Street, 2008; Street, 2012).

Although Street (1984) and Heath (1983) initially focused on reading and writing print language, Heath and Street (2008) further extended their definitions of literacy events and practices to include “multimodal literacies,” “those events and practices in which the written mode is still salient yet embedded in other modes” (p. 22). While not viewing all modes as potentially equal contributors to meaning-making during literacy events, as multimodality scholars would argue (Kress, 2010; Jewitt, 2017), both theoretical perspectives understand people as social beings whose interactions and work with words and other semiotic resources are influenced by social context and histories of use.

For the purposes of this study, my understanding of “multimodal literacies” is shaped by the work of Kress and Jewitt (2003). They presented a broader definition of multimodal literacies grounded in social semiotic principles that identify humans as sign-makers, both in terms of any text they might produce or interpretations formed in response to the work of others. Language is a significant mode of representation and

communication that people use to make material their ideas and communicate those ideas to others. However, other sign-systems also offer significant meaning potential and have equal potential to be used during meaning-making activity (Kress, 2010). Importantly, Kress and Jewitt (2003) argued for the multimodal nature of human communication and requested that modes be understood as partial. A more complete understanding of any text or interaction can be constructed by building interpretations across modes (Serafini, 2015).

Therefore, I understand multimodal literacies as semiotic work that involves understanding how multiple modes have or can be used to represent and communicate ideas and how they work in combination to offer meaning potential. Isolating modes for thorough investigative and inventorying purposes is useful work but should not be the defining goal for those interested in multimodality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001).

### **Literacy, Power, and Multimodality**

Importantly, a sociocultural approach to literacy understands that literacy is never neutral (Street, 1984). Literacy connects with issues of power and “always involves contests over meanings, definitions, boundaries, and control of the literacy agenda” (Street, 2016, p. 337). New Literacy Studies scholars emphasized ideology and power, viewing literacy practices in terms of how they either align or do not align with dominant and hegemonic views of what it means to read and write (Street, 1984, 2012, 2016).

Ideas about power and its distribution are also central to social semiotics theorists (Bezemer & Kress, 2016; Hodge & Kress, 1988; Kress, 2010; van Leeuwen, 2005). Hodge and Kress (1988) described ideology as a vision of the world as the dominant group believes it ought to be perceived. They argued that any regularization of semiotic

resources into modes implies a society's modal preferences for representing reality and the world. Kress (cited in Street, 2004, p. 327) emphasized how sites of power can be identified by looking at what modes are more policed than others. The policed nature of particular modes points towards dominant social groups, their ideologies, and the practices of communication and representation for which they advocate (Street, 2004).

Many literacy researchers aligned with New Literacy Studies have taken a social semiotic approach to multimodality in their research. In South Africa, for example, multimodal analysis has enabled critical readings of texts that reveal what has been included and excluded, hidden or made salient (Archer & Newfield, 2014). In pedagogical spaces, multimodality has made possible critical readings of dominant modes and provided a rationale for including less-dominant modes and their associated resources (Archer & Newfield, 2014). Harrop-Allin (2014) used social semiotic multimodality to offer an account of a storytelling game that many Black South African children play. Harrop-Allin concluded that teachers should capitalize on students' literacy practices and understanding of modal affordances, even if these are not part of the regulated curriculum. Studies by Archer (2017) and Stein (2003) also showed how students exercised their agency and drew upon cultural forms and knowledges during the in-school literacy projects.

In all three studies, students were able to be creative as they moved their meaning-making across and within modes. As Archer (2017) stated, this work "makes visible the resources that marginalized South Africans have developed" (p. 190). In this way, multimodality can be viewed as a powerful alternative to the logocentric, monolingual, and dominant approaches to meaning-making traditionally honored in



institutional spaces (Archer & Newfield, 2014). As Kress and Cowan (2017) observed, understanding literacies as inherently multimodal means that the semiotic work of all meaning-makers is significant. In this way, arguments for multimodal literacies in schools are also arguments for creating more inclusive and equitable classroom communities.

### **Implications for Multimodal Literacies Pedagogy**

Street's (1984) distinction between autonomous and ideological models of literacy has important implications for educators and researchers who work within school contexts. O'Brien (2012) argued that schools often present literacy as autonomous. The reading and writing skills practiced in school tend to be print-centric and represent a conceptualization of literacy as "one that is formally assessed, one they [students] get feedback on from day to day in schools, and one that, in their minds, is the sole measure of their literate competence" (p. 73). High-stakes testing, standards, and approved core curriculum texts all sustain the "institutional practices and artifacts of the Institution of Old Learning" (p. 87), practices and artifacts that O'Brien also referred to as the "deep grammar of schooling" (p. 78). Botzakis (2012) explained that even though literacy "might need to be pared down in the interests of education from time to time, it would behoove educators, researchers, and learners to not let those pared-down versions become definitive" (p. 46).

To reduce adolescent literacy to the reading and writing skills presented in the policy statements such as the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) can be understood as succumbing to a grand narrative (Luke & Woods, 2009) that does

not account for the “situated literacies that young people have developed or will need” (Hinchman & Alvermann, 2012, p. xiv; see also Street, 2007). The danger of a literacy curriculum that depends upon a narrow range of objectives tied to standardized assessment is that the literacy curriculum in schools might become null, removing from classroom instruction the texts, topics, and practices most connected to the lives adolescents live and the futures they will pursue (Burroughs & Smagorinsky, 2009).

Furthermore, a multimodal literacies approach to pedagogy also aligns with other influential arguments for including multimodal texts and practices in school curricula. First, Sanders and Albers (2010) united multimodality and literacy with arts-based approaches to reading and writing education. The connection makes sense: incorporating music (Blecher & Burton, 2010), spoken word poetry (Williams, 2018, 2019), theater (Macro, 2019), visual responses to literature (White, 2019), visual texts (Martens, Martens, Croce, & Maderazo, 2010), and image-making (Albers, 2010; Zoss, Siegesmund, & Patisaul, 2010) necessarily means incorporating a wide range of modes of representation and communication into the curriculum.

Arts-based literacy pedagogy is grounded in the aesthetic education philosophy of Greene (2001) and Eisner (2002). Greene (2001) described how the arts help learners “break with the taken-for-granted...and look through the lenses of the various ways of knowing, seeing, and feeling in a conscious endeavor to impose different orders upon experience” (p. 5), while Eisner (2002) described arts education as extending beyond learners’ competency using particular materials, tools, and media. He saw art-making as inherently social and student-artists as learners engaged in understanding community norms regarding producing, sharing, and talking about their artwork. Art, regardless of

modes and materials used, is about social ways of representing, communicating, and expressing thoughts and ideas in material and tangible form. People's representational and communicational decisions shape their understanding of their world. Thus, individuals perceive, know, and understand differently.

Second, from the realm of special education and based on work in the field of architecture, the Universal Design for Learning framework advocates for the removal of barriers to students' learning by increasing the range of opportunities for students to access academic content and extending ways for students to express their thinking (Kleinfeld, 2019). This framework focuses on constructing inclusive and accessible classrooms and curricula for all learners so that incorporating multimodal texts and text-making options is a possibility for all students. Students, then, have the agency and autonomy to decide how best to construct and represent their learning using the modes and materials most apt for their representational and communicational purposes (Kress, 2010).

### **Multimodality, Multiliteracies, and Design**

The New London Group's (1996) *A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies* mapped out another argument for expanding literacy education. The New London Group (1996) acknowledged that traditional literacy pedagogy is "a carefully restricted project – restricted to formalized, monolingual, monocultural, and rule-governed forms of language" (p. 60). In its place, they advocated for a pedagogy of multiliteracies to "ensure that all students benefit from learning in ways that allow them to participate fully in public, community, and economic life" (p. 60). Their pedagogical framework recognized the value of differences inherent in a diverse society and, therefore, in diverse

classrooms. Teachers should draw upon students' cultural and language resources during classroom instruction. According to Cope and Kalantzis (2000), "gone are the days when learning a single, standard version of the language [English] was sufficient" (p. 6).

In addition, the New London Group's (1996) manifesto also incorporated multimodality, which is not surprising considering Gunther Kress was a New London Group member. The New London Group made it clear that, for them, meaning-making activity necessarily involves multiple modes of representation and communication. The New London Group named visual design, gestural design, linguistic design, audio design, and spatial design as modes of meaning, and identified multimodal texts as texts that incorporate more than one mode of representation and communication. Importantly, and in alignment with social semiotic theory (Kress, 2010, 2015), their multiliteracies framework emphasized design and the agency and power of designers.

### **Agency and Design**

As part of their manifesto, the New London Group (1996) proposed a metalanguage built around the idea of Design, something they saw as central to an increasingly technological and global world. They proposed treating semiotic work as a Design process involving three elements: Available Designs, Designing, and The Redesigned. Designing involves designers selecting from a range of available resources, shaping those resources into meaning, and then materializing a newly redesigned meaning. As in social semiotics (Kress, 2010, 2015) meaning is always made anew. The New London Group used the word "transformation" to describe how meaning-making is never a reproduction or replica of the available design. Design always involves remix.

The New London Group (1996) also showed how their concept of design could translate to school instruction through curricular inclusion of four pedagogical components: (a) situated practice, which values local knowledge, practices, resources, and relationships; (b) overt instruction that provides students access to important metalanguage; (c) critical framing, which involves helping students re-see information and knowledge from other perspectives to become critical consumers; and (d) transformative practice, which results in the remix, design, and production of new meanings and new texts.

Hagood (2012) remarked that these components require teachers to step out of their comfort zone by asking teachers to consider how remix practices (Burwell, 2013; Knobel & Lankshear, 2008) and critical analyses and constructions of multimodal texts (e.g., Johnson & Rezak, 2009; Lapp, Moss, & Rowsell, 2012) might play a role in situated literacy curricula that strive to be relevant to specific students working within particular classroom contexts. Multiliteracies pedagogy must be designed by educators, fashioned from educators' expertise, students' interests and ways of knowing, and the resources available (Hagood, 2009).

However, as Gee and Hayes (2011) observed, school tends to support three major orientations towards literacy: (a) an essayist literacy orientation that privileges the formal language and structure of the essay, (b) a test literacy orientation that promotes assessment practices learned only for performance within educational institutions, and (c) a school content literacy orientation that helps students acquire the language needed for participation in school versions of disciplinary fields. The kinds of new literacies

advocated by advocates for multiliteracies pedagogy are “not related to most of what passes for literacy in schools today” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011, p. 231).

The multiliteracies theoretical perspective illuminates the potential power and agency belonging to both teachers and students. Because both the teacher and their students can be understood as learning designers, in classroom studies, attention should be paid to the agency and design work of all social actors operating within a given classroom context. Social semiotics and multimodality scholars have expanded upon the roles of teachers and students in the design of learning. In Bezemer and Kress’s framework (2016), teachers who organize learning for others are deemed “shaping agents.” Similarly, in Selander’s (2007) Learning Design Sequence, the teacher is viewed as a designer. As agency does not just belong to the teacher, in Kress and Selander’s (2012) pedagogical framework, teaching and learning are presented as “interactive design.” The teacher sets the frame for learning, but students then interact with the teacher’s learning designs, taking ownership of their meaning-making and knowledge construction.

Interactive design (Kress & Selander, 2012) allows students to transform information into new texts constructed with multiple modes of representation and communication. The product one student designs may be different in medium and modality to the text produced by another student. Allowing students to demonstrate their agency through this interactive and multimodal sign-making necessitates the expansion of what ensembles and signs are recognized as evidence of learning (see also Bezemer & Kress, 2016; Selander, 2007). Insulander (2017) argued that such frameworks combine social semiotics with a design-oriented perspective on learning. Knowledge is made in

the learning process, and students should have the autonomy to represent that knowledge as they choose, using modes of representation and communication that they have decided are apt for the task at hand (Insulander, 2017).

It is important to note that scholars (Leander & Boldt, 2013; A. Smith, 2017) have critiqued the New London Group's (1996) focus on design for assigning too much intentionality and agency to text-producers. Drawing on post-humanist and socio-material theories, these critics argued that this view of Design did not account for the spontaneous, unexpected and sensory entanglements with everyday objects, resources, and environments. Leander and Boldt (2013) took issue with the idea that meaning-making and engagement with the world always result in a definitive text product that is the result of a sequence of planned, intentional design-decisions. Furthermore, this concept of design does not seem to align with Vasudevan's (2015) scholarship on multimodal play, "a phrase that calls attention to the spontaneous, unscripted, undirected, and often unpredictable interactions young people have with the modal resources and materials around them" (p. 4). These scholars understand learning as "an ever-unfolding act of becoming" (Vasudevan, 2015, p. 9) that might take the learner in surprising new directions.

### **Design Dispositions**

To clarify how the making of new things involves the remixing or convergence of available designs, Sheridan and Rowsell (2010) studied professional producers and makers of a range of texts. Professional designers involved in their study included an architect, a gamer, a film-maker, and a children's television producer. Sheridan and Rowsell argued that teachers could learn about teaching with design dispositions by

observing professionals engaged in their professional work. Rowsell (2013) further advocated for deepening knowledge about modal expertise through similar kinds of observation. One can, for example, learn about how images work by discussing with artists and illustrators their creative process (Rowsell, 2013).

Sheridan and Rowsell (2010) constructed four dispositions required for contemporary text-making. Design, the ability to use resources available in the making of something new, was named the core disposition. The other dispositions named in this scholarship were: (a) creativity, which involves the ability to craft different problem-solving strategies; (b) spin, which involves moving from an idea through the making process to the creation of a final product for specific audiences; and (c) multimodality, the ability to work across and integrate multiple modes of representation and communication.

Understanding meaning-making as designing disrupts what Lemke (1998) referred to as the “curricular learning paradigm” (p. 293). According to Lemke, the curricular learning paradigm dominates unit and lesson design in most schools. This paradigm insists that educational personnel design a curriculum unit, determine its learning objectives, and dictate the learning sequence. The students follow the mapped curriculum and do not themselves engage in design. Lemke proposed a second paradigm, the “interactive learning paradigm” (p. 293), which resembles the kind of learning that takes place in museums and libraries. In this second paradigm, people determine the details to which they pay attention, the route they carve through the learning space, and the pace at which they move. Experts are on hand to provide guidance and expertise when needed. This paradigm seems to align with the ideas of those who advocate for



designing in literacy education, for design work involves working through the processes and practices involved in the making of a product (Rowse, 2013).

Lemke's (2000) work on timescales is also relevant here. He described how education and learning could be understood and interpreted on a variety of timescales. We can think about the classroom in terms of shorter timescales, such as utterances, brief exchanges of dialogue, or a lesson. But we can also think of education in terms of lesson sequences, curriculum units, the academic school year, and lifespan educational development (p. 278). Each student is the unique sum of their experiences and life trajectories up until each moment of learning, their life trajectories continually refined and shaped as they learn. No amount of teacher design can bring all students to the same curricular endpoints or set of mastered skills. The learning experiences enacted through curriculum implementation will leave different impressions upon different students. Within any given classroom, "There are longer-term Selves already engaged in longer-term projects and activities and shorter-term Selves of current activities, some of which contribute to longer-term projects and some of which may not" (p.285). The designers whose work Sheridan and Rowse (2010) and Rowse (2013) analyzed are engaged in long-term work and have honed their design literacies and dispositions over many years. Understanding the trajectories of students and the work in which they invest could help teachers design for the kind of interactive learning experiences for which Lemke (1998) and also Kress and Selander (2012) advocated.

Furthermore, Sheridan and Rowse (2010) highlighted collaboration and interdisciplinarity as dispositions important for contemporary designing. While school tends to foreground individual success and mastery, thus constructing students as sole

authors of their own work, Sheridan and Rowsell's scholarship highlighted how little design work is typically accomplished alone. As Gee (2005), pointed out, collaborative co-design can help reframe knowledge-making as something in which multiple people can participate. Understanding knowledge as distributed and co-constructed unseats the transmission model of education in which a figure of authority transmits a fixed and sanctioned body of knowledge to those without who lack that knowledge (Freire, 1968/2018; Street, 1984). Design and, in particular, the notion of co-design emphasizes the socially-constructed nature of knowledge, meaning, and texts.

### **Critical Literacy and Design**

Janks (2000, 2010) designated the New London Group's theoretical presentation of design as one of four fundamental orientations or approaches to literacy. She named domination, access, and diversity as the other three orientations. Each orientation offers insight into the relationship between literacy and power while foregrounding different aspects of this relationship. Domination-oriented approaches to literacy highlight the constructed nature of texts and the ways text uphold power structures and position readers (Janks, 2010). Access-oriented understandings of literacy and power center on ethical and culturally-sustaining (Alim & Paris, 2017) ways to help marginalized students access and participate in dominant literacy practices. Diversity-focused orientations present literacy from a multiliteracies perspective (New London Group, 1996) that values pluralism, both in terms of welcoming linguistic multiplicity and multiple modes of representing and communication into classrooms and society. When educators assume a Design-orientation to literacy, they position students as creators and producers and

acknowledge students' potential to create transformative texts that may impact and help change for the better their social worlds (Janks, 2000).

Although Janks (2000, 2010) identified four distinct approaches, she clarified that these dispositions should be conceptualized as necessarily intertwined. Adopting one orientation to the exclusion of the other would result in a “problematic imbalance” (Janks, 2010, p. 27). For example, without experience in deconstructing texts, the act of reconstruction and redesign becomes less potent and less likely to result in social transformation. Janks argued that curriculum design must purposefully incorporate all four orientations if education is to help build towards and actualize social justice and equity. While each orientation can be focused upon at one time, equal weight must be attributed to each orientation across the curriculum (Janks, 2010).

Janks (2000, 2010), then, aligned design with a critical disposition, crafting a vision for text production and composition that aligns with Freire's (1968/2018) notion of praxis in that literacy should be used by readers and writers to act upon and transform the world. Aligning her work with Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), Janks described writers and text-producers as motivated agents able to make conscious decisions about the texts they craft and the potential ways in which those texts might influence or impact an audience. The emphasis on consciousness again also aligned with Freire's (1968/2018) Marxian advocacy for the raising of critical consciousness as a necessary part of a liberating pedagogy. The goal of a liberating education is always for students to be the agentive subjects of their own life narratives, as opposed to the object of another person's version of reality (Freire, 1968/2018).

The critical and transformative potential of education cannot occur when design is enacted in the curriculum without attention to issues of power, access, or diversity (Janks, 2010). When teachers support students in critical design, students may move from undertaking individual and personal work (Janks, 2010, p. 172) to doing sociocultural, historical, and political design work (Janks, 2010). Academic labor that focuses entirely on individual response and personal satisfaction is not critical. Importantly, if one adheres to the notion that all texts can be deconstructed and challenged (Janks, 2000, 2010), then students can also become text-critics (Luke & Freebody, 1999) of their own and their classmates' work. Thus, students can assume the responsibility for constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing their own and their peers' texts.

### **Curriculum Matters: Interpreting Multimodal Texts**

While Mills and Exley (2014) detailed the lack of attention to visual and multimodal literacies in U.S. standards policy documents (and the prevalence of visual and multimodal literacies in the standards of nations such as Australia), other literacy-oriented organizations have made the necessity of visual and multimodal literacies clear. The National Council for Teachers (2005) released a statement on multimodal literacies that called for increased attention to the multimodal nature of meaning-making and the integration of key multimodal literacies concepts across the curriculum. Additionally, in their position statement on students' "Right to Supportive Learning Environments and High-Quality Resources," the International Literacy Association (2019) advocated for educators to provide students with access to multimodal texts and learning experiences designed to build expertise in multiple semiotic systems. While official standards documents offer teachers little guidance as to how to incorporate multimodal literacies

objectives into school curricula, scholarship on children's literature (Serafini, 2014), visual literacy education (Callow, 2008, 2018; Cappello, 2017), and visual culture (Barthes, 1977) has offered ideas that may prove useful to educators searching for guidance.

In this section, I offer an overview of scholarship that might support a teacher looking to construct multimodal literacy experiences for their students. Indeed, much of the scholarship included here formed part of the resources I shared with Mr. Bergeron prior to the beginning of the unit (see Appendix A), potentially to aid him in the design of his curriculum unit. An important factor guided the inclusion of scholarship in this section: The multimodal texts Mr. Bergeron focused on in his curriculum unit included picturebooks, graphic novels, and multimodal novels. A magazine front cover, artwork, an animated short, and a series of book trailers were included as supplementary texts. Image, therefore, was a significant mode of representation and communication in this unit, as was written language, which was almost always combined with images in the texts listed above.

### **Critical Readings of Visual and Multimodal Texts**

Although visual and multimodal texts have sometimes been deemed to be less academic than purely linguistic texts (Jiménez & Meyer, 2016), a range of scholarship has investigated the complexity of word-image texts. For example, Pantaleo (2011, 2012a, 2012b) studied picturebooks with middle-grade students, demonstrating how explicit teaching of visual metalanguage and design concepts supported students in their interpretive and compositional work. Jiménez, Roberts, Brugar, Meyer, and Waito (2017) showed how middle-grade students could be taught to navigate the design features of

comic books, and Jiménez and Meyer (2016) described the complex array of comprehension moves made by expert readers of graphic novels. Kersten and Dallacqua (2017) used the comics medium to question representations of history and science in graphic and multimodal texts.

Understanding all material representations as reality removed is an essential component of understanding visual text complexity. Kress (2010, 2017) described modes as “culturally shaped resources” for representing and communicating ideas to other people. In representing ideas, motivated and interested sign-makers use the resources of modes to make representational work material and tangible to an audience (Kress, 2015). These ideas highlight the humanmade nature of any material representation and the agency and decision-making in shaping representations for a particular audience. These ideas matter, for, as Janks (2010) observed, each representation offers a perspective on the world. Any representation is not the world itself and should not be considered reality. Janks stated: “Every text is just one set of perspectives on the world, a representation of it: language, together with other signs, works to construct reality. This is as true of non-fiction as it is of fiction” (p. 61).

A viewer can even disrupt the apparent reality presented through photographs. Barthes saw the relationship between a photograph and what the photograph means as quasi-tautological (Bateman, 2014), a close repetition of the same idea. This quasi-tautological relationship implies a natural relationship between the signifier and signified. However, as Barthes’ (1977) work showed, this “naturalness” is deceptive. Such naturalness helps to hide the socially constructed nature of cultural norms and ideologies. His work helped reveal the ideological myths that underpin image-text artifacts. For

Barthes, understanding image-text ensembles involves understanding power. As Sturken and Cartwright (2001) remarked, “to explore the meaning of images is to recognize that they are produced within social power and ideology” (p. 21). Signs (and, therefore, texts, if we deem texts to be collections of signs), in and of themselves, have no inherent meaning. Humans make meaning and assign meanings to things (Berger, 1972).

Therefore, reader-viewers can apply to visual texts the same questions they might use to interrogate written language texts. Freire (1985) called upon educators to support students in “reading the world” and “reading the word,” but teachers can also assist students in reading the world and reading the visual. Visual texts can be problematized and interrogated, too. Problem-posing questions (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004) can prompt reader-viewers (Serafini, 2012) to think about who created the image(s), whose agenda the image(s) best serve, and whose perspectives are absent from any given visual representation. Critical literacy, as numerous scholars have shown (Ajayi, 2011, 2012; Kajder, 2018; Witte & Dail, 2018), must include interrogation of visual texts.

### **Reading Images in Perceptual, Structural, and Ideological Ways**

Thus, when encountering visuals in multimodal texts, the reader should examine the image itself and seek to understand how it works, both as a syntagmatic whole in its own right and, if the image is part of a longer text such as a picturebook or multimodal novel, as part of a larger text. However, the social and ideological nature of texts should not be ignored. In his scholarship on reading visual images, Serafini (2010) converged theoretical understandings of how images work from several disciplines to construct a framework that offered three distinct (but connected) analytical perspectives for understanding multimodal texts that include visual images. He described how multimodal

and visual texts could be interpreted from perceptual, structural, and ideological perspectives. His scholarship provided insight into the possibilities for meaning-making with multimodal and visual texts. Serafini's framework could be used by teachers to support their students in reading images and situating their discussions of images within broader sociopolitical contexts.

**The perceptual analytical perspective.** In explaining the perceptual analytical perspective, Serafini (2010) drew from Barthes (1977) and Panofsky (cited in Rose, 2016; Serafini, 2010). Barthes (1972, 1977), in his examinations of a print advertisement and a magazine cover, first described the “uncoded iconic” or “denotative message.” The denotative message refers to what is seen in the image. Panofsky (cited in Rose, 2016; Serafini, 2010) named the first layer of visual interpretation as pre-iconographic and viewed this kind of interpretation as a basic or more literal (Serafini & Ladd, 2008) form of inventorying what has been perceived. Perceived components inventoried in an image, then, might include noticing and naming the visual icons that comprise the image syntagm (Barthes, 1977) or identifying the compositional features such as frames, borders, colors, and use of space (Serafini, 2015).

It is important to note that, even at the perceptual level of analysis, the person undertaking the interpretive labor impacts what is looked at and seen (Serafini, 2010). Looking is never innocent (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001, p. 10) and can never be objective. The act of noticing and naming will vary from person to person, and the linguistic signs chosen as names will limit, constrain, and direct further interpretations.

**The structural analytical perspective.** The structural perspective (Serafini, 2010) enables the reader-viewer to consider how a text works as an act of social



communication. Any sign in any mode “must be doing some job in some context” (Halliday & Hasan, 1985, p. 10). Serafini (2010) presented Kress and van Leeuwen’s (1996, 2006) visual grammar system as a means of analyzing how every text is realized through three co-present metafunctions. The representational metafunction presents information about people, places, events, things, and actions. The interactive metafunction illuminates how text-producers connect with their audience or how the audience might connect with the characters within a text. The compositional metafunction enables text organization and structure. It is important to note that this third functional component makes the other two metafunctions possible. Ideational and interpersonal meanings can only be expressed through the textual function.

Meaning potential in Halliday’s (1978) work is defined as the range of semantic options available within specific social situations (2014, p. 263). Halliday’s (1978, 2014) notion of choice acknowledged the agency of the text producer while also considering the constraints placed on text production by the social context. Adapted by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2006) in their visual grammar, these ideas help move the reader-viewer beyond the act of noticing and naming (Serafini, 2010). In understanding an image in terms of a grammar, the reader-viewer can start to consider the meaning-making choices made by sign-makers or rhetors in constructing their interpretations of a given image or visual text. Thus, while the act of noticing and naming breaks down a syntagmatic whole into its constituent parts (Barthes, 1977), the structural perspective enables a more paradigmatic (Barthes, 1977) examination of those components in questioning why certain selections were made in place of other meaning-making possibilities.

Other structural possibilities for analyzing multimodal texts include taxonomies that detail word-image relationships. For example, Martinec and Salway (2005) built upon Halliday's (1978) systemic functional grammar. Martinec and Salway's (2005) system for understanding image-text relations first determined whether text and image hold equal status. A second system mapped a range of logico-semantic possibilities. Typically used to describe the relationship between clauses in a sentence, the logico-semantic system in Martinec and Salway's scholarship was used to describe relationships between words and images.

Picturebook scholars have also constructed language to describe how images and words work together (or not). For example, Nikolajeva and Scott (2000) described word-image relationships as symmetrical when the words and images in a picturebook reflected much the same information, as complementary when the images offered different but connected information, and as counterpointing when the words offered contrasting or conflicting information to the representation of information provided through the visuals.

**The ideological analytical perspective.** The third analytical perspective outlined by Serafini (2010) recognized that texts are both shaped by and help shape dominant ideologies that circulate through our social worlds. Without interrogation, any text has the potential to naturalize and normalize the beliefs and values of those with dominance and power (Barthes, 1977; Hodge & Kress, 1988; Janks, 2010). For Rose (2016), reading beyond the text itself is essential for moving visual analysis in a critical direction. Rose acknowledged that interpreters make meaning at the site of the text or image itself, but she also argued that meaning-making happens at three further sites: the site of the text or image's production, the site(s) of the text or image's dissemination, and the site of the

text or image's reception by people. In opposition to the text-dependent analytical behaviors practiced by adherents to New Criticism, the ideological perspective encourages reading-viewing the text in the context of the social world(s) within which any given text is made, disseminated, and received (Freire, 1968/2018).

Barthes (1972, 1977) also presented ways to think about the ideological possibilities for text analysis. In addition to the denotative message, texts carry a second interpretive layer, the "coded iconic" or "connotative" message. The connotative message is seen as coded because it expresses culturally and socially-determined symbolic associations, values, and ideas beyond naming what people see on the denotative level. Importantly, both the denotative and connotative messages simultaneously point to and hide the larger ideological myths that might lie unnoticed if artifacts are not closely inspected (Chandler, 1994). Myths are the hegemonic ideologies belonging to dominant social groups. Reader-viewers can interrogate and challenge these powerful myths if they consciously choose to attend to them. If reader-viewers do not problematize the texts and images they encounter, myths and grand narratives can be consumed uncritically and taken as natural (as opposed to socially constructed). The ideological analytical processes, therefore, position reader-viewers as text-critics (Luke & Freebody, 1999).

### **Reconceptualizing the Reader of Visual and Multimodal Texts**

A visual and multimodal text requires the reader to look beyond written language as the sole or most significant source of meaning potential. Consequently, the reader-viewer needs a more complete understanding of the interpretive moves available to them. As Meyer and Jiménez (2017) noted, Serafini's (2012) expansion of Luke and Luke's (1999) four resources model can be used by teachers to clarify the complexity involved in

making-meaning from visual and multimodal texts. Although the four resources are sometimes erroneously thought of as different roles into which the reader can step, the four practices are embedded within each other. Serafini (2012) recast the four resources/practices as “reader-viewer as navigator,” “reader-viewer as interpreter,” “reader-viewer as designer,” and “reader-viewer as interrogator.”

According to Serafini (2012), as navigator, the reader-viewer attends to the different elements on the page, identifies the elements and semiotic resources perceived, and makes decisions about where to start their reading and the path(s) their reading will take. As interpreter, the reader-viewer constructs meaning from the combination of modes during transactions with multimodal texts. As (re)designer, the reader-viewer (re)constructs the text according to their interests, their purposes and audience, and their criterial commitments. Each textual construction will be unique because no two people will have engaged with the text or paid precise attention to the same criterial aspects of a text (Bezemer & Kress, 2016). Finally, as interrogator, the reader-viewer moves beyond examining the text itself to consider the additional sites of production, reception, and dissemination (see also Rose, 2016; Kendrick, 2015).

A change to understandings about the nature of readers and reading also requires a shift of thinking regarding how readers are assessed. Linguistic measures of reading achievement are not sufficient when evaluating students’ multimodal text interpretive capabilities. Callow’s (2008) scholarship, however, provided a starting point for researchers and practitioners interested in multimodal literacies curriculum creation and enactment. Callow presented a framework for assessment of students’ visual literacy capabilities and showed how teachers might assess students’ visual literacy according to

three different dimensions: the affective, compositional, and critical dimensions. The affective dimension of assessment requires teachers to observe how students interact with visual texts, to notice their level of engagement, and to attend to the personal responses students make as they transact with visual works. The compositional dimensions require students to demonstrate an understanding of key metalanguage that demonstrates students' knowledge regarding how images work. Concepts from Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996, 2006) visual grammar could support teachers and students in clarifying compositional knowledge of visual texts. Callow (2008) described the last dimension as the most challenging for students and teachers because criticality requires students to challenge and critique the visual texts along ideological lines of thinking.

### **Designing Multimodal Literacies Curricula**

Serafini (2014) designed a curricular structure to support teachers in designing learning experiences involving visual and multimodal texts. The first phase of the learning experience is the exposure phase, during which students engage with and experience a variety of visual texts. During the exploration phase, students study exemplar texts as a class and self-select examples to read and comprehend. During the final phase, students engage with the text-medium by composing multimodal texts themselves. Exploring texts across a medium can help students learn how visuals and design features work across a range of texts. The knowledge students glean through exploration can then serve students' text-making purposes. A multimodal literacies curriculum should benefit both students' reading and composing efforts.

Another way to conceive of a multimodal literacies curriculum is to harness Smagorinsky's (2002) notion of designing conceptual units that bring different texts into

conversation with one another. Smagorinsky defines a conceptual unit as a way of “organiz[ing] students’ learning around a particular emphasis” (p. 5). A teacher could choose to emphasize a chosen theme, period of time, cultural movement, region, genre, works by a single author, or key literary strategies. Through the development of multimedia text-sets (Strop & Carlson, 2011), teachers could also incorporate visual and graphic texts (both fiction and non-fiction) into the curriculum across academic years. In this way, visual and graphic narratives could be counted as literature alongside more traditional linguistic texts.

### **Curriculum Matters: Composing Multimodal Texts**

As Mr. Bergeron self-identified as an expert writing instructor, I first chose to also examine the intersection of composition literacy practices with multimodal literacies pedagogy. Then, motivated by Cook and Kirchoff’s (2017) argument that graphic novels and visual texts can sponsor and increase the sophistication of students’ multimodal compositions, I investigate the notion of mentor texts and their potential contributions to students’ composing. Third, I conclude by discussing how the field of rhetoric and composition, which has remained largely separated from K-12 literacy education scholarship, has been grappling with the need to prepare college-level students for an increasingly visual and multimodal social world. The issues confronting those interested in multimodal composition at the college level are the same issues facing K-12 educators. At both levels, educators are preparing students to be critical consumers and capable designers of the multimodal texts that abound within their social worlds.

## **Multimodal Composition in Secondary English Language Arts Classrooms**

In this section, I examine thematic trends that I constructed after searching for scholarship on multimodal composition in secondary English Language Arts classrooms. I first examine how scholarship tends to focus on the site of the text itself (Rose, 2016). Research on multimodal composition did not tend to emphasize the sites of dissemination or reception (Rose, 2016). I then explore how scholarship suggested that inviting multimodal texts and concepts into the English Language Arts arena has impacted traditional classroom structures of power and authority.

**The foregrounding of the text itself.** In a number of the studies, students did not appear driven by their distinct motivations or interests (Kress, 2010, 2015) in sparking communication with addressees of their choosing. The adults in charge tended not to invite the students, the meaning-makers themselves, to participate in the construction of the multimodal composition task at hand. For example, McLean and Rowsell (2015) developed a visual composition assignment based on the work of an artist they admired. Chisholm and Trent (2014) required students to compose a place-based digital story, and Pantaleo (2012a) crafted a curriculum unit that culminated in students creating a picturebook. The teachers and researchers seemed mostly responsible for designing tasks students undertook, and they made decisions regarding the texts students would make, the materials and tools available for their composition, and the audience(s) that would receive the texts (if there was an audience beyond the teacher or researcher).

I am not arguing, however, that the notion of audience is entirely absent from research on multimodal composition. For example, McLean and Rowsell's (2015) students showcased their photographic work at a local gallery, while in other studies,

students shared their work with their classroom peers (Bruce, 2009; Curwood & Cowell, 2011). There are scholarly exceptions that included an audience beyond the teacher or researcher. For example, Schwartz (2014) encouraged her students to choose social media platforms for their work and disseminate texts for a potentially global online audience. However, even when students' texts were disseminated, and audiences received their work, these studies in multimodal composition did not investigate the audience's interaction with and interpretation of the students' texts.

There are potential consequences for focusing on the material product, the text itself. In not examining more completely the sites of reception and methods of circulation and dissemination (Rose, 2016), the semiotic potential for impact of a text on a range of audiences is left unexplored. Students may not fully understand their power as text-makers or comprehend the ways in which their texts might act upon the world (Freire, 1968/2018; Janks, 2010). Furthermore, by not investigating the site of production, students also miss the opportunity to critically examine the beliefs, values, and contexts that influence the texts they choose to make or the tools and materials they chose to use.

**Differing presentations of teacher authority.** In the last subsection, I detailed how teachers mostly initiated students' acts of representation and communication. In the studies mentioned above, the teachers and researchers made curriculum decisions (Pantaleo, 2011) and created the curricular, classroom, and digital space for multimodal composition (see Curwood & Cowell, 2011; Consalvo & David, 2016; Schwartz, 2014). The teacher and/or researcher decided the learning objectives and, in most circumstances, provided the tools and material resources. In showcasing the curricular designing of the teacher, these studies also highlighted the authority of the teacher.



However, other studies in multimodal composition have suggested that teacher authority and status as a content-area expert may need to change as multimodal texts and concepts gain traction in classroom communities. For example, Miller (2010) showcased the work of four teachers. One teacher, Ms. Gorski, described how her focus on student composing and design helped her realize that she needed to create new roles for both herself and her students. Ms. Gorski remarked that she left a familiar district mantra behind: “I do, we do, you do” (p. 207). Co-construction proved to be the solution. Ms. Gorski and the other teachers “offered the students the chance to co-construct purpose for their literacy activity” (p. 211). Co-construction provided space for students to take responsibility for their work and design the text that fit their vision and emphasized their voice. This shift in responsibility required students to simultaneously take on the mantle of multiple roles as they became researchers, writers, interpreters, editors, and designers of meaning (p. 212). The teacher facilitated students in this design work. This approach aligns with Kress and Selander’s (2012) vision for interactive design pedagogy and Gee’s (2005) vision for co-design.

Nahachewsky (2013) also presented a case study of a teacher who challenged traditional classroom power structures. Nahachewsky described the classroom as a text and viewed Michelle, the focal high school English teacher in his study, as an author herself: She constantly engaged in the process of remaking her role as this classroom’s teacher. However, she shared authorship with her students. With her students, Michelle navigated the “wide array of writing and representational possibilities for teachers and students in this digital age” (p.86). This navigation is too much for one person to manage;

the possibilities are too vast. Nahachewsky determined that this kind of teaching becomes an ellipsis. The ellipsis is the gap left by Michelle for her students to fill.

For Nahachewsky (2013), the notion of a single authority figure must be revisited and challenged. A new horizontal power structure exists in the classrooms belonging to teachers like Michelle (Nahachewsky, 2013). These challenges to traditional ways of doing school also align with Bomer's (2012) proclamation that the "project of involving adolescent students in naming their own practices and knowledge...is the next step in building literacy curricula" (p. x). If teacher-authored sequences and designs stay in place, there is the possibility that student compliance may prevail over student design (Miller, 2010). Teachers must find a balance between offering support and allowing students the creative freedom to pursue composing texts of their choice for audiences that matter to them (Smith & Shen, 2017). A classroom can be a space that permits "multidirectional flows of expertise" (Smith & Shen, 2017, p. 88).

### **Mentor Texts and Multimodal Composition**

Throughout this dissertation study, the visual and multimodal texts were used by Mr. Bergeron for both interpretive and compositional purposes. In addition to interpreting multimodal texts, he wanted students to develop their understanding of the tools, materials, and semiotic resources they could use in the production of their texts. As inspiration for students' own multimodal compositions, the multimodal texts became mentor texts, sources of artistic or stylistic ideas that students could imitate or use in their work. Therefore, I deemed an examination of the roles played by mentor texts in English Language Arts settings, with attention to how multimodal mentor texts have been used, important to this study. Yet, like Moses, Serafini, and Loyd (2016) argued, very little

research has been conducted on how mentor texts impact student writers and what aspects of this textual mentorship students take-up and use in their work. How students respond to mentor texts may not match the intention and design of the classroom teacher (Moses, Serafini, & Loyd, 2016).

**The ubiquity of mentor texts.** The notion of “mentor texts” has achieved ubiquity within the realm of English Language Arts (Laminack, 2017). Calkins (1994) stated that mentor or “touchstone texts” were capable of guiding young writers in crafting, and Ray (1999) explained mentor texts as works that showcased vivid and robust writing that students could imitate when constructing their own texts. Ray (1999) described how mentor texts should feature interesting writing concepts, well-organized or unique structures, and creative vocabulary and phrasing. Teachers can also induct students into disciplinary ways and genres of writing using mentor texts (Pytash & Morgan, 2014). Ultimately, support for studying mentor or model texts is grounded in the belief that examination and imitation of writing found in published texts will result in students crafting more effective written language texts (Graham & Perin, 2007). Mentor texts have been recommended for use in elementary (Calkins, 1994; Ray, 1999) and secondary contexts as an effective instructional practice for teaching writing (Graham & Perin, 2007).

Notably, the phrase “reading like a writer” has accompanied the idea of mentor texts. This phrase suggests that reading like a writer is different from reading like a reader. Instead of reading for comprehension and with purpose, writers read for elements of craft (Griffith, 2010). According to Anderson (2006), examples of good writing should be noticed and then “collected, categorized, and imitated” (p.31). Indeed, Pytash and

Morgan (2014) issued a note of caution during their argument for using mentor texts to teach disciplinary writing: Students' attention should be directed towards writing craft and teachers should assist students in examining the decisions the writers made. They advised against discussing the topic or content of the writing. Therefore, reading like a writer requires developing the ability to notice good writing and identify the linguistic aspects that comprise its good quality (Griffith, 2010). Students must notice, name, and then apply the writing techniques exhibited within mentor texts to their own writing (Ray, 1999; Griffith, 2010; Pytash & Morgan, 2014). When reading with a "writer's eye" (Culham, 2019), students do not keep narrative and meaning in view. Comprehending and enjoying the text seems secondary to technical considerations of craft.

**The authority of mentor texts.** In some scholarship, the mentor text seems to transcend its role as text object. Almost by means of metonymy, the mentor text stands for and represents the professional writer responsible for published texts. Anderson (2006) identified mentor texts as "writing mentors" (p. 31), while Premont et al. (2017), in their study exploring how tenth-grade writers used picturebook mentor texts to improve the quality of their writing, stated that mentor texts "allow published authors to step into the classroom and act as writing coaches" (p. 291), a sentiment also expressed by Sturgell (2008). If not representative of the writer themselves, the mentor text has also been portrayed as a window through which a reader who is reading with a writer's eyes (Culham, 2019) can witness and comprehend the behaviors and decisions made by an author. Yet, as Smith (1983) reminded us, the published texts we encounter do not show us the work of writing—just the end product or the "golden urn" (Gallagher, 2009).

Some scholars have expressed concerns with the positioning of mentor texts in classrooms because it attributes authority and status to a text and its author. Wissman (2011), for example, pointed out that the use of mentor texts as models of good writing often means that this approach to text “often do not consider the epistemologies, purpose, or intent behind the work, tending to gloss over the context in which the writing emerged and the author's social positioning” (p. 431). Thus, while students may become more proficient writers in terms of their knowledge of writing techniques and devices, they may not develop the understanding that all texts can be examined, critiqued, and (if necessary) challenged. The fact that the teacher often selects mentor texts means that there is a double assurance of textual authority and excellence: first by the text’s publisher and then by the teacher, the often-recognized human expert in the classroom.

**Multimodal mentor texts.** When considering multimodal literacies and multimodal texts in the classroom, another issue with expertise arises. In much scholarship on mentor texts, the emphasis is on developing written language skills, skills with which the English teacher is likely familiar. These writing competencies enable teachers to mediate between the mentor texts and the students, and some scholars (Griffith, 2010; Pytash & Morgan, 2014; Ruday, 2016) have recommended that teachers structure students’ learning from mentor texts using the gradual release of responsibility model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). In this instructional design template, the teacher models noticing and naming the writing techniques “until students start to see writing in this new way” (Pytash & Morgan, 2014, p. 96).

However, although Cook and Kirchoff (2017) stated that teachers must support students in understanding how images and design features contribute to meaning-making

and interpretive work through “explicit instruction and modeling” (p. 78), the scholarship of researchers like Meixner et al. (2019) showed that many classroom teachers are enthusiastic about taking a multimodal literacies approach to instruction but do not have the knowledge or experiences reading and crafting multimodal texts to claim expertise and authority. The teachers in their study found reading and crafting multimodal texts challenging and, sometimes, anxiety-inducing. Both preservice and inservice teachers need support in establishing a broad knowledge of multimodal concepts, important metalanguage, and opportunities to craft multimodal texts (Meixner et al., 2019; Smith, 2018). Pedagogical frameworks such as Dalton’s (2012) Digital Designer’s Workshop, which expands the writer’s workshop model to include mini-lessons on crafting multimodal texts and time to compose multimodally, are useful. However, implementing such frameworks still requires teacher expertise with regards to choosing example texts, selecting multimodal concepts to teach, and identifying tools and materials for student use. There is a gap between multimodal theory and pedagogical practice that needs closing (Khadka & Lee, 2019).

### **A Manifesto on Multimodality for Composition Instructors**

In an effort to close the “multimodal gap” (Khadka & Lee, 2019) between theory and pedagogical practice, Wysocki et al. (2019) wrote a manifesto for the rhetoric and composition field that detailed key multimodality tenets and principles to guide the design of curriculum and inform pedagogy in writing classrooms. Their goal for the manifesto was “to further situate rhetoric and composition as a habitable space for multimodality” (p. 18) and to provide a “replicable stance” (p. 18) that can be taken up by composition scholars and instructors. Although written predominantly for the higher

education community, the tenets and principles that comprise the manifesto hold relevance for K-12 English teachers, particularly as teachers like Mr. Bergeron were trained in college composition programs and practices. As secondary English teachers look to incorporate multimodal literacies into their curricula, this manifesto may represent a useful reference point.

**An overview of the manifesto.** Wysocki et al. (2019) organized their manifesto into seven tenets: (a) on thinking rhetorically, (b) on making, (c) on teaching and curriculum building, (d) on approaching evaluation and assessment, (e) on considering embodiment and performance, (f) on working infrastructurally, and (g) on advocating. The first tenet emphasized that multimodal composition and the tools and technologies that enable multimodal composition should always be taught as a means of supporting composers' aims and intentions for the social reception of their work. The second tenet focused on composers as makers and composition as the process of making a meaningful artifact. The third tenet advocated for multimodal pedagogy as necessitating a shift in theoretical orientation or stance, while the fourth tenet argued that the rhetorical purposes of any composition should guide assessment and evaluation practices. The fifth tenet noted the sensory aspects of multimodal text-making, and the sixth tenet promoted the need to examine multimodality within broader institutional contexts and the necessity of resisting the written language norms of academia. The final tenet connects multimodality and multimodal pedagogy with social and community activism.

**The manifesto's emphasis on criticality.** All seven tenets of the manifesto on multimodality (Wysocki et al., 2019) make clear the necessity of critical reflection to multimodal composing. For example, the first tenet on thinking rhetorically stated that

meaning-makers should engage critically with the semiotic resources, tools, materials, and technologies that mediate their composing labor. Making and doing should not occur without thinking and critical reflection: “We cannot split practices of making from those of critiquing and making knowledge” (Wysocki et al., 2019, p. 19). In the second tenet on making, they similarly stated that “the practices of making and critical activity must be rendered mutually supportive” (Wysocki et al., 2019, p. 21). Text-making and analysis should, therefore, feature in classrooms practicing a multimodal literacies approach to communication.

The manifesto brings together criticality and making/doing, two components that Pangrazio (2016), for example, viewed as distinct and separate approaches to literacy, and digital literacy, in particular. Pangrazio defined three approaches to literacy in the digital era: the critical literacy approach, the critical media literacy approach, and the digital design literacies approach. She grouped scholarship on design (New London Group, 1996; Kress, 2010) with more recent scholarship on the maker movement (Gauntlett, 2011). The design literacies scholarship, according to Pangrazio (2016), focused on the maker, the text made, and the developing skill-set and expertise of the maker. For Pangrazio (2016), these approaches highlighted a tension between the personal/creative and the social/political, between the user/consumer of resources and engaged/active citizen, and between technical mastery and critical dispositions. The manifesto suggests that making and criticality are part of the same stance on multimodality, and the duty of the composition scholar is to “advocate for structures that empower others to both critique and create multimodal work” (Wysocki et al., 2019, p. 27). Critical analysis is not an additive component but an integral aspect of the playing,



making, and doing that design and semiotic labor entail.

### **Future Directions**

Khadka and Lee's (2019) scholarship challenged researchers and practitioners to think about how best to close the gap between multimodal theories and pedagogical practice. Through this study, I intended to examine that gap more closely by investigating what happened when the curriculum design decisions made by a teacher new to multimodal theories were enacted in a classroom setting. Taking Bezemer and Kress's (2016) framework for learning, my study highlighted which aspects of multimodality Mr. Bergeron foregrounded in both his curriculum plans and classroom instruction, as well as what kinds of concepts and metalanguage were backgrounded or not mentioned at all. Furthermore, Kress and Selander's (2012) notion of interactive design assigned agency to students and made them participants in the design of learning. However, Kress and Selander present student involvement in a very orderly way that may not reflect the spontaneity, complexity, and messiness of everyday classroom life. Thus, my study not only asked what the teacher did as he worked to create and implement a multimodal literacies curriculum, but also inquired as to what the students did in response to the multimodal concepts, texts, and composing opportunities Mr. Bergeron made available to them.

### **Summary**

In chapter two, I introduced the conceptual framework that guided this study and showed how both social semiotic theories of multimodality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Kress, 2010) and sociocultural theories regarding learning and literacy (Lave & Wenger, 1991; New London Group, 1996; Street, 1984) shape my understanding of classroom

communities of practice. I also demonstrated the relevance of scholarship on critical literacy (Luke & Freebody, 1999; Janks, 2000, 2010), children's literature (Serafini, 2010, 2014, 2015), visual culture studies (Barthes, 1977; Rose, 2016), and composition (Wysocki et al., 2019) to this study.

In chapter three, I introduce the study site and participants in more detail, and I explain my data collection and analysis strategies in the hope of making my research process as visible and transparent to the reader as possible. Chapter four is dedicated to my explication of my findings. In chapter five, I conclude my dissertation study by making six assertions. I justify each assertion and show how each one is significant to designing multimodal literacy learning experiences in school contexts.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

This research study sought to understand what happened when a seventh-grade English Language Arts designed and implemented a multimodal literacies curriculum unit. The following overarching research question guided this study: What happened when multimodal narratives were used as mentor texts in a seventh-grade English Language Arts Classroom? In addition, a series of sub-questions further refined the focus of this study:

- What did the classroom teacher do when literacy learning was expanded to include multimodal concepts and texts?
- What did students do when literacy learning was expanded to include multimodal concepts and texts?

Guided by these research questions, I designed and carried out a qualitative, interpretive study of one teacher and four focal students in a seventh-grade English Language Arts class in a suburban K-8 school in the American Southwest. For thirteen weeks, I documented the curriculum decisions and pedagogical moves made by the teacher. I also selected four focal students and observed their engagement (both independently and together) and transactions with the multimodal texts the teacher chose to incorporate into his multimodal literacies curriculum design. I used a variety of data generation methods to gather information from the perspectives of both the classroom teacher and the four focal students. From this data, I constructed a composite bricolage or montage (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013) of what transpired in this classroom during the study's timeframe.

In this chapter, I explain my research design. I include introductions to the site and study participants, and I also discuss my role as the researcher in this study. I conclude this chapter by detailing my data collection and data analysis methods.

### **Research Design**

This qualitative research study is informed by a constructivist epistemology that understands meaning as constructed by human beings within particular social contexts (Crotty, 1998; Kamberelis & Dimitriades, 2005). I, therefore, recognize myself as both a research instrument and a constructor of knowledge and meaning (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tracy, 2013). Knowledge about the social world is constructed by and mediated through the researcher (Tracy, 2013). However, despite this inherently human aspect of qualitative knowledge-making, qualitative data collection, analysis, and interpretation procedures can still be systematic, organized, and made transparent (Tracy, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Furthermore, although specific social contexts are critical to research conducted according to constructivist epistemology, qualitative research can still be “phronetic” (Tracy, 2013, p. 4) in being both useful and practical. Thus, while I recognize the particularity of a research study situated in one seventh-grade classroom, my research offers assertions and implications relevant to researchers, practitioners, and other stakeholders interested in designing and implementing English Language Arts curricula informed by multimodal literacies pedagogy (Erickson, 1986; Tracy, 2013; Yin, 2018).

Additionally, my research design was influenced by Erickson’s (1986) interpretive approach to research in teaching. For Erickson, “interpretive research” refers to the family of research methods that includes, for example, ethnography and case study research. His use of the term, interpretive research, avoids delineating and restricting

research designs to the methodological specificities of ethnography or case study. Instead, interpretive research speaks to the “family resemblance among the various approaches” (p. 119) in that, when undertaking ethnography or case study, researchers seek to understand how humans make meaning within social contexts. According to Erickson, interpretive research enables the education researcher to construct an understanding of classrooms as social communities, as well as gaining insight into the “meaning-perspectives” (p. 120) of the social actors. Within a classroom, the social actors are the teacher(s) and their students.

### **The School Site**

The K-8 charter school in which this study took place is situated to the east of a large southwestern city. The school’s mission statement identified college graduation as a primary goal for students who attended this school. The school does not receive Title I funding. Demographic data reported by the state Department of Education at the time of the study identified 52.38% of the grades 5-8 students as White, 30.27% of students as Hispanic, 4.42% of students as African American, 4.76% of students Asian, 1.13% of students as Native American or Pacific Islander, and 7.14% of students as Multiple Races.

Standardized state English Language Arts assessment results showed that 12% of the grades 5-8 student population scored within the minimally proficient range, 16% scored within the partially proficient range, 48% scored within the proficient range, and 24% scored within the highly proficient range. While 69% of middle-grade students classified as low socioeconomic status were scored as proficient or highly proficient, 51% of special education students received proficient or highly proficient scores. The

school was designated a “B” grade by the state Department of Education according to the criteria mapped out in its accountability system. The grade assigned to the school by the Department of Education was based upon the school’s student proficiency levels in English Language Arts and Math, students’ academic growth (as determined by standardized test scores), English Language Learners’ growth, and acceleration and readiness measures. This grade indicated that the Department of Education deemed the school a highly performing academic institution. The school’s accountability cut scores showed that the school fell just short of scoring an “A” grade.

In addition to standardized state tests, the school also administered summative examinations in reading and mathematics that are prepared by an international curriculum development and assessment corporation. These scores were not reported with the state data. They were used internally by school personnel to determine student groupings (or cohorts) within each grade level and individual student eligibility for participation in advanced classes in English Language Arts and Math.

Four days each week, students experienced one-hour classes in Mathematics, English/Language Arts, Social Studies, and Science. On the remaining weekday, class-time was extended to a 90-minute block for each of these core academic subjects. Core classes were not held at the same time each day. Although there existed an emphasis on test scores and preparing students for graduating from college, there was no fixed English Language Arts curriculum to which teachers were required to adhere. Teachers were able to exercise autonomy in determining learning goals, designing curriculum content, and constructing formative assessments. Core teachers taught student cohorts from multiple grade-levels.

## Study Participants

### Focal Teacher

Mr. Bergeron taught the seventh-grade English Language Arts class upon which this study focused. Mr. Bergeron was a 33-year old White male. In addition to teaching full-time, at the time of the study, he was also studying full-time for his doctorate in English Education. His research interests focused on writing strategies to support middle-grade writers, and he described in an early interview how a former professor had influenced him during his undergraduate teaching experience. Through his work with his professor, he developed an interest in how picturebooks might be used to teach secondary students different writing and stylistic techniques and support students in examining genre conventions and rules.

Although his student teaching experiences encompassed working with high school students, after accepting his first teaching position at a middle school, he realized that he loved teaching middle-grade students. He enjoyed teaching students at this stage in their academic careers and stated that he was “hyper-aware of the importance of middle school in students’ learning trajectory” (personal communication, January 1, 2019). He described middle school “as a time when [students] can easily become lost as concepts get harder and more abstract, and it is also a time when some lose interest in academic work” (personal communication, January 1, 2019). Also, Mr. Bergeron felt that there was less pressure with regards to meeting standards, mastery, and high-stakes standardized assessments.

At the time of the study, he had taught middle-school students English Language Arts for eight years. He had been teaching English Language Arts at the research site for

close to two years. During his first year at the school, he had taught student cohorts in grades seven and eight. His second-year teaching responsibilities at the research site changed. When the study took place, Mr. Bergeron was teaching three sixth-grade cohorts and one seventh-grade cohort. When asked to describe his approach to teaching middle school students, Mr. Bergeron stated that he prioritized making students feel welcome, safe, and comfortable in his classes. He explained that he focused less on standards and more on self-confidence and exposure to different writing strategies and texts. Mr. Bergeron emphasized that providing students with choice was a hallmark of his teaching. Therefore, whenever possible, he dedicated time in each lesson for independent reading and provided students with options when it came to writing assignments.

This study took place during the final quarter of the academic school year. Immediately before starting the curriculum unit incorporating multimodal texts, I observed Mr. Bergeron engage his students with dystopian literature. They read dystopian short stories and watched a dystopian Disney animation, discussing the dystopian characteristics of each text they studied. Students also experimented with the dystopian literary genre and produced their own dystopian creative writing. Mr. Bergeron enjoyed teaching this unit because dystopian literature and science fiction are text genres he loved to read, write, and view. His interest in dystopian literature, movies, and television shows was documented on his teacher website.

The dystopian unit was the fourth curriculum unit Mr. Bergeron had designed and taught in this academic year. The first unit of the year focused on literary elements (setting, plot, character, conflict, point of view, figurative language, and dialogue). Students wrote a fictional short story using the literary elements and writing techniques



studied. The second unit centered on argumentative writing and speaking. Students constructed a senate bill and participated in a class senate debate. During the third curriculum unit, students read, wrote, and performed poetry. Students built poetry portfolios containing their work from the unit. Mr. Bergeron had invited students to work with visual images throughout the school year. While studying argumentative writing and speaking, students explored infographics and data visualization. Students also discussed page space and graphic design when examining how some poems played with visual forms when presenting their work.

Mr. Bergeron became interested in multimodal texts and multimodal literacies instruction after learning about my research interests during doctoral-level classes we had both taken and attending several of my presentations on multimodal middle-grade literature. I had presented my research to doctoral and masters level students in a post-colonial young adult literature class, and I also presented my work at a state English Teachers Association conference. Importantly for answering my research questions, Mr. Bergeron identified himself as a novice regarding teaching with multimodal texts and concepts, and he stated that he is “convinced that [he] can do a much better job incorporating/leveraging more modes and media in [his] classes” (personal communication, January 1, 2019). Although I met with and interviewed two other teachers regarding this study, Mr. Bergeron had the curricular space, time, and autonomy to design and implement a curriculum unit that addressed multimodal literacies.

## **Focal Classroom**

Mr. Bergeron was open to me attending any of his four English Language Arts classes (three sixth-grade cohorts and one seventh-grade cohort). He taught each class the same lessons and did not design different learning experiences for different grade-level cohorts. To keep the study manageable, I decided to focus on one English Language Arts classroom. I chose his seventh-grade class. Assessment data and recommendations from teachers in prior years determined student cohort groupings. The seventh-grade cohort most closely resembled the school's state-reported English Language Arts scores, with the majority of students scoring within the proficient range. The class schedule meshed with my own schedule, so I could be present during most class periods. Mr. Bergeron's seventh-grade class met on Monday and Thursday mornings and during the afternoon on the other three weekdays. The Thursday morning class was the extended 90-minute block lesson.

The seventh-grade cohort was Mr. Bergeron's largest class. There was a total of 31 students in this class, which was comprised of 16 females and 15 males. School records indicated that 65.1% of the students were White, 22.6% of the students were Hispanic or Latino/a, 3.2% of the students were Black, and 3.2% of the students were American Indian. In terms of achievement on state tests, students classified as proficient in English Language Arts totaled 80.6%, while 6.4% of students scored below proficient, and another 6.4% scored highly proficient. The students not included in these statistics were transfer students from another school and district. Their demographic information and test data had not been entered into the school's reporting system.

## **Focal Students**

I invited all students to participate in this classroom research study. Following the procedures I described in my application to the Arizona State University Institutional Review Board, I sought consent from the parent(s)/guardian(s) of each student and assent from each student. I received consent and assent from 29 students. I did not collect data from the two students who did not wish to be included in the study. Although student artifacts and data were collected from all participants in the study (for example, reading journals, visual narratives, and daily classroom writing/drawing), I collected additional data from four focal students (for example, paired/small group discussions, informal check-ins, and interviews) in order to understand students' perspectives and insights.

When selecting the focal students for this study, I followed Olson's (2011) advice and thought about which students "would likely have experience that was relevant to the topic and would therefore be a good participant" (p. 26). Lincoln and Guba (1985) discussed "naturalistic sampling" and suggested that researchers choose informants based on "informational, not statistical, considerations" (p. 201). These perspectives seemed to align with the rationale Bazeley (2013) provided for purposive sampling, which enables researchers to identify participants that will help them answer their research questions. I spent three weeks observing Mr. Bergeron and the students in his class before selecting the four focal students. I drew upon conversations with Mr. Bergeron and my classroom observations and fieldnotes when making my selections.

When selecting the focal students, I thought deeply about which students could offer knowledge and information that would help me understand a more complete picture of what happened when Mr. Bergeron focused on the multimodal nature of texts and

introduced multimodal literacies concepts into his classroom for the first time. I thought about the different dimensions of my topic (Olson, 2011), and I selected four students I believed would provide me with an emic, yet unique, insight into classroom literacy events and practices. I built my rationales for each student selection based upon the notion of maximizing my knowledge. Each student came to classroom texts and classroom literacy practices from a different perspective. I thought about which students could offer different insights and knowledge regarding the implementation of visual texts and visual literacy practices in this middle school classroom. (See Table 1 for an introduction to each focal student and my rationale for their selection).

### **Timeframe**

This study took place during Spring 2019. My study was approved by the Institutional Review Board for my institution on January 28, 2019. Beginning in mid-February, I attended Mr. Bergeron's seventh-grade class as his and my own schedule permitted. I spent the first four weeks of the study observing Mr. Bergeron teaching a dystopian fiction and writing curriculum unit. From March through mid-May, Mr. Bergeron designed and enacted the multimodal literacy curriculum unit. I did not attend class if students were taking state or benchmarking assessments or if there were school events that caused the class to be canceled (for example, a school assembly celebrating the color guard). In total, I attended 55 class periods.

### **Researcher's Role**

As stated above, I had met Mr. Bergeron before the study. We had taken a research methods class together, and he had attended several of my presentations on multimodal texts and multimodal literacies instruction at on-campus and state-level

**Table 1***Introduction to Each Focal Student and My Rationale for Their Selection*

	<b>Demographics</b>	<b>Academics</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
<b>Blue</b>	13 Male Hispanic or Latino	State Test: Proficient  Teacher Grade: A	Blue was a vocal contributor to whole class discussions, but his comments and interpretations stood out from the rest of the class because he often shifted the discussion from the story / text details to social and political issues beyond the text. I was interested in seeing if/how Blue connected the visual narrative texts and the images in those texts to sociopolitical issues.
<b>Norman</b>	13 Male White	State Test: Proficient  Teacher Grade: B	Norman was recognized in this classroom community as an avid reader. He loved reading novels and had fun creating written language stories. Other students often had to nudge him when independent reading time was up to orient him to the next activity. I was interested in hearing Norman's ideas about and interpretations of the visual texts and multimodal novels.
<b>Pinon</b>	13 Female American Indian/Alaskan Native	State Test: Proficient  Teacher Grade: A	Pinon worked in images, often turning the linguistic texts they studied in class into series of images through transduction (Kress, 2010). Her drawings often represented her interpretations and, while she never contributed verbally to whole-class discussions, she did share her art with others through conversation. She held artistic status in the classroom, and both her fellow students and teacher appreciated and valued her artwork. Pinon, therefore, offered an artist's perspective on the illustrated and graphic texts the class studied. I was interested to see how she represented her thinking on the visual texts in terms of transduction and/or transformation.
<b>Regina</b>	13 Female White	State Test: Proficient  Teacher Grade: A*	Regina was "a legitimate, committed, and accepted member within the local context" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 52). She held both academic and social status within the classroom. She was very successful within this literacy community and excelled at the literacy practices this community valued. She was a vocal contributor and committed participant in every literacy event. I was interested in understanding how Regina, an expert in the classroom community, responded to the introduction of visual texts and new, modified, or adapted literacy practices. Her A* grade signaled academic achievement beyond usual expectations for seventh-grade students. This grade is awarded on summative school-wide assessments.

events. Before the study, I provided Mr. Bergeron with research and pedagogical articles on reading multimodal texts and teaching visual literacy that I thought might support him as he designed and enacted a multimodal literacies curriculum for the first time. I received grant funding from Arizona State University's Graduate and Professional Student Association (GPSA) to supply Mr. Bergeron with the multimodal texts he needed for the curriculum unit. We selected sets of multimodal novels for students' independent reading and literature circles and bought classroom sets of four picturebooks. I also shared with him my library of picturebooks and visual narrative texts for potential modeling and read-aloud purposes. We agreed that he did not have to use or incorporate all of these resources as he designed and planned his curriculum. Please refer to Appendix A to view the resources shared and purchased.

Throughout the planning and implementation phase, I acted as a consultant or "shaping agent" (Bezemer & Kress, 2016) to Mr. Bergeron. I listened to his ideas, shared my ideas when requested, and highlighted resources that I thought might provide timely support. We met four times throughout the study, twice before Mr. Bergeron started teaching the unit and twice during the unit. Mr. Bergeron shared his plans and resources via an online shared document and would sometimes highlight parts of his plans, leaving comments or questions for me to consider. I addressed his comments and questions by writing into the shared document or through short informal conversations before or after classroom conversations. Often, I responded with further questions for him to consider, or I asked for clarification regarding a specific idea or pedagogical move. My goal was to be supportive and responsive but not directive.

It is important to note that Mr. Bergeron made and enacted all curricular decisions. As consultant or shaping agent, I listened and responded to his questions, comments, and concerns. Still, I did not insist on one pedagogical move or resource over another or assist with the mapping of the lesson sequence and learning goals. In this way, Mr. Bergeron benefitted from access to professional development resources, multimodal texts, and my expertise in multimodal literacies. However, as the expert in terms of the students he teaches, his school community, and the teaching practices deemed valuable within his classroom community, it was appropriate that Mr. Bergeron continued to make text selections and pedagogical decisions. As Pantaleo (personal communication, December 6, 2018) explained, together, classroom teachers and researchers can fuse their areas of expertise to craft learning experiences designed for specific groups of students. Yet, because my research questions focused on what happened in Mr. Bergeron's classroom due to the decisions he made, our fusion of expertise was balanced in favor of Mr. Bergeron. To document both of our contributions to the learning experiences that unfolded in the classroom during the multimodal literacies unit, I audio-recorded our planning sessions, downloaded the curriculum unit document each week to preserve our written conversation and keep track of edits, and reconstructed informal classroom conversations in my fieldnotes.

As I was a shaping agent in the design of the multimodal literacies curriculum, following Heath and Street's (2008) advice, Mr. Bergeron and I established a distinct period of observation before the unit of instruction began. I visited the classroom and observed the context, social actors, and the literacy practices valued in this space every weekday for four weeks prior to the unit beginning. Like C. Lewis (2001), I wished to

observe the “unfolding” (p. 186) in the classroom before identifying focal students and formulating ideas about the literacy events and practices deemed valuable within this classroom. During these four weeks, Mr. Bergeron taught a dystopian fiction unit that involved students reading and responding to short fiction and an animated movie. Students also wrote dystopian fiction. I recorded jottings in the small yellow notebook I carried with me throughout the study and wrote-up my jottings into more extended and detailed fieldnotes immediately after each observation period (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011).

Despite not teaching the students or being a student myself, I became a member of the class whose presence was noted and acknowledged by the students in the class. On one occasion, I was late to class due to my car getting a flat tire on the highway. I received a round of applause from the students when I entered. My entrance interrupted the lesson in which they were engaged. Both Merriam and Tisdell (2016) and Tracy (2013) questioned the possibility of a researcher who can assume a purely observational role within any context, and particularly within classroom contexts “where research is shaped by a web of relationships” (C. Lewis, 2001, p. 184). A researcher’s presence will always have an effect on context and the people who operate within any given context. Thus, my relationship with the students in Mr. Bergeron’s classroom might be described as a “quasi-friend” or “tolerated insider in children’s society” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p.88, cited in C. Lewis, 2001, p. 186). As neither friend nor authority figure, I occupied a role somewhere in between those two poles.



## **Data Construction and Initial Analysis Procedures**

To answer my research questions, I utilized a range of relevant data construction strategies often utilized by ethnographers, visual ethnographers, and case study researchers. (Please see Table 2 for a representation of how each data source aligned with my specific research questions). I constructed ethnographic fieldnotes (Emerson et al., 2011) and conducted semi-structured and informal interviews (Olson, 2011) with both the teacher and the focal students. I videoed and audio-recorded whole-class instruction and student interactions, and I also gathered documents and artifacts created by participants during this study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, I documented changes to the classroom space by taking photographs with my phone camera. I also used my phone camera to record classroom action and interactions in still-image format. Below, I explain each of these data construction strategies in further detail and justify their use in answering the research questions that drove this study.

### **Photographs**

When I entered Mr. Bergeron's classroom for the first time, I noticed his wall décor and displays of student work. He had two whiteboards positioned at the front and the back of the classroom. On these board, Mr. Bergeron wrote the learning objectives and skills targeted during class instruction. He had also decorated the outside of his classroom door. I took daily photographs of the classroom environment to document how the setting evolved to accommodate visual texts and multimodal literacy concepts. My photographs also documented changes in furniture arrangements and the different uses of classroom space. My decision to photograph the material reality of the classroom was

**Table 2**

*Relationship Between Data Collection Strategies and Research Questions*

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	What did the classroom teacher do when literacy learning was expanded to include multimodal concepts and texts?	What did the students do when literacy learning was expanded to include multimodal concepts and texts?
Photographs	●	●
Fieldnotes	●	●
Teacher Interviews	●	
Teacher/Researcher Planning Sessions	●	
Teacher Audio-Recorded Reflections	●	
Whole Class Video and Audio	●	●
Student Small Group or Paired Interactions		●
Student Interviews		●
Student Artifacts		●
Teacher Artifacts	●	

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influenced by Scollon and Scollon's (2003) scholarship on geosemiotics, which contextualized discourse and interaction as always taking place in the material world. Any examination of social activity and interaction between social actors must account for the material and physical place in which interactions take place and address how place intersects with everyday language-in-use. My daily photographs could be understood as a form of repeat photography or *rephotography* (Klett, 2011) and supported me in understanding how this classroom environment and community changed across the duration of the study.

Pauwels (2011) remarked that, when researchers use visual methods, either material culture or human behavior is the referent, the 'thing' in the real world that is being referred to or represented in photographic form. My repeated photographs sought to record the visual material culture of the classroom. I also photographed Mr. Bergeron and his students as they worked and interacted throughout the unit. Thus, I also photographed human behavior. I employed "opportunistic sampling" (Sorenson & Jablonko, 1975) when photographing Mr. Bergeron and the students, using my camera to record moments or interactions that captured my attention

### **Fieldnotes and Memos Developed from Fieldnotes**

While observing each lesson, I recorded handwritten jottings in a notebook (Emerson et al., 2011). My notebook was small, and I felt handwritten notes in a small notebook to be less intrusive than either electronic notes using a laptop or a larger binder with pre-printed observation proformas (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I dated and named each lesson observation in my notebook and drew a small margin on the right side of the page. Following Emerson et al. (2011), I jotted down significant fragments of what I

noticed transpiring during each class period. Notes regarding salient (to me) changes in the classroom environment, excerpts of speech and conversation written down verbatim, and brief descriptions of student or teacher activity tended to comprise my jottings.

Emerson et al. explained how it is impossible to see everything that transpires in any given social context, and Merriam and Tisdell (2016) advised fieldworkers to focus their observation on specific people, interactions, or activities (p. 150). Therefore, I tended to concentrate my jottings and fieldnotes on the classroom teacher and the four focal students. To help me maintain my focus during observations, I reserved the front page of my notebook for my current research questions. The front page also contained an adapted list of questions that Emerson et al. (2011) recommended ethnographers consider during observations: What do I see going on? What are people doing? What are they trying to accomplish and how? How do people in this classroom talk about and understand what is happening? (p. 177).

The margin was space reserved for initial thoughts, analytical asides, questions, and commentary connecting what I saw in the classroom to theory and scholarship. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) identified this reflective aspect as an essential component of fieldnote construction, and they also named this practice as an early form of data analysis. This kind of thinking moves beyond notes about what is happening or going on in the classroom. Such comments represent the initial stages of interpretation. Berger (1972) described how human decisions about where to look shapes the way we see the events that unfold before us: “We only see what we look at. To look is an act of choice. As a result of this act, what we see is brought within our reach” (p. 8-9). Berger argued, therefore, that choices of looking connect the looker to the thing observed. Any

representation of something that exists in the world signals that relationship with the observer. I deemed it necessary, therefore, to include these margin commentaries and notes in this methods section because, as the study evolved, these analytical jottings played a crucial role in directing my gaze and attention as an observer in this seventh-grade classroom. My theoretical perspective influenced what I looked at and what was seen (Erickson, 1986; Rose, 2016). I did, however, stay alert to interactions, events, and changes in the environment that deviated from patterns I previously wrote about (Emerson et al., 2011).

After each lesson, I scheduled time to write-up my jottings into detailed and descriptive fieldnotes (Emerson et al., 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) also emphasized the importance of not allowing too much time to elapse between the observation and the time the researcher dedicates to writing up those fieldnotes so that the researcher can write “fresher, more detailed recollections” (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 49). I wrote my fieldnotes in narrative fashion, incorporating sensory details and verbatim dialogue from my jottings into the fieldnotes. I consciously avoided evaluative statements and used brackets to distinguish my analytical thoughts, questions, and interpretations from my fieldnote narratives (Emerson et al., 2011).

Although my fieldnotes were constructed using predominantly written language, I drew from visual ethnographic methods in enhancing my fieldnotes with photographs or video stills. While language worked best for documenting spoken interactions, developing sensory descriptions for the page, and explaining the social and academic contexts of each lesson, images helped me detail changes to the classroom environment, classroom wall décor and decisions about the display of student work, and the location of

student and teacher interactions. In addition, an image captures facial language and body position differently to a written description. Sometimes a picture communicated my experience in the classroom better than language. In turn, the language of my fieldnotes extended the context beyond the lens of the camera (Collier & Collier, 1986). It is important to note that the photographs included in my fieldnotes were selective in two ways: (a) As Collier & Collier (1986) observed, any photograph is selective in that the camera operator chooses what aspects of material reality are captured within the frame of the photograph; and (b) I took many more photographs than I embedded in my fieldnotes, so my inclusion of particular photographs and their location in my fieldnotes was also a choice I made. As with all my other acts of selection, I recognized the selection and embedding of particular images within my fieldnotes as initial acts of data analysis or data condensation (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2019).

After writing each fieldnote, I read over the thoughts I had bracketed and wrote more detailed in-process memos (Bazeley, 2013) or commentaries (Emerson et al., 2011). My in-process memos recorded my connections between what was happening in the classroom and my theoretical perspectives. My commentaries contained reflections on what I had learned during classroom observations, what events or interactions seemed particularly pertinent, and what moments had surprised or confused me. I also developed paragraph-long vignettes, “a briefly described episode” (Stake, 1995, p. 128) or “vivid portrayals of specific incidents” (Jarzabkowski, Bednarek, & Lê, 2014, p. 280), as (re)constructions of moments or interactions I deemed meaningful. I also wrote episodes (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 77) to recount longer slices of classroom life. My vignettes and episodes were saved separately from my fieldnotes and coded as narrative memos. These

forms of writing were more “storied” versions of moments I had extracted from my more general fieldnotes (Saldaña, 2016, p. 147). They represented a different kind of data construction. Again, I recognized these memos and narrative writings as the beginnings of my data analysis.

### **Pre- and Post-Study Semi-Structured Interviews with Mr. Bergeron**

Although Olson (2011) stated that semi-structured interviews are more suitable for later phases in the study as a means of seeking clarification regarding certain aspects of the study, I used a semi-structured interview format to prepare for pre-study and post-study interviews with Mr. Bergeron. As conversations with Mr. Bergeron took place during the recruitment process and initial ideas had already been exchanged, I felt that I had established a relationship with Mr. Bergeron and built a foundational understanding of his classroom and pedagogy. The more targeted format of the semi-structured interview allowed me to attend to pertinent questions regarding Mr. Bergeron’s development and design of his multimodal literacies curriculum.

I conducted the pre-study interview in mid-February 2019 using a semi-structured protocol adapted from Olson’s (2011) work on qualitative interviewing (see Appendix B for a copy of my interview protocol and accompanying questions). The purpose of this initial interview was threefold. First, I wished to learn Mr. Bergeron’s insights and perspectives on the community he has created within this seventh-grade English class. Second, I wanted to learn what ideas, questions, or concerns he might have regarding designing and enacting a multimodal literacies curriculum so that I could be responsive and offer relevant resources or scholarship. Third, I was interested in listening to his interpretations of the multimodal texts and concepts he planned on incorporating into his

curriculum unit. The semi-structured nature of this interview permitted me to pose additional and probing questions not included in the protocol. I audio-recorded this one-hour interview.

I conducted the post-study interview in May 2019, two weeks after my exit from the classroom and one week after school ended for Summer vacation. Once again, I used a semi-structured interview protocol built from Olson's (2011) qualitative interviewing scholarship (please see Appendix C for a copy of the protocol and accompanying questions). Our schedules had not allowed for an earlier interview. The purpose of this interview was also threefold: I wanted to gather Mr. Bergeron's final thoughts and reflections on teaching the multimodal literacies unit, learn his thoughts on the impact of the unit on his students, and ask for his perspectives on the pedagogical strategies he employed during the unit. In addition, I was also interested in the "residue" (Dewey, 1915), the lasting impressions and understandings left by the curriculum unit. I wanted to understand what aspects of the unit would make their way into his consecutive years of teaching and future curriculum units. I asked additional questions to probe further into some of the responses Mr. Bergeron offered. I audio-recorded this hour and a half-long interview. Both interviews were fully transcribed for later cycles of data analysis.

### **Pre- and Post-Study Semi-Structured Interviews with the Focal Students**

Because I had spent four weeks in the classroom and had presented my study and talked with the students as they worked, I felt that the semi-structured interview format (Olson, 2011) would also work for the pre- and post-study interviews with the four focal students. I developed an initial interview protocol comprised of seven questions (see Appendix D). The questions focused on their English Language Arts experience with Mr.



Bergeron, their prior literacy experiences with multimodal texts, and their thoughts on what counts as successful reading and writing. For the final question, I asked students to read a Shaun Tan (2009) multimodal short story, *Stick Figures*. I audio-recorded students as they answered the questions. However, I also video-recorded each student's transaction with the short story so that I could see how they interacted with the book in ways that an audio-recorder alone could not document. I wanted to see how long they looked at certain images, which visual elements they gestured to, their facial expressions, and their physical proximity to and handling of the book I put before them. These initial interviews took place during the English Language Arts class or students' Learning Lab class period on days when their focus was English Language Arts. The times and dates were discussed and arranged with Mr. Bergeron and the students. The initial interviews were either conducted in a classroom, administration office, or in the school hallways, and the interviews lasted about 30 minutes.

I also developed a semi-structured interview protocol (Olson, 2011) for the exit interviews with each student (see Appendix E). Due to interruptions by scheduled assessments and end-of-year events, I conducted the exit interviews over the last two weeks of the curriculum unit. Once again, I interviewed students during their English Language Arts or Learning Lab classes. Interviews were conducted in the school hallway or an available classroom. This interview contained 13 questions and asked students about their reaction to the multimodal literacies curriculum unit and the texts they studied and produced. I audio-recorded each interview. During Regina and Pinon's interview, I also video-recorded students as they talked about and described their multimodal narratives. The other students had either not yet completed the assignment or had not

remembered to bring it to the interview. In addition, Pinon brought to the interview her sketchbook and pens. As I asked questions and she answered, her hands were busy sketching and drawing ideas and examples to support the statements she was making verbally. I asked her if I could video-record the entire interview, and she agreed. I deemed it important to record Pinon's multimodal ways of responding to my questions. Most students' interviews lasted 30 minutes or less. Pinon's exit interview took place over two days and lasted 40 minutes total.

### **Informal Interviews with Students**

Olson (2011) described informal interviews as the conversations that take place between the researcher and participants as they interact within the research site. As I considered my role within the classroom to be that of quasi-friend or tolerated insider in children's society (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 88, cited in C. Lewis, 2001, p. 186), I knew that I would be holding brief conversations with students during class. Many of these short conversations were recorded in my jottings notebook and were later (re)constructed as part of my fieldnotes (Emerson et al., 2011). Although Olson (2011) stated that informal interviews are unlikely to be recorded as they occur spontaneously, I did use my cell phone to record occasional conversations. For example, during one lesson, Mr. Bergeron requested that I listen to Via's interpretation of *The Rabbits* (Marsden, 1998/2011). The request gave me time to ready my voice-recording digital application. The informal interview protocol I devised for this study (see Appendix F) guided my informal conversations, and I verbally checked with students to make sure they were comfortable being recorded before recording any informal conversation. My

questions were very general and prompted students to comment on their reading or writing work during class that day or during recent class periods.

### **Teacher/Researcher Planning Sessions**

Over the course of the unit, Mr. Bergeron and I met for five one-hour planning sessions during his preparation time or after school. We met three times before the start of the multimodal literacies curriculum unit, and twice during the unit. In the initial planning sessions, we discussed the scholarship I shared with him and possibilities for the multimodal texts he planned to include in the curriculum unit. During the final three planning sessions, we discussed his lesson plans and pedagogical moves. I audio-recorded these planning sessions for two reasons. First, I wanted to document my contributions to his thinking on multimodal literacies and the planning of the curriculum. Second, our conversation provided further insight into his perspectives on teaching multimodal literacies and the challenges involved in incorporating multimodal texts and concepts into the curriculum for the first time. These planning sessions helped me understand the pedagogical actions he pursued in his classroom. Importantly, video was also used during two of the planning sessions. During these two sessions, Mr. Bergeron read a picturebook, thinking aloud as he did so. My video-recordings captured what transcribed words cannot: the gestures, facial expressions, and changes in body position that reading a picturebook's visuals invites. The video camera, with its tripod and microphone attachment, was more physically intrusive, so I only video-recorded the planning session segments that involved Mr. Bergeron reading and thinking with visual texts. The audio of each planning session was transcribed.

## **Teacher Audio-Recorded Reflections**

Mr. Bergeron audio-recorded brief and informal reflections after many lessons, when time allowed. He made the recordings using Voxer, a mobile software application, and I received the recordings as voicemail messages. Over the course of the study, Mr. Bergeron recorded 31 voice messages, ranging in length from 30 seconds to 10 minutes. Each voice message was transcribed. Mr. Bergeron recorded 157 minutes of voice messages across the study. During these voice message recordings, Mr. Bergeron reflected upon the lesson(s) taught, students' reactions to the lesson concepts or texts, and moments he viewed as representative of pedagogical successes or challenges. Sometimes, he reflected on various assumptions he had made regarding what students knew or could do. Other times, he recorded his thinking with regards to plans for future lessons.

As there was often little time to talk before or after class due to his teaching schedule, we agreed that I could email him with any questions I had. A number of his voice messages addressed the questions I posed. For example, during one lesson, he remarked that his favorite visuals produced by students were “simple” (fieldnote, March 22, 2019). This notion of visual simplicity and complexity was something that he referred to repeatedly throughout the unit, including when he introduced *Giant Squid*, a picturebook written by Candace Fleming and illustrated by Eric Rohmann (2016), to his class. On this occasion, Mr. Bergeron told his students that “images don't have to be complex” (fieldnote, April 23, 2019). After this class period, I sent him an email asking him about his use of “simplicity” and “complexity” with regards to visual images. He recorded a voice message in response to my questions.

### **Whole-Class Instruction: Video and Audio Recordings**

For the first four weeks, aside from video-use in interviews or planning sessions, my data were primarily fieldnotes and photographs. However, once the multimodal literacies curriculum unit began, I used video cameras to record whole-class instruction. As the microphones on video cameras tend to be weaker than audio-recorders, I also used audio-recorders to ensure I could hear what was being said by classroom participants when I re-watched these excerpts. The video camera recorded not only what was said and by whom, but the camera also captured how Mr. Bergeron framed the multimodal texts, which visual components Mr. Bergeron highlighted, as well as how Mr. Bergeron drew students' attention to those elements. The camera also recorded student movement and positioning during the whole class instruction segments.

As Pink (2007) advised, researchers need to reflect on their image-making and be reflexive regarding their role in the construction of visual data. I understood that how I chose to position my cameras impacted the data I constructed and the environment within which I was conducting my research. Most days, I set-up two video cameras in the classroom. One video camera was typically focused on Mr. Bergeron's main site of display (Rose, 2016), his whiteboard, or, later in the unit, his projector screen, so that I could clearly see what he was choosing to show the students and have a clear record of how he was using and referring to multimodal text when thinking aloud before the class. Sometimes, only a pointed finger referenced the part of an image he was describing. Without video footage, I would not always have been able to identify which visual element or even page he was verbally discussing. A second video camera was positioned on the right side of the classroom. Often in this camera's frame of view was Mr.

Bergeron (or presenting students) standing at his technology podium and the two rows of students seated facing the right side of the classroom. These students included the four focal students.

Both cameras remained fixed in place throughout instruction unless the action shifted away to different parts of the room, at which point I typically repositioned the cameras to record interactions between focal students. After selecting my viewpoints, I turned the cameras on and practiced minimal interference with the video cameras (Heath, Hindmarsh, & Luff, 2010). As Mr. Bergeron's schedule allowed, I set up the cameras before class started, so that the students' entrance into the classroom and Mr. Bergeron's opening words were recorded. I ended the whole-class recordings when students were dismissed back to their desks or other corners of the room for independent or paired/small group work. I also practiced ethical and visible conduct with the cameras (Heath et al., 2010). I spoke to the students at the start of the unit about what segments of the class I would be recording and my rationale for doing so. The cameras were always visible and were never hidden. Their position was negotiated with Mr. Bergeron and confirmed with the students in view that the placement of the cameras was acceptable.

There were definite affordances to using video camera footage as a data source. Video clips can be (re)watched and analyzed both broadly as a whole and as minutely as frame-by-frame dissections (Heath et al., 2010). Video also enabled me to attend to details that my fieldnotes and audio-recordings would struggle to detail: the "visible conduct, material artifacts, and features of the local environment" (Heath et al., 2010, p. 8). As Pink (2007) pointed out, visual data sources and written text "represent the various stories of the research in different ways" (p. 120). Although the classroom context in its

environment can never be fully recorded or represented in a complete form, multimodal data sources represent important aspects of the syntagmatic whole. Just as I have argued with regards to multimodal texts (Reid & Serafini, 2018), each modal component of data should not be analyzed or examined in isolation but in the context of the other modal components that interact in the construction of data using multiple modes of communication and representation. All data must also be understood as transduction (Cowan & Kress, 2017) because all the data I constructed are mediated reconstructions of daily life in Mr. Bergeron's classroom.

However, the presence of the video cameras also had direct repercussions for students in the classroom. For example, Mr. Bergeron organized the seating for this unit according to my research needs. Focal students were sat together and formed the majority of the two rows facing the camera positioned on the side of the room. The two students who did not supply permission and/or assent were positioned out of the camera's view as a means of protecting the two non-participating students. This seating arrangement meant that they were positioned on the edges of the classroom and were not centered in the physical classroom forum. As an effort to counter this consequence, Mr. Bergeron often allowed students to switch seats and move around the classroom during independent or paired/small group work time. I ensured those students were off-camera during these classroom occasions.

### **Student Small Group or Paired Interactions: Video and Audio Recordings**

Although video recording is more intrusive than other data collection strategies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Pink, 2001), the video recorded data offered affordances that are useful to me as I work to understand what happens when multimodal concepts and

texts form a central part of the English Language Arts curriculum. In my pilot study, when they worked in small groups or pairs, students pointed at different parts of images when discussing the multimodal texts, sometimes holding the book close to their face or leaning in to get a closer look. Even page-turning looked and sounded different when students were reading image sequences in multimodal novels. In this study, too, video data focused on students' small group or paired interactions enabled me to record "the nonverbal behavior and communication patterns such as facial expressions, gestures, and emotions" (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 186).

I recorded the interactions of the focal students as they transacted with multimodal texts and engaged in discussions around these texts. Mr. Bergeron had seated the focal students together in paired formation. I had three video cameras and three audio recorders. When students worked with their seat partners, I positioned the camera tripod near their desk and angled the lens down so that I could see their faces, gestures, and the text, which was often situated on the desk in front of them. Although the video cameras had shotgun microphones attached, the audio quality when every student in the class was talking was low. Therefore, I also used my audio-recorders to capture their dialogue.

However, I needed to make careful selections when the focal students worked in different paired or small group combinations because I did not have four cameras. When the focal students worked with other participants, I followed pairs or small groups across segments of the curriculum unit. For example, students' work on the wordless picturebook, *Bluebird* (Staake, 2013), spanned two days. During that time, I recorded Blue (and his partner, Benjamin), Regina and Pinon, and Bill and Norman. My three cameras enabled me to focus on all four focal students. However, in the next lesson



sequence, when students were exploring *The Arrival* (Tan, 2007), Pinon and Regina chose not to work together. I had to make a choice, so I decided to record Pinon working with her partner. A self-identified artist, she had expressed finding pleasure in Shaun Tan's work. I had video-recorded her transactions with three previously-explored Tan texts and did not want to miss the opportunity to hear her thoughts on this fourth Tan text. I had noticed Blue and Benjamin interacting in playful ways with the first wordless book and was interested to see how they would read this second wordless text. Bill and Norman had fallen out during their discussion of the first text, and Norman had found a new partner, Herb. I decided to use the third camera to capture Norman's interaction. I spoke with Regina's group during the lesson, reconstructing our interaction in fieldnotes. Whenever I recorded paired or small group work, I always verbally made sure that all students were comfortable being filmed. I had received their assent at the start of the study, but I also felt that it was ethical to acquire additional verbal assent before each peer interaction was filmed.

It is important to note that, alongside only having three cameras available, there were other challenges. First, to protect non-participants, I did not record small group or paired interactions in which they participated. I wondered how not being involved in the filming or data collection process might have impacted them. I worried that they might feel their opinions and thoughts mattered less to me. Mr. Bergeron made sure that he interacted with those two students and their groups. Second, as Pink (2007) noted, the presence of the camera effects what happens in the context. Watching the videos back, it became clear that students were aware of the camera, which I had not attempted to hide. For example, Gabrielle, a student who frequently worked with Blue, repeatedly turned to

the video camera and showed the “Future Mrs. Reid” (Gabrielle’s words, numerous transcripts) a page from a text they were analyzing. She held the book close to the camera and recounted what she deemed important pieces of the conversation with Blue, making sure that I had not missed significant things they had discussed. In this sense, the camera is also a participant in the research, acting, particularly in moments such as these, as a version of myself, the researcher. As Pink (2007) observed, “Video is not simply a data collecting tool but a technology that participates in the negotiation of social relationships” (p. 168). Gabrielle seemed to see the camera as a technological extension of myself. She interacted with the camera when she had ideas from her discussions with Blue that she wanted to express to me.

### **Video Transcription**

As part of my initial data analysis methods, I viewed all the videoed whole-class interactions and peer interactions. I wrote short summaries of each video data source and logged each video clip in chronological order. Each segment of video data was transcribed, except for two literature circle group discussions where the sound quality was so low it was impossible to hear individual students speak. The audio-recorder had not picked up high-quality sound, either, due to the volume of the other discussions happening in the room. I edited the videos submitted for audio-transcription. The segments edited out were either moments of prolonged silence or moments when the students were talking off-topic (although I did note the topics of these conversations in case of salience later). I counted as off-topic conversation student talk that I deemed not related to reading, writing, classwork, or my research questions. Such off-topic conversations included interactions about weekend plans, softball practice, and

arguments with friends. Although I edited the videos submitted to a transcription company, I kept the raw data with silences and off-topics intact. I chose to transcribe only the audio mode at this point because the audio-transcriptions presented a detailed record of what was talked about. I decided that more fine-grained multimodal discourse analysis, if I deemed it necessary, could be conducted later during the more focused stages of my data analysis.

When I received the transcripts, I watched each video and compared the words spoken by participants to the typed transcript. I corrected any errors or typos. I used brackets and timestamps to document in language moments where other modes seemed salient. For example, in the transcript that showed Blue and Benjamin discussing *Bluebird* (Staake, 2013), I added notes about their laughter, a jovial slap on the shoulder, and their facial expressions. Their timing and pacing of their speech also conveyed humor. When these details were missing from the transcript, the conversation could have been interpreted as a somber conversation about a character they had named Sad Boi.

I recognized my transcription choices as an act of data condensation (Miles et al., 2019) because I condensed my multimodal data into a written language text that privileges the verbal sign system. Oral language transcription loses the other modes of representation and communication used during the interaction and is extracted from the social context in which the interaction occurred. I also recognized my transcription choices as an act of transduction (Cowan & Kress, 2017). Meaning was transformed when I created a written language transcript from the mode of video-recorded spoken language. Each video clip underwent a series of transformations from a classroom conversation to a video recording of a classroom conversation to a written language

transcription of a classroom conversation. There is no direct transfer of meaning from one representation of an interaction to another representation of the same interaction. I understood that with each transductive move, I was making meaning anew. As Kress (2010) observed, meaning is always made anew. I viewed my audio transcriptions, therefore, as a piece of data separate and different from the video recorded files.

### **Teacher and Student-Created Documents and Artifacts**

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), researchers who conduct studies in classroom contexts may benefit from collecting documents that include (but are not limited to) teachers' lesson plans, learning resources, and student assignments. Mr. Bergeron created his lesson plans and materials within a shared online folder. I downloaded this document at the end of each week of instruction to help me understand how the unit evolved across the duration of the study. Mr. Bergeron also used the comments feature to direct my attention to questions or ideas he had regarding certain parts of the curriculum. I would respond to these comments and questions within the document. The copies I downloaded each week also contained our online written interactions so that our online conversations were documented.

I also gathered student work and other artifacts. I collected students' reading response notebooks containing their written ideas about the multimodal texts and concepts with which they were engaging during class. Furthermore, I collected any texts they composed or artifacts they created. Some students wished to keep their work, so, on occasion, I photographed student work instead of collecting the actual artifact.

## **Documentation of Methods and Data**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the maintenance of an introspective journal is a technique for establishing trustworthiness. Indeed, they stated that a “reflexive journal” (p. 107) provides information about the human as a research instrument and addresses all four of the criteria that they map to their conceptualization of trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Therefore, throughout the study, I maintained a Researcher’s Journal. Following the advice of Emerson et al., (2011), and in line with Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) reflexive journal, my Researcher’s Journal documented my methodological decisions, my rationale for any decisions made, and my interpretive thinking. My Researcher’s Journal contained four sections.

The first section contained an outline of my daily schedule throughout the study (see Appendix G for the template I used). Here, I summarized the focus of each lesson, provided a brief overview of classroom activities, and noted my research activity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The second section was a methodological log in which I noted and dated each decision I made throughout the study and explained my rationale for those decisions. My methodological log also detailed and cited scholarship that had informed my choices. (See Appendix H for an excerpt from my methodological log). The third section was influenced by Miles et al.’s (2019) suggestions for data condensation and visual displays. I created a Data Accounting Log (see Appendix I) that showed the different data I generated each day I was present in Mr. Bergeron’s classroom. This chart provided me with an overview of all the data in just two pages. The fourth section contained the in-process memos (Emerson et al., 2011) I wrote in conjunction with my

fieldnotes, in addition to the memos I wrote anytime I formed ideas or interpretations regarding my data, research questions, and methods. All memos were dated, time-stamped, and coded with keywords or terms to make them more easily searchable and retrievable.

### **Data Management Strategies**

Bazeley (2013) argued for the importance of data management strategies by stating that there is a difference between having data and having data that is ready for analysis (p. 63). Essentially, data analysis is impossible if the qualitative researcher has not organized their data systematically and made collected data accessible, searchable, and known. I also recognized that my systems of organization constituted initial data analysis procedures (Bazeley, 2013). The labels I assigned, the summaries I wrote, and the sequencing of my data all represent my thinking about and interactions with the data I generated.

I constructed a network of password-protected embedded folders on my computer desktop. These folders were also connected to password-protected online data storage depositories so that my data were saved in two places. I uploaded any data generated during a lesson observation (video, photographs, fieldnotes, memos, and artifacts) to a folder labeled with the date. This data organization strategy enabled me to access and view my data in chronological order (Erickson, 1986). I created a Contents Page for each day. These charts contained the file name, the title I had assigned each file, and 2-3 sentences summarizing the data point. I also noted if Mr. Bergeron or the six focal students were featured in or involved in the creation of each data source.

At the same time, I also maintained a system of collation. I collated my fieldnotes into a single document so they could be read uninterrupted in order and searched. Additionally, I collated the written language transcripts and memos into two respective chronologically-sequenced documents. A large PDF file contained all the photographs taken throughout the study. I also assembled the content pages for each day, so that my library of data could be accessed in one document. A final document contained the titles and page numbers of my fieldnotes. Following Bazeley's (2013) suggestion, I included a column containing keywords or codes that identified important elements of each fieldnote. I did the same for my memos. The keywords represent the initial ways in which I started to link data segments and made my data more searchable.

### **Data Analysis Procedures: First and Second Cycle Coding**

According to Miles et al. (2019), there are three “flows of activity” (p.12) that run concurrently throughout the data analysis process. The three flows of activity are: (a) data condensation, (b) data display, and (c) drawing and verifying conclusions. Miles et al. (2019) do not consider the flows of activity to be chronological steps or stages that are followed in sequence. Instead, the flows of activity run concurrently and are connected to each other. As I detailed above, these flows are readily evident throughout my data collection, my documentation of methods and data generation, and my data management activities. Even the conception of my research study, the shaping of research questions, site and participant selections, and chosen data generation methods are already selective acts that condense the range of options available to researchers (Miles et al., 2019). However, once I exited the fieldsite and completed my data collection and management, my focus turned more exclusively to data analysis procedures.

After reading through the entire data corpus in chronological order (Erickson, 1986) and continuing to write analytic memos (Saldaña, 2016), I engaged in first and second coding cycles (Saldaña, 2016). However, as Evers (2016) pointed out, these analytical cycles often involve more than attributing codes to pieces of data. She preferred the term “data processing” because it attested to the multiple analytical techniques and tactics researchers use to work on data throughout each phase of a study. I used MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2016), qualitative data analysis software, to code or process my data. As Bazeley (2013) argued, software enables the researcher to search their data for segments of coded data while maintaining access to the segment in the context of its original representational source. The software also offered me a range of ways to link, display, and play with the organization and categorization of the codes I generated. Additionally, MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2016) provides code-memoing tools that permit researchers to create and maintain a codebook. Below, I detail how I approached these two data processing cycles.

### **First Cycle Data Processing**

As Tracy (2013) observed, data management and organization impact how qualitative researchers approach coding. I chose to organize my data chronologically (whether by day or within collated documents) because sequencing and day-to-day lesson planning are critical components of curriculum design. Therefore, I also approached my coding in a chronological fashion. I began by coding my fieldnotes and initial participant interviews. I began by applying descriptive codes (Saldaña, 2016) to my fieldnotes and initial interviews. Through my application of these initial codes, I started to build a list of potential topics and subtopics.



However, as I read through my fieldnotes and interviews, I recognized the need to develop a more hybrid approach to first cycle coding (Saldaña 2016) that combined multiple coding options. This hybridity also aligned with the data processing moves Evers (2016) suggested. I felt that descriptive codes alone did not provide insight into Mr. Bergeron and the four focal students' perspectives. Therefore, when coding direct speech (fieldnotes) or participants' transcribed words (interviews), I also used *in vivo* (Saldaña, 2016) and values coding (Saldaña, 2016). *In vivo* coding preserved salient phrases that the participants used and helped alert me to language that they repeatedly used. These codes "prioritize and honor the participants' voice" (Miles et al., 2019, p. 65). For example, Mr. Bergeron expected "smooth-sailing" (*in vivo* code from the first two weeks of the multimodal literacies unit) but, after the first weeks, referred to multimodal literacies instruction as "messy" (*in vivo* code used after the second week).

Values coding (Saldaña, 2016) helped me begin to form ideas about the different perspectives each participant brought to the study. Values coding was especially useful with regards to the focal students who were each selected because they might offer different viewpoints and perspectives. Values coding distinguishes between attitudes, values, and beliefs. Miles et al. (2019) defined an "attitude" as "the way we think and feel about ourselves, another person, a thing, or an idea" (p. 67), "values" as "the importance we attribute to ourselves, another person, a thing, or an idea" (p. 67), and "beliefs" as "part of a system that includes values and attitudes, plus personal knowledge, experiences, opinions, prejudices, morals, and other interpretive perceptions of the social world" (p. 67). When relevant, I coded data with the primary code of "attitude," "value," and "belief," but I also added a sub-code or "second-order tag" (Miles et al., 2019) to

indicate what they (dis)liked, valued, or believed. (Please see Table 3 for examples of each value code with their sub-code).

**Table 3**

*Examples of Data Coded as Attitude, Value, and Belief Plus Sub-code*

<b>Main Code</b>	<b>Sub-code</b>	<b>Data</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
Attitude	Loves Picturebooks	Bill: Pre-Unit Interview  Like let's say you're in fourth grade and they choose a picture book. I would love that.	Bill shows a positive attitude towards texts with images and uses the word "love" to describe how he feels about such texts.
Belief	Pictures in Books Not for Seventh-Graders	Regina: Pre-Unit Interview  I used to love those books, 'cause it did the job of ... the pictures ... like helped you picture that world. It was harder when you were younger to picture the world of the book, but then now, it's kind of easy. 'Cause you just have to read the words and you can see everything, but the pictures really helped with that, you could see everything right on there.	Regina recounts her prior experiences as a younger reader of books with images to explain her belief that pictures in books help or aid comprehension. She believes that once readers can visualize and comprehend words, images are no longer needed. Evidence of past attitude ("used to love") and value ("really helped") bound up in this belief.
Value	Picturebooks as Mentor Texts for Writing	Mr. Bergeron: Pre-Unit Interview  She does a lot with writing, writing strategies and actually using children's books, picture books to teach secondary how writing works and how to look at genre. That was great.	Mr. Bergeron attributes importance to the pedagogical decisions made by a previous instructor and mentor. His comment about her work being "great" demonstrates the value he has attached to books as mentor texts.

Although it may seem more organized to perform separate cycles of descriptive, in vivo, and values coding, I found that my hybrid coding system enabled me to document my thoughts and interpretations through my coding system as I read through my data. I did not need to delay any thoughts and interpretations until a later cycle of coding. I also alternated between line-by-line coding and coding longer segments. Especially when coding the interviews, I often deemed it more appropriate to label an entire sentence or group of sentences with one code.

In addition, I used the software to group like-codes together and utilized the memo function in my software to document my coding movements. Bazeley (2013) described how a disadvantage to using qualitative data analysis software is that researchers can become “obsessed with the task of coding” (p. 139) and can generate too many disparate codes that distract from more complex and interpretative thinking. I moved codes within my coding structure as I worked to promote particular thoughts regarding the linkages, patterns, and themes I was constructing from my data. Often, the descriptive or in vivo code became a sub-code beneath a category heading. The attitudes, values, and beliefs coding already functioned as codes beneath which I filed other codes. (Please see Table 4 for examples of coding categories and their accompanying sub-codes generated during this part of the data analysis process).

In terms of the data I coded, as Tracy (2013), Saldaña (2016), and Bazeley (2013) stated, it is not necessary to code all the data collected, particularly with regards to qualitative studies such as my own due to the large and broad data corpus. As both my data management systems were structured chronologically, in this initial stage, I coded

**Table 4.***Examples of Coding Categories and Accompanying Sub-codes Generated During First Cycle Coding*

<b>Coding Category</b>	<b>Sub-codes</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
Teaching and Literacy Practices	Composition as Making Schoolifying Visual Texts Teacher-motivated Image Analysis Framing Multimodal Texts Noticing Naming Discovering Student Choice: Reading Student Choice: Writing Teacher Modeling Decisions About Time	The codes grouped here helped me think about what Mr. Bergeron was doing as he designed and enacted the multimodal literacies curriculum. These codes referenced moments from my fieldnotes and/or statements made by the students and/or Mr. Bergeron
Environment and Classroom	Role of Sound Role of Silence Classroom Management Routine Classroom Space Site of Display Site of Reception Middle School Social Reality Art Objects in the Classroom Image Talk on the Outskirts Memes: On Walls Student Work Displayed Wall Décor	The codes grouped under this category heading referenced segments of my fieldnotes or statements made by the study participants during interviews or reflections that addressed the material and/or social reality of this middle-grade classroom and school contexts
Building Student Writing Identities	Writing Freedom Students as Intentional Designers Modal Freedom Personalizing Literacy Practices Flexible Rules Flexible Spaces Writing and Fun Models and Mimicry	Mr. Bergeron identified himself as a writing pedagogue, so these codes referenced segments of my data concerned with students becoming, working, and/or thinking like writers.

my fieldnotes and memos, participant interviews, and teacher-recorded voice message reflections. I coded all these data sources for the first nine weeks of the study (four weeks before the multimodal literacies unit and the first five weeks of the multimodal literacies unit). After this point, I found that I was not generating new codes at either the code or sub-code level, even though I was employing descriptive, in vivo, and values coding. However, to ensure that later data were represented in this first cycle of data analysis, I decided to code all remaining researcher memos, teacher voice messages, and exit interviews for all participants. It was particularly important to me to code Mr. Bergeron's voicemail messages and the exit interviews to ensure that potentially significant in vivo codes were not overlooked. I felt that my researcher memos would index salient parts of the fieldnotes to which I could refer at a later point. Tracy (2013) advised that decisions regarding data selection should represent a range of data sources. I felt that my choices met this data selection requirement.

It is also important to note that I did not, during this phase of data analysis, establish a codebook. A codebook can be understood as a data display (Tracy, 2013) or an act of data condensation (Miles et al., 2011). At this point, I wanted to familiarize myself with the broad stretch of my data. I was not willing to limit the scope of my data analysis to a more focused coding framework at this point (Tracy, 2013). Furthermore, developing a codebook for the 975 codes I generated during this data analysis cycle would have been too vast to be a useful and meaningful source of information. Although I did not construct an official codebook at this point, following Saldaña (2016), I did write analytic memos that contained information regarding how I was clustering codes together and my thoughts regarding potential categories and thematic strands that I was

starting to thread across the categories. I wrote these memos within the MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2016) software.

### **The Transition from First to Second Cycle Data Processing**

Before determining a more focused (Tracy, 2013) and selective (Saldaña, 2016) approach to the next phase of data analysis, I experimented with different ways to think about the data I had generated and my processing work thus far. Bazeley (2013) and Saldaña (2016) advocated for researchers to use the transition from first phase data analysis to second phase data analysis as an opportunity to read, reflect upon, and play with the data and the interpretive work conducted thus far. As a starting point to navigating this transition, I first experimented with code-clouds (Saldaña, 2016) and used the visual display tools embedded within MAXQDA to explore code frequency. The two code-clouds (see Figure 1 and Figure 2) showed the most frequently assigned codes to data collected (a) during the first four weeks of the unit when Mr. Bergeron was engaging students with dystopian literature study and (b) enacting the multimodal literacies unit. I included codes and sub-codes in the production of the code-clouds.

Bazeley (2013) suggested creating visual displays that prioritized repeated codes or researcher-determined significant words or phrases and explored the connections between them. I used the codes generated by the coding-clouds to create a hand-drawn visual map that helped me begin drawing connections and linkages between codes and categories (see Figure 3). As the most frequent code suggested by the code-cloud was “Teaching Practice,” I began my visual map by writing “Mr. Bergeron.” Mr. Bergeron seemed an appropriate starting point for my visual exploration. In essence, this curriculum experience for students begins with the pedagogical decisions Mr. Bergeron

makes and his enactment of the multimodal literacies curriculum he designed. I included codes, linking arrows, short comments and questions, and quotations from my data in my visual representation.



Figure 1. The code-clouds from data constructed during the dystopian literature unit.

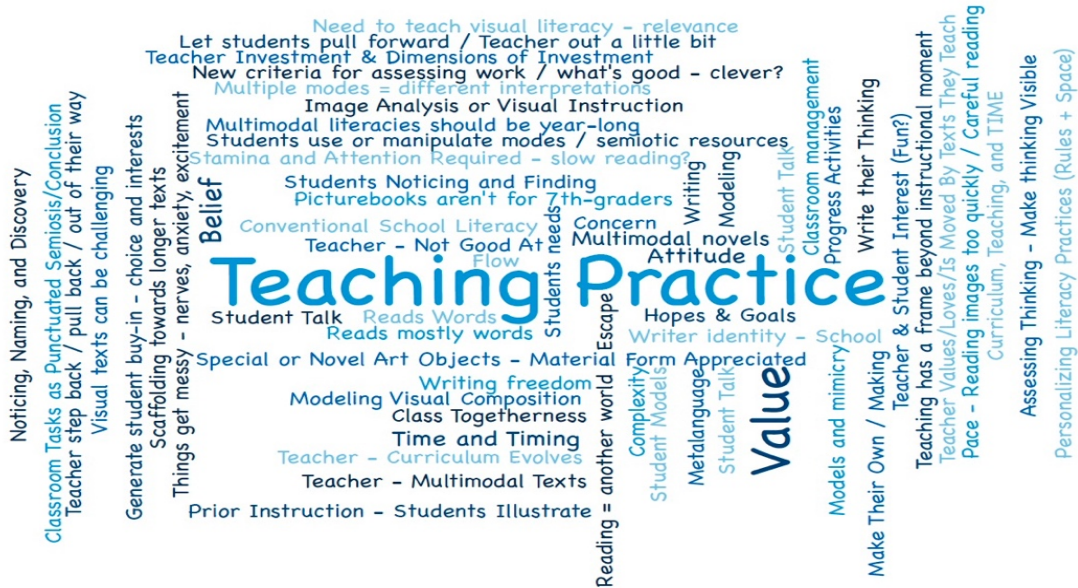


Figure 2. The code-clouds from data constructed during the multimodal literacies unit.



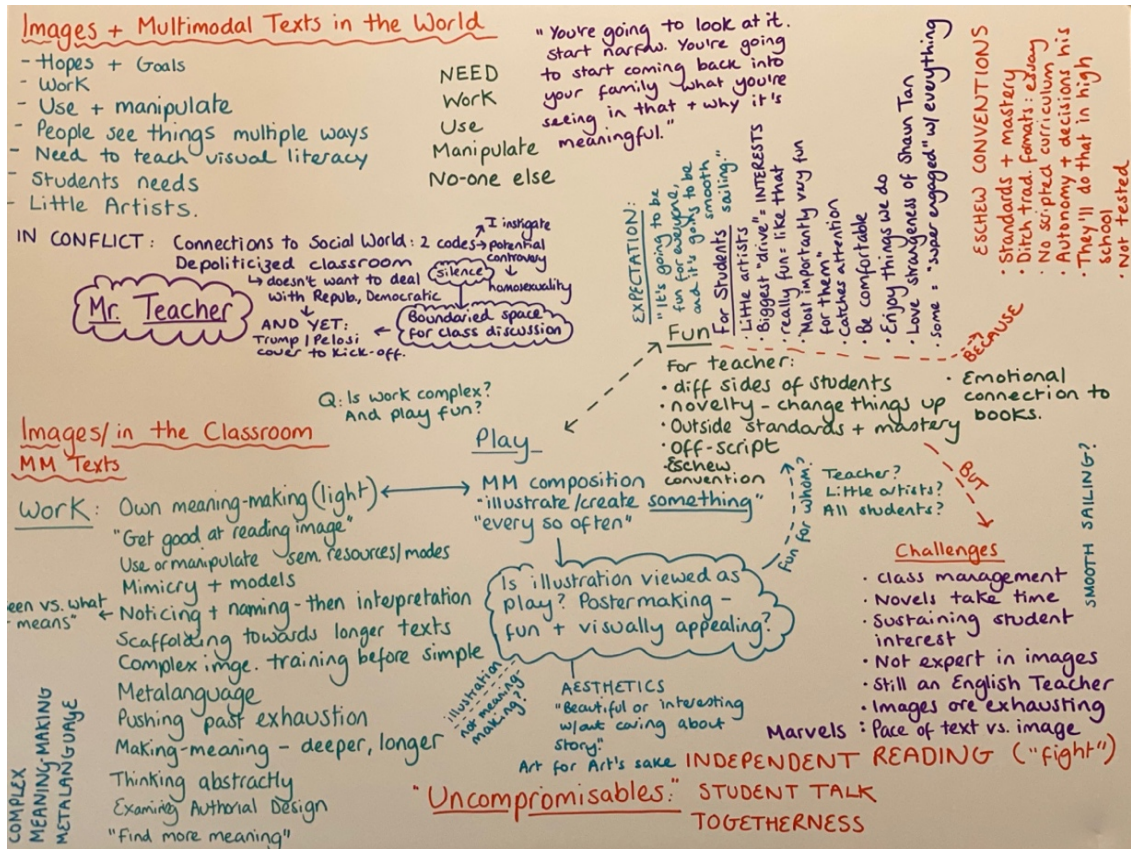


Figure 3. The visual map I constructed during the transition between coding cycles.

As I have discovered in my research on multimodal texts (Serafini & Reid, 2019b), qualitative research is both inductive and deductive and “alternates between emic and emergent readings of data plus etic use of existing models and theories” (Tracy, 2013, p. 184). During this transitional phase, as I did throughout the entire study, I returned to the scholarship I had cited in my memos. However, my writing, thinking, and exploration during this phase also led me to explore ideas and concepts I had not considered in my theoretical memos. For example, the prominence of the word, *play*, at the center of my visual map, caused me to read Dewey (1915) to understand his distinctions between “work,” “play,” and “drudgery.” “Fun” also appeared several times



on my map, and so I read Noddings' (2003) work on happiness in education and Duckworth's (1996) connection of learning to the having of wonderful ideas. As I read, I created drafts of potential analytical outlines or frameworks (Tracy, 2013) that would guide my more focused second phase of data analysis.

### **Second Cycle Data Processing**

Although this is not a grounded theory study, I was guided by Charmaz (2006) in developing higher-order focused codes that would help me synthesize, theorize, and interpret my data (Tracy, 2013; Saldaña, 2016). My theoretical readings and memos supported me in this work. I used the codes and sub-codes, "coupled with interpretive creativity and theoretical knowledge" (Tracy, 2013, p. 194), to produce my second phase data processing codes. During this second cycle data processing, I formed three larger "conceptual bins" (Tracy, 2013) or categories into which I placed previously coded data. I named the conceptual bins: (a) Teacher Design, (b) Classroom (Re)Making, and (c) Work, Play, and Drudgery. To not lose sight of the potential nuances I had identified within my data, I further divided each conceptual bin into categories. Below, I provide a brief introduction to each conceptual bin and the major coding categories that characterize each bin. It is important to note that these categories form the basis of my findings and will be explored in greater detail in chapter four.

**Teacher Design.** The first conceptual bin I titled "Teacher Design." This bin contained categories and referenced data that directly addressed my first question about what Mr. Bergeron did during the enactment of the curriculum he designed (see Figure 4). My understanding of design has roots in the New London Group's (1996) conceptualization of design as the remixing and reuse of available designs to suit the

purpose and needs of particular designers within their situated contexts. Based on this definition, my coding scheme accounted for Mr. Bergeron’s curriculum design decisions, the resources and materials he chose to use, the instructional moves he made, and the opportunities for independent and collaborative multimodal literacies work. Mr. Bergeron also engaged in a purposeful redesign of his classroom before the start of the multimodal literacies unit. Therefore, this conceptual category also accounted for Mr. Bergeron’s design decisions regarding his classroom space. As a whole, this conceptual bin was characterized by the agency of Mr. Bergeron. This category recognized the decision-making undertaken by him as the curriculum and classroom designer. I also characterized this conceptual bin using the in vivo code of “smooth-sailing,” a phrase used by Mr. Bergeron in the early stages of the planning and enactment of the unit.

<b>TEACHER DESIGN (“Smooth Sailing”)</b>		
<b>Designing a Multimodal Literacies Curriculum</b>		
Curriculum Goals and Objectives  Resource Selection	Framing or Introduction of Multimodal Concepts or Texts to the Students	Independent Opportunities  Collaborative Opportunities
<b>Redesigning Classroom Space for Multimodal Literacies Instruction</b>		
Initial Changes to Classroom Space (Prior to Unit)	Evolving Classroom Wall Displays	Changes to Classroom Space and Furniture Arrangements

*Figure 4.* Visual depiction of the teacher design conceptual bin.

**Classroom (Re)Making.** This conceptual bin or category was influenced by the work of Selander (2007). Drawing upon Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001) definition of design as a way of reconfiguring communicative resources (modes and media) for social interaction, Selander (2007) argued that even within the controlled social spaces within schools, design agency must belong to both teachers and students in the creation of learning pathways. Kress and Selander (2012) named the student-sharing of curricular design as "interactive design." Therefore, for Selander (2007) and Kress and Selander (2012), designing for learning also necessitates a disruption to traditional power structures and hierarchies of expertise inherent in many schools.

While Kress and Selander's notion of "interactive design" might give the impression that student input is the consequence of controlled, agentive student decision-making, my analysis showed this to be a "messy" (Mr. Bergeron, fieldnotes and voice messages) negotiation regarding changes to known English Language Arts concepts, the introduction and use of new metalanguage, and the (re)distribution of authority and expertise. These negotiations suggested that, despite Mr. Bergeron's design decisions, the enactment of the curriculum he designed will never match the curriculum planned. The curriculum planned became an available design used in the (re)making of the classroom. (Please refer to Figure 5 for a visual representation of this conceptual bin.)

**Play, Work, and Drudgery.** The third conceptual bin I titled: "Play, Work, and Drudgery." The title of this conceptual bin finds its origin in the work of Dewey (1915). This conceptual bin contained codes that addressed the actions of the focal students with regards to the multimodal literacies curriculum unit, both in terms of what they were asked to do by Mr. Bergeron and in terms of what the students did. Returning to theory

and scholarship, I found that ideas regarding play, work, and drudgery helped me understand what I perceived as an observer in the classroom.

<b>CLASSROOM (RE)MAKING (“Messy”)</b>		
<b>Designing a Multimodal Literacies Curriculum</b>		
Curriculum Goals and Objectives  Resource Selection	Framing or Introduction of Multimodal Concepts or Texts to the Students	Independent Opportunities  Collaborative Opportunities
<b>New Metalanguage</b>		
Planned and Responsive Metalanguage Taught	Use of Metalanguage by Students	Metalanguage Avoided
<b>(Re)Distributing Authority and Expertise</b>		
Mentor Texts and Modeling	Student Expertise	Student Modeling

Figure 5. Visual depiction of the classroom (re)making conceptual bin

According to Dewey (1915), a child is absorbed in play when they engage in spontaneous, action-oriented activity that has no definitive outcome or end product. Dewey does not suggest that play lacks goals. A child at play is trying to do something or effect something and their actions lead to further actions. Wohlwend (2008) viewed play as child-directed activity and expressed concerns that standardized ways of teaching “leave little time for the messy wonder” (p. 127) of play. This notion of play as “messy

wonder” resonated with Duckworth’s (1996) conceptualization of learning as the having of wonderful ideas (p.7). Both notions involve learners being inventive with regards to the materials and resources at hand without stringent guidelines in place that direct the activity or learning. As I moved iteratively between the open codes generated through first cycle coding and the theoretical readings that sharpened my perceptions, I developed a series of codes that I used to analyze the play I witnessed in the classroom. Some student play took place during teacher-directed activity. Other student play took place outside of specified classroom activities, during the moments of transition between tasks or class periods.

It is important to note that Dewey (1915) did not consider the difference between work and play a matter of pleasure. For Dewey, the difference lies in the idea that work involves a series of targeted and persistent efforts towards an articulated end goal. The established nature of the end goal and a person’s persistent effort towards that end goal marks a person’s transition from playing to working. However, work should still be enjoyable and feel satisfying to the person doing the work. I coded data for explanations of and rationales for curriculum goals. I also coded for reading, composing, and talking work, moments of classroom activity that the students seemed to value and enjoy or moments when they expressed that they valued and enjoyed the classroom activity. I coded for drudgery by documenting classroom work that appeared to have little or no personal significance or satisfaction to students. I coded for visual drudgery (image-based work), writing drudgery (classroom writing tasks), conversational drudgery (classroom talk), and making drudgery (compositional tasks involving modes and materials beyond language and notebook paper).

Within this conceptual bin, I also determined between different domains of work activity. Noddings (2003) described how humans seek happiness in three key social and personal arenas: (a) paid work, (b) personal life, and (c) civic/community life. With regard to children, these activity domains differ due to their dependence on adults and societal institutions. Therefore, school-aged children's domains of activity can be understood as school (as a parallel to paid work), home (as a parallel with personal life), and the street or playground (as a parallel with community/civic life). However, despite my study taking place in a seventh-grade classroom, one of the focal students, Pinon, discussed the artistic portfolio she maintained at home and talked about how the concepts learned during this unit informed her work as a picturebook artist in collaboration with a cousin. For Pinon, aspects of the curriculum unit counted towards the paid work she currently undertakes and plans to continue undertaking as she progresses towards life beyond school. Therefore, I distinguished between "classroom work" and "lifework." Classroom work represented work that was carried out for school purposes. Lifework identified work that was undertaken at school but also used by students to develop their professional and life trajectories and to meet self-determined personal goals.

It is important to note that my coding of classroom tasks and activities depended upon the social actor whose actions and words were represented in my fieldnotes or transcripts. For example, in week three of the unit, students read a wordless picturebook. Two student partnerships, Norman/Herb and Blue/Benjamin, invented storylines unexpected by the teacher. I coded their interactions as "Play: During Lesson Activities." In contrast, Regina complained about the story and said it was making her tired. I coded this moment in the transcript as "Reading/Interpreting Drudgery" because she was

working on interpreting and understanding a visual narrative text. It is also important to note that, although coding related to Mr. Bergeron’s pedagogical choices and instruction may seem to be restricted to the first and second coding frameworks, Mr. Bergeron was also a social participant in instances of students’ schoolwork, personal work, and play. (Please see Figure 6 for an overview of the third conceptual bin.)

<b>PLAY, WORK, and DRUDGERY</b>		
<b>Play</b>		
Play Outside Class Period or Lesson Activities	Play During Lesson Activities	Shared Laughter Solo Laughter
<b>Classroom Work</b>		
Reading/Interpreting Class Work	Composing Class Work	Speaking/Listening Class Work
<b>Life Work</b>		
Reading/Interpreting Life Work	Composing Life Work	Speaking/Listening Life Work
<b>Drudgery</b>		
Reading/Interpreting Drudgery	Composing Drudgery	Speaking/Listening Drudgery

Figure 6. Visual depiction of the play, work, and drudgery conceptual bin

### **Drawing and Verifying Assertions**

Erickson (1986) argued that interpretive research must critically examine any assumptions made about meaning or meaning-making in any setting. Therefore, during

my second-cycle coding, I wrote analytic memos that focused on patterns I constructed or “key linkages” (Erickson, 1986, p. 147) I was building across my data points. My goal was twofold. First, these memos enabled me to initiate the process of generating assertions from my data. Second, I used this second cycle of coding as an opportunity to write about assumptions voiced by various social actors, including myself. Example assumptions included the ideas that certain kinds of students would appreciate visual texts more than others or that all students would consider multimodal literacies work as “fun.” Through my memos, I examined moments of tension or complexity that I identified in the data. One tension I wrote about, for example, was how Mr. Bergeron sanctioned some instances of play but did not seem to condone other instances of student play.

My memo writing and analysis enabled me to construct six different assertions. I discuss these assertions in detail in chapter five. However, following Erickson’s (1986) advice, to ensure the strength of my assertions, I re-read my data corpus, searching for confirming and disconfirming evidence in support (or not) of my assertions. An assertion’s strength can be argued by referencing multiple instances within the data and, importantly, across data sources. To ensure the strength of my assertions, I created a data display table (Miles et al., 2019) for each assertion. The assertion was written at the top of each data display table, and confirming and disconfirming segments of data were displayed in the table’s grid. I included a column for brief notes and another column for the codes already assigned to each segment. My goal in assembling these data displays was to show my data analysis and assertions as plausible (Erickson, 1986).



## Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the participants in this study and the school site in which this study took place. I shared my data generation strategies and explained my data analysis through a careful explanation of my coding cycles and assertion-building methods. I also explicated my role as the researcher in this study.

In chapter four, I report the findings of my study by examining each of the three major coding categories that comprised the outcome of my second-cycle coding procedures. In chapter five, I conclude this dissertation study by reviewing in detail the assertions I have formulated. I also consider implications for future research and multimodal literacies classroom pedagogy.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

This chapter examines the results of my data analysis process and explores the three major categories I established through my second cycle coding (Saldaña, 2016). The three categories are responsive to my overarching research question: What happens when multimodal narratives are used as mentor texts in a seventh-grade English Language Arts Classroom? First, I explore Mr. Bergeron’s instructional decisions and expressed intentions as actualizations of “Teacher Design.” Second, I examine how the introduction of multimodal mentor texts and concepts resulted in “Classroom (Re)Making” and led to shifts in traditional literacy practices and changing distributions of expertise and authority. Third, I describe how the texts and practices were taken up differently by the focal students as “Work, Play, and Drudgery.” My findings demonstrate that classrooms are complex learning communities in which seemingly more stable notions of teachers’ designs and intentions are disrupted by students and their multiple literacy purposes and “modal preferences” (B. Smith, 2017).

#### **Teacher Design**

Drawing upon the work of Margaret Mead, Sheridan and Rowsell (2010) discussed how teachers “orchestrate the environments and opportunities for student learning” (p. 112) by deciding on readings, course materials, and the specific tasks that students will undertake. As curriculum designers, teachers select from the ideas and resources available to them and remix them into an instructional sequence designed for specific classroom communities (New London Group, 1996). As Kress and Selander (2012) stated, the teacher sets the frame for learning. While a frame can be sturdy and

provide structure for what happens in the classroom, the unfolding of curriculum and the events that transpire in any given classroom can never be completely predicted.

In this section, I answer my first research sub-question: What did the classroom teacher do when literacy learning is expanded to include multimodal concepts and texts? I examine first the curricular frame constructed by Mr. Bergeron for his students' learning: (a) the different phases of the curriculum he planned, (b) the texts he used, and (c) and the learning activities and experiences he constructed. I then describe how he redesigned the classroom environment for multimodal literacies instruction. This section testifies to the pedagogical knowledge Mr. Bergeron demonstrated and provides insight into the curricular and instructional decisions he made.

### **Designing a Multimodal Literacies Curriculum**

The end of the year, it's just going to be like the smoothest sailing I've ever had because it's, it's new for me. So that's also, that's fun for me, you know, to change up something I'm doing. It's fun. It's going to be fun for everyone, and it's, it's going to be smooth sailing. (Mr. Bergeron, initial interview, February 14)

Although Mr. Bergeron self-identified as a novice with regards to designing and then enacting a multimodal literacies curriculum, he was excited and invested in building new learning experiences to benefit himself and his students. In addition to the unit potentially being “fun” for students, Mr. Bergeron saw this unit as filling an educational gap. “No-one,” he said in his initial interview, “is teaching them to design things...No-one’s teaching them how to read those kinds of messages.” He described “always trying to predict what these kids might need by the time they graduate.” Despite

not seeing visual or multimodal literacies acknowledged in the state standards and, therefore, lacking the institutional status of being assessed literacy skills, he stated: “I care that they’ll graduate and have the things that I think they’ll need.” Mr. Bergeron worked to create a multimodal literacies curriculum that would support his students in gaining both the designing and interpretive experiences he thought they needed in their social worlds beyond school.

**Curriculum goals and objectives.** Mr. Bergeron created a 49-page curriculum document that contained his plans for the curriculum unit. The opening page (see Figure 7) expressed his rationale for teaching this sequence of lessons and contained a list of essential questions (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) and a series of key learning objectives. The mode of representation and communication he chose to center in the unit was image, and he defended this choice in his rationale by stating the ubiquity of visual texts as “a means of communication.” He argued that “even the most advanced users of textual writing will be at a serious disadvantage to those who can ‘read’ and ‘write’ with visuals.” His essential questions aligned with core aspects of the social semiotics approach to multimodality theoretical perspectives in questioning what counts as reading and writing, in addressing the affordances and limitations of different modes, and in identifying that meaning can be shaped and constructed differently by authors, illustrators, and readers (Kress, 2010). His objectives positioned students as users of academic metalanguage, visual elements, and critical perspectives. He also positioned students as analysts of visual images, visual texts, and modal interaction. Importantly, his unit objectives asked that students justify and explain their use of visual elements.

Criticality, then, played a notable role in this early conceptualization of the unit, requiring students to be text-critics (Luke & Freebody, 1999) of their own and others' work.

### **Unit Overview**

Notions around literacy—what it is, what “counts,” what can/should be taught in schools, what can/should be tested, what might need to be prioritized, etc.—have direct impact on language arts classrooms, and therefore, importantly, on students lives.

In the current climate of standardization and high-stakes testing, writing and the reading of writing are given central attention. While those are crucial skills for students to learn, they alone do not prepare students for the many and varied ways of making meaning in the world.

Why visual literacy? Because we communicate visually! It can easily be argued that visuals are a form of writing: Is the inclusion of a chart, graph, map, illustration, or photograph in a written text not “writing?” Is the author not considering purpose and audience in the decision to include visual elements? Is the author not using a writing-like process—brainstorming, drafting, revising—in working with visuals?

Regardless of how the use of visuals is defined, they are clearly ubiquitous as a means of communication. From billboards and commercials to memes and photographs, architecture and landscaping to road signs and company logos, students are bombarded with visual messages. In such a context, even the most advanced users of textual writing will be at a serious disadvantage to those who can “read” and “write” with visuals.

### **Essential Questions**

This unit is the beginning of a broader multimodal curriculum. With a focus on visuals, students will consider the following essential questions:

- What is reading and writing? What “counts?” What is a “text?”
- How are textual writing and visuals similar? Different? What are the affordances and limitations of different modes?
- How do authors and illustrators shape meaning?
- Why do we sometimes arrive at different interpretations of meaning?
- What does a critical perspective reveal about texts?

### **Objectives**

This unit will be guided by the following objectives:

- Students will use academic vocabulary when discussing visual texts.
- Students will analyze visuals, explaining how visual elements work together to shape meaning.
- Students will analyze the interaction of visual and textual modes.
- Students will use visual elements to create visual texts and explain/justify their use of visual elements.
- Students will discuss connections (compare, contrast, etc.) among texts studied.
- Students will use critical lenses to consider representation (including the absence of representation) in texts studied.

*Figure 7.* The cover page to Mr. Bergeron’s curriculum unit.

**Introductory lessons.** The curriculum Mr. Bergeron created contained five components. The first component was an introductory sequence of lessons designed to orientate students to thinking about single images and visual texts comprised of image sequences. In the first lesson, Mr. Bergeron challenged students to (re)consider what they counted as reading and text by asking them to agree or disagree with a series of statements (e.g., “You are reading when you watch a TV commercial”). Students stated their opinions and debated their perspectives with each other. Mr. Bergeron then projected the January 21, 2019 cover of *TIME Magazine* to model and lead students in analyzing *TIME*’s depiction of Nancy Pelosi firing subpoena catapults at Donald J. Trump, who, from his seated position on a wall, slings Twitter-like birds back at her.

During this discussion, Mr. Bergeron talked about the labor that can be involved in reading visuals: the background knowledge needed to understand it, the image’s intertextual references, the arrangement of the visual elements in space, and the artist’s use of semiotic resources, such as color, line, and modality (closeness to reality). Following this discussion, Mr. Bergeron asked students to unpack the details of their discussion, and, as students recalled aspects of their talk, he created a list of the kinds of details to which a reader-viewer might attend when analyzing image. So that students could practice visual analysis, Mr. Bergeron asked students to use the classroom laptops to locate, upload, and explain an image of their choice from any source. Students took turns at the projector, showing and explaining their image to their classmates.

The second component Mr. Bergeron planned was an introduction to composing visual texts. Using Molly Bang’s *Picture This* (2000), he demonstrated how Bang drafted various representations of the fairytale, *Little Red Riding Hood*, using shape, line,

perspective, color, and scale. After analyzing Bang’s work, Mr. Bergeron asked students to represent a fairytale of their choosing. Realizing that he had made a cultural assumption about his students’ knowledge of fairytales, he extended the task to include any well-known story (including famous novel franchises or movies). Unlike previous visual tasks students had undertaken, there were no student or teacher models to guide their work. Bang’s work served as the only mentor text. Mr. Bergeron made available scissors, glue, and construction paper in a range of colors. He disallowed the use of markers and pens and limited the students to four colors.

**Exposure to multimodal texts curriculum phase.** Mr. Bergeron then earmarked two weeks for reading picturebooks and graphic novels. These two weeks aligned with Serafini’s (2014) description of the exposure phase of a multimodal literacies curriculum. During this time, students read and analyzed the three illustrated narratives in *Lost and Found* (Tan, 2011), *Bluebird* (Staake, 2013), and *The Arrival* (Tan, 2007). Mr. Bergeron explained, “We’ll start with the shorter things to introduce them to some of these ideas.” He felt that the “busy and complex” images in the picturebooks he selected would result in students becoming “trained up really well” in preparation for reading the longer multimodal novels (initial interview, February 14, 2019). During this period, Mr. Bergeron developed a new literacy practice that I am calling “naming and noticing” (Serafini & Ladd, 2008). Mr. Bergeron, in his initial interview, described his vision for this practice:

I don't know how many stories we need to go before I feel like they're ready to take on the whole class novel. But my inclination is to go slow. I, there's no hurry and, the pictures are great. I mean there's a lot of complexities, so, you know, I

just see us moving it up. I almost say like a crawl for the first week or two, just making sure that we're, I want the kids to really understand, like you, you can keep looking at an image and making meaning for a long time. And I'd also like them to see or be able to notice out loud. (February 14, 2019)

Mr. Bergeron understood that reading even a single image takes both time and effort. He described a lunch meeting with other staff members, during which he talked about his plans for this unit. He told his colleagues that, "I just did something really exhausting today, and you won't believe what it was. It was looking at pictures in a picturebook." In explicating his experiences reading images, Mr. Bergeron revealed his belief that images, just like words, should be read slowly and carefully (Newkirk, 2011). His allocation of this time showed, too, that he valued this work and believed in the rationale he set forth in his curriculum unit guide.

**Independent reading of choice multimodal novels.** Independent reading was important to Mr. Bergeron and was a prominent component of his curriculum design activities. This component had been present in the units before the multimodal literacies unit. On the importance of independent reading time, Mr. Bergeron proclaimed, "I've always given them time. I will fight anybody for the independent reading every single day. But I try to fight for that as much as possible" (initial interview, February 14, 2019). Other staff members testified to the importance of this literacy practice in Mr. Bergeron's classroom. During the unit, one of the classroom aides shared with me that a student who had made great strides with regards to reading credited the independent reading in Mr. Bergeron's class for helping him feel more confident as a reader. Independent reading was a component of his curriculum that Mr. Bergeron continued to protect and defend.



Independent reading was paused during the exposure phase but was reintroduced during the third week of the study. After week two, Mr. Bergeron allotted the first 10-15 minutes of most lessons for silent and independent reading. Previously, students had been permitted to read books and texts of their choosing from Mr. Bergeron's classroom library or elsewhere. During this unit, students were required to choose one of the ten multimodal novels available. Mr. Bergeron took one lesson to introduce the book options to students. He had read most of the multimodal novels himself and was able to offer his opinions and commentary. For example, he concluded his comments on *Wonderstruck* (Selznick, 2011) by stating, "I really liked this book. It was a really good read." When introducing *Making Up Megaboy* (Walter, 1998), Mr. Bergeron said, "It's very thin. It's an older book that uses visuals...And I think it's kind of neat to see some of the older, I think, ways that we were experimenting with making images on print" (transcript, March 29, 2019). Mr. Bergeron also piqued students' interest in each book by sharing digital book trailers he had located online.

There were changes to this iteration of the independent reading practice. As already stated, student choice was limited to the ten books on offer. Furthermore, because there were only five copies of each book, some students did not initially get to read the book that had most caught their attention. Students wrote down their favorite three books in order of preference at the end of the lesson, and Mr. Bergeron was initially responsible for matching the student to a book. After reading their first book, students could choose any available book. The other independent reading parameter introduced into this unit was that students could not read their books outside of the classroom because students in

Mr. Bergeron's three other classes were also reading the multimodal novels. Mr. Bergeron restricted the reading of the multimodal novels to the classroom.

The additional element Mr. Bergeron attached to this version of independent reading was time to dialogue in literature circle groups. He planned for groups to meet once each week for 10-15 minutes, most likely during the more extended block class on Thursday. Moving into the enactment of his multimodal literacies curriculum design, this was one aspect of his curriculum plans that lacked clarity in his plans. When preparing students for the independent reading and literature circle dialogue during class (transcript, April 1, 2019), Mr. Bergeron was open about his lack of clarity with regards to what the literature circles would look like in practice. He told his students:

This is kind of an 'in-process' thing, you guys know how I run, I have my ideas of what it'll look like, but that isn't necessarily what will actually happen... As you read your book, here's this kind of what I'm thinking. So, in your notebook, you'll be reading- most days we'll be reading, just like we do for independent reading time, but you'll be reading your literature circle book. And, I'm asking you to, at least once a day, but you'll probably have more than once a day, you'll record a thought, and it could be any of these things, anything you want to talk about with others in your group. Anything you love, hate, find interesting, find funny, and so on. Questions you have or your thoughts on the images, such as: Why is the image here? What does it add? How is it shaping my understanding?... That can change. Everything is really open right now, but I'd like to start that way.

In his initial interview, Mr. Bergeron had expressed the value he attached to “togetherness.” He described how he liked “everyone kind of working through things

together” and that for “a lot of learning in my classes, we do it all together.” He was not sure if his propensity for the classroom working together was “good or not” and this uncertainty seemed to be reflected in his introduction of the literature circles. In terms of curriculum design, Mr. Bergeron knew he wanted to allocate time for this dialogue, but he found it challenging to envision how that time would be used. As Kress and Selander (2012) pointed out, curricular design is always interactive. As designers themselves, students will always impact and redefine plans set forth by even the most meticulous teacher-designers.

The other important feature of Mr. Bergeron’s enactment of independent reading was how he positioned himself as a reader of multimodal novels. Sometimes seated at the front of his class, other times seated at his teacher desk, and other times still standing where there was space, Mr. Bergeron would visibly engage with the multimodal novels himself. By the end of the unit, there was only one book he had not read. The time Mr. Bergeron spent engaged with the books demonstrated his interest and investment in the books. His words during class often affirmed his enthusiasm for the book he was currently reading. For example, just before the first literature circle meeting, he asked the class if there was a group reading *The Imaginary* (Harrold, 2015). When four students raised their hands, he told the class, “This is way different than I expected, and I’m loving it.” He let the students know he would be stopping by their group discussion (transcript, April 4, 2019). Mr. Bergeron modeled reading and investment in the multimodal novels he had asked his students to read.

**Whole-class study of a single multimodal novel.** The exposure phase was designed to support students in tackling a formidable multimodal novel. Mr. Bergeron

decided upon Selznick's *The Marvels* (2015) for the whole-class novel study, a text comprised of 400 pages of double-spread images, 200 pages of written language text with chapters and paragraphs, and a concluding 10-page image sequence. After the conclusion of the main narrative, the novel presents readers with an afterword which, in turn, concludes with a photograph of a dining room belonging to a house in London. Although he was more emotionally moved by multimodal novels such as *A Monster Calls* (Ness, 2013) or *Wonderstruck* (Selznick, 2011), Mr. Bergeron opted for *The Marvels* (Selznick, 2015) because Selznick "does a good job of keeping it mysterious for a long time" so that the reader is "always kind of on edge for when you're going to figure something out" (initial interview, February 14, 2019).

Mr. Bergeron's interest in using this book also seemed driven by an interest in the book's construction and composition. He referenced how the word-image structure of the book impacted pacing and the rhythm of reading. He explained that, when he was reading the written language part, "Maybe because I knew there were images to finish the story, I was always like trying to get back to the images." Additionally, Mr. Bergeron questioned his reaction to the conclusion of the story and expressed visceral disappointment in finding out that the image portion of the novel is an artifact created by one of the creators. He explained that the novel "was this whole amazing thing, but it was all a dream...I was, I guess, just a little appalled...To have fiction within a fiction, why is it that I feel in a way that's like cheating?" He believed that these aspects of this multimodal novel would lead to "good conversation with the students" (initial interview, Feb 14).

Interestingly, in the initial interview, when asked to identify and talk about a favorite moment or image in the novel, Mr. Bergeron seemed to find it challenging to

isolate aspects of the story to talk about. He stated, “I’m just trying to think if there’s something that I just thought was like beautiful or interesting without necessarily caring about the story.” He enjoyed the construction of narrative without becoming attached to the story itself. With *Wonderstruck* (Selznick, 2011), the novel he chose not to use, Mr. Bergeron revealed that, “I just liked the story...The discovery was a nice ending, and I don’t like many nice endings...I know I cried in *Wonderstruck*.” He had not, however, liked “the imagery versus text” and the use of two different modes of representation and communication for two different character perspectives. He liked the “extended narrative through the pictures” in *The Marvels* (Selznick, 2015), preferring to teach the book whose construction he favored rather than the other novels which “broke” the images and words apart and made the images “seem like they are companions to the text in some ways.”

At the beginning of the multimodal literacies unit, the whole-class novel study had not been fully planned out. This component of the unit took shape as the unit progressed through its initial phases. Mr. Bergeron gave students time to read and talk together as they progressed through the 400 pages of images that depicted five generations of the Marvel family. He designed a visual task (see Appendix J) for students to work on as they completed this reading. Students had to create a symbolic image for each of the characters who made up the Marvel family tree. He did not want students to mimic Selznick’s portraits or drawings: “But instead of a face, I kind of led them, asked them to put an image that would remind them of the character's story” (voice message, April 12, 2019). He modeled this work under the projector, drawing a ship for the character of Billy, who had been lost at sea. Mr. Bergeron noted that this task was not

easy for students, and he reflected on the challenges connected to students' visual representational work. In particular, with regards to one character, Kitty, he had to dissuade students from "word association" drawings of cats, asking students instead, "What would we do to represent this character that is a little more related to what's there in the book, or not there in the book, as opposed to just relating it to her name as Kitty?" (transcript, April 12, 2019).

Before students moved onto the verbal section of the novel, Mr. Bergeron assigned them a visual analysis task that involved a written analysis of the visual elements on one double-spread identified by each student as significant. He designed an assignment (Appendix K), asking students to first choose a double-spread from *The Marvels* (Selznick, 2015) and to then write a written analysis of the visual techniques Selznick had used. Students could use concepts introduced during the unit, including ideas from a YouTube video he had shown on camera angles and cinematic shots used by movie directors. The task opened with a short summary of the double-spread so that Mr. Bergeron could tell which part of the novel was under discussion. *The Marvels* does not disclose page numbers during the image-sequence, so traditional methods of citation are redundant here. Mr. Bergeron modeled the visual analysis task using the page where Leontes sleeps. He debated with students the effect of the close-up focus on Leontes' face on the reader, and he pointed out the lines used to wrinkle the character's forehead as if he might be worried or deep in thought. Mr. Bergeron modeled the writing, adding to the paragraph he started in a previous class.

To support students in reading the 200-page verbal section, Mr. Bergeron designed three tasks that could be accomplished in any order (see Appendix L). Although

he initially called these tasks “checkpoints,” he changed his terminology to “progress activities” because the former name was shared with the school’s assessments. One task was a series of “Connection Collection” baseball cards. Each baseball card was to feature a different motif or connection that linked the image section to the written language story. Each card needed to feature an image of the connection, a brief written explanation of the image, and a colored-border. A green border signaled a common connection that many readers might notice, a yellow border signaled a less-common connection, and a red border identified the connection as a rarity or a likely-original idea.

Mr. Bergeron had pre-created his own connection collection cards as models, which he showed beneath the projector. He had also laid out pre-cut cardstock rectangles for the baseball cards on the sideboard next to an assortment of pencils and markers. Mr. Bergeron made a point of telling students that manga or anime-style drawings would be welcomed. He reassured students who might have felt self-conscious about their artistic ability, stating that, “I’m basic” (transcript, April 16, 2019). He had thus kept his visual products “plain.” The second task required students to think and work transductively (Kress, 2010) as they turned a self-selected moment from the writing into an image. The third task was a filmed reaction video. Mr. Bergeron said that the video could be unedited and “raw” and would be an opportunity for students to express verbally what they thought of the book.

The task that concluded students’ transactions with *The Marvels* (Selznick, 2015) was a fishbowl discussion of the multimodal novel. Mr. Bergeron rearranged the furniture in his classroom to set-up an inner and outer circle. Students seated in the inner circle could raise questions and pose discussion points. Their fellow students would then

respond to the questions or discussion points. One seat on the inner circle was left open for students on the outer layer to occupy if they felt like they had an important contribution to make. After 20 minutes of discussion, the two layers of the fishbowl swapped places. A teacher-selected student leader took charge of the discussion. Mr. Bergeron stepped out of the circle, only intervening when he deemed necessary. Students participated in this discussion whether or not they had finished reading the novel.

**Student-designed multimodal compositions.** The last week of the unit was dedicated to students' own multimodal composition work. Students could create any visual or multimodal composition of their choice. At the end of the week, they shared their visual work with a class during a lesson dedicated to celebrating their work. Each student was allocated a table and expected to set out on that table (a) their composition work, (b) an artist's statement explaining their design decisions, and (c) a compliments sheet for their reader-viewers to leave compliments and feedback on their work. During the days dedicated to the multimodal composition, Mr. Bergeron demonstrated how he was converting the text of a young adult novel he had started to write into a graphic novel format. During some parts of some lessons, Mr. Bergeron sat at his desk, visibly working on his multimodal narrative in public. Just as he had modeled being a reader of multimodal novels, he also modeled being the creator of his own multimodal text.

Mr. Bergeron continued to use picturebooks and other multimodal texts in his classroom during this concluding week. Sometimes he showed or read aloud excerpts from these texts. For example, he showed his favorite pages from Tan's (2019) *The Singing Bones*, a book that juxtaposes page-long segments from the Brothers Grimm's fairytales with sculptures made by Tan to accompany the verbal text. He also read aloud a



small section of the nonfiction poetry in Fleming and Rohmann's (2016) *Giant Squid* and extended the gatefold pages in the book's center to reveal the huge depiction of a giant squid. Other times, he read aloud the entire picturebook. For example, he read Gravett's (2006) *Wolves* aloud. Mr. Bergeron pointed out the interplay of fiction and nonfiction and took pleasure in revealing the mise-en-abyme metafictional device: "This author likes to play around with us," he told his students (transcript, April 23, 2019). When he read aloud Myers and Steptoe's (2009) *Amiri and Odette: A Love Story*, Mr. Bergeron pointed out the found items that Steptoe incorporated into his mixed-media illustrations—a candy wrapper found on a Brooklyn street and a necklace found on a basketball court, for example. He made his purpose in introducing these texts to his students very clear:

Listen, the sky is the limit on what you guys want to do on your multimodal stories, so you want to play around with something like this, where you have a fold open portion, you can do it okay...Fiction or non-fiction, there are things you can play around with as you do your own visuals. So, I am just going to show you, from now on, for the rest of the week, it'll be run like today. I am just going to show you ideas. (transcript, April 23, 2019)

Mr. Bergeron recognized the time constraints he and his students were under from the beginning of the unit. With only eight weeks (and interruptions from testing during four of those weeks), he knew that students would not have much time to work on their multimodal composition pieces. As a result, the product shown on the final day of the unit was less important than the process of composition and the opportunity for students to "try out" and "play around" with different modes of representation and communication. In his initial interview (February 14, 2019), Mr. Bergeron stated his

desire to incorporate opportunities for students to “try things as we go.” He believed it was important that students learn about multimodality, “so they feel like they can use these ideas not only for the reading but also for their own making meaning so that they know they can do things like that.” His goal was for students to know that they, too, can “make meaning visually.” Just like the published authors and illustrators whose work they read during the unit, Mr. Bergeron wanted his students to understand that these are modal techniques and semiotic resources that they can use, too.

### **Redesigning Classroom Space**

During the vacation week preceding the start of the unit, Mr. Bergeron sent me photographs of his newly arranged classroom. As part of his preparations for teaching the multimodal literacies unit, Mr. Bergeron attended to the physical environment in which the learning took place. Documenting the changes to the classroom became an important part of understanding what happened when visual and multimodal texts were introduced. These subsections attend to the organization of the floor space, the positioning of display technologies, and the wall displays that changed as the unit progressed.

**Initial redesigning of classroom space.** In addition to redesigning the curriculum, Mr. Bergeron also paid attention to the physical space available within his classroom. During my initial weeks of observation, as Mr. Bergeron completed a short unit on dystopian fiction and writing, the desks had been arranged in three long rows that extended out from near the whiteboard at the front of the classroom. The projector that he used to display written language text, either his own as he modeled or the printed text of a short story under literary investigation, was positioned at the side of the room. Due to its sidelined position, the image cast was slightly askew, projecting anything being shown to

the class diagonally on the board. When written language had been the object of study, Mr. Bergeron had not considered the shape, size, and quality of the projection as issues that required resolution. The quality—or correctness—of the projected image had not mattered so long as the students could read the writing being projected.

However, during the vacation week before beginning the unit focused on multimodal texts, Mr. Bergeron spent an entire day reconfiguring the classroom in preparation for reading and analyzing visual and multimodal texts. First, he attended to how the texts would be viewed by students as a whole class. He had moved the cart with the projecting equipment to the back center of the room so that the projector was facing the whiteboard directly. He built a stack using crates to raise the image projection higher and taped over the silver edging of the two whiteboards where they met in the middle of the room with white tape. The silver edge of the whiteboard had interfered with the image too much. The white tape made the line between the board less visible and smoothed over the visible disruption to the presentation of the image. Mr. Bergeron said that he “even” practiced positioning picturebooks under the lens to decrease the glare from the projector light on the picture book (personal communication, March 13, 2019). He wanted the students to be able to see as much of the image being projected as possible. He had also managed to get the image as large as possible. Maximizing students’ potential to see and look at the image was important to Mr. Bergeron as he prepared to teach with multimodal texts and concepts.

Mr. Bergeron’s reimagining of the classroom space did not conclude with the repositioning of the projector. As evidenced in the opening fieldnote, he also rearranged the furniture and reconfigured space. Mr. Bergeron created a space for students to gather

and sit in front of the board so they could enjoy a position directly in front of the image and text under discussion. Additionally, he broke up the long rows of desks into shorter lines of two or three desks, thus creating groups of students in preparation for talking about and discussing visual texts. These grouped rows of tables were situated off to both sides of the classroom, facing the space in the middle of the room that he had created for whole-group gatherings.

These changes were noticed immediately by the students when entering the classroom for the first time after Spring break. Regina was first at the classroom door on the first day of the multimodal literacies unit. “It looks snazzy in here,” she said numerous times (fieldnote, March 20, 2019). Other students responded vocally to the changes in the room before using the seating chart to locate their new seats. When the students found their seats, Mr. Bergeron addressed the class and told them the purpose of this new space in the middle: the space was “designed” to help them see any image displayed on the board. He also said that the space was optional, to be used as necessary. Later in this lesson, before examining a cover of *TIME Magazine*, Mr. Bergeron invited students to sit in the center space. This invitation was re-issued across the curriculum unit each time Mr. Bergeron shared a multimodal text with them using the projector.

The intentionality of Mr. Bergeron’s rearrangement of the furniture and projector was evident throughout the unit. He remained committed to preserving the integrity of the multimodal texts he displayed. During one lesson (transcript, March 28, 2019), three minutes after starting the animated rendering of Shaun Tan’s *The Lost Thing* (2010), Mr. Bergeron paused the video. “I’m sorry,” he said. “There’s a smudge on the board, and it’s totally distracting me. Can’t you all see that?” The students laughed as he, with a smile,

erased the smudges. “I probably made it worse,” he said as he journeyed back to the projector at the back of the room. Mr. Bergeron wished to offer his students uncompromised visuals.

Mr. Bergeron also made his classroom design intentions clear to his students following the installation of a new electronic screen in his classroom (fieldnote, April 1, 2019). When Andrew raised his hand and inquired why Mr. Bergeron was not using the new screen, which remained in its rolled-up position near the ceiling, Mr. Bergeron told the students that another teacher ordered these screens and that the other teacher was “super gung ho” about putting them up and that, “because he’s my friend” he didn’t want to disappoint him, so they finished putting up the screen. He told the students that the screen is “really nice” and “automatic” and has a remote control that moves it up and down. However, he explained that his current projector set-up did not work well with the screen. He had positioned the projector to make the screen as large as possible, but the new screen could not house the entire image. Any projected image continued over the top of the screen paraphernalia and reached almost the ceiling. He demonstrated his issue by using the zoom buttons on the projector. “See,” he said, “I’ve got it on my smallest setting, right now.” He chose to display the image with the screen raised so that the edges of the screen did not appear in the center of the image. He chose instead to interrupt only the top part of any image displayed with the rolled-up screen.

**Evolving classroom wall displays.** As the work of Bieler (2019) and Scollon and Scollon (2003) demonstrated, a teacher’s use of classroom wall space is significant, communicating to those who enter and participate in the classroom community what is valued in this place. Mr. Bergeron’s use of wall space was certainly significant. Although

he identified himself as a novice with regards to visual and multimodal texts and declared himself a language expert, the walls of his classroom bore testimony to an interest in images and multimodal text that pre-existed the multimodal literacies unit.

One of the most-referred to and enjoyed aspects of Mr. Bergeron's classroom was his meme display-board. Positioned on the back wall of the classroom and comprised of a large number of laminated memes, this display was a popular point of interest for Mr. Bergeron's students. It was the only classroom display before which students often gathered to discuss its contents. Each week, Mr. Bergeron placed a meme on the outside of his classroom door. When a new meme had been placed there, students entering the classroom would pause and gather around to read and laugh at the new meme, blocking the entrance and causing a student-jam in the hallway. After the meme's week on display in the hallway, it was moved to a display board in the back corner of the classroom (see Figure 8). The meme display in the classroom expanded over time, gradually filling up the display board. In the time before and after lessons, and sometimes during the transition between class activities, students would gather in front of the meme display, reading their favorites and laughing at them anew. For example, in a fieldnote (April 16, 2019), I recorded: "Before reading time begins, a number of students gathered around the meme wall behind Regina. As students notice others looking, the circle around the wall grew from one student to a small crowd of students."

During one of our early planning sessions (February 25, 2019), I asked Mr. Bergeron how he came up with the idea of the meme display (both outside and inside his classroom). He explained that he started by displaying comics and then collected them and laminated them for display in his first-year teaching at his current school. In his

second year, he put them all on display at the start of the year. “This year,” he explained, “I’ve been putting them out so that there’s a sense of something...It’s kind of something, a little something for them to look forward to in their day.” He stated that he enjoyed conversations with students about the memes, particularly when students said, “I don’t get it.” He enjoyed “introduc[ing] a new aspect of humor to them.” He laughed as he described having to encourage students to enter his classroom and stop blocking the hallway because they are looking at the meme. Although not a part of Mr. Bergeron’s formal curriculum, these multimodal texts had played an important role in this community long before the beginning of the multimodal literacies unit. The memes were a point of shared interest that instigated moments of shared laughter and entertainment.



Figure 8. The meme display in Mr. Bergeron’s classroom.

Another area of wall space that Mr. Bergeron updated during the multimodal literacies unit was a large display board that spanned almost the entire width of the classroom. Even when I first entered his classroom, this space was used to display students' visual work. For example, during a previous unit, Mr. Bergeron had asked students to create a poster that contained keywords associated with their book. Students could, if they wished, add images. Even the posters without image showed evidence of students experimenting with color, typography, and composition of visual elements. This display changed twice more during my time in Mr. Bergeron's classroom. To conclude the dystopian unit, the curriculum unit that preceded the multimodal text course of study, students created a poster centered on dystopian aspects of society. When finished, these posters replaced the book projects.

The third evolution of this space occurred after the first week of the multimodal literacies unit. After exploring Molly Bang's (2000) depiction of *Little Red Riding Hood* using line, color, shape, scale, and perspective, Mr. Bergeron tasked students with creating visual renderings of a fairytale or story of their choosing. This work formed the third iteration of that wall space. After the lesson, in a voice message reflection (March 22, 2019), Mr. Bergeron stated, "Pretty cool the things that they're making. I'm excited. I can't wait to put them up on my wall." Interestingly, Mr. Bergeron chose to display his "favorite" representations on the large display with the remainder of student work posted elsewhere in the room. When reflecting in another voice message (April 4, 2019) on how he selected his "favorite" pieces of work, he responded that, for him, his favorite projects demonstrated "the most clever uses of shape, meaning, using the different shapes and colors and placements...It just so happens that most of my favorites are also not



extravagant. They do just use some very basic shapes.” This third display (see Figure 9) was exhibited on the wall within a week after the students completed them.



*Figure 9.* The wall display that showcased students’ visual work inspired by Molly Bang’s *Picture This* (2000). Two close-up student examples by Gabrielle (left) and Regina (right) are also shown above.

Finally, another space worthy of note was the corner of the classroom that housed Mr. Bergeron's desk, bookshelf, and filing cabinet. This corner of the classroom was noticeable to me when I first entered this classroom space: "The wall behind his desk contains notes and posters addressed to him, most notably a pink and purple valentine's day card from his daughter" (fieldnote, February 11, 2019). This wall was space organized by Mr. Bergeron, and it contained artifacts that were meaningful to him. However, as the multimodal literacies unit progressed and images and visuals attained increasing prominence in the classroom, a group of students led by Pinon started to create their own meme-like humorous depictions of Mr. Bergeron based upon information he shared with them, such as his penchant for Dr. Pepper soda drinks (see Figure 10).



Figure 10. One of Pinon's Dr. Pepper-themed creations for Mr. Bergeron.

These hand-drawn (usually in black marker) visuals were left on his desk and sometimes presented to him during class-time. Mr. Bergeron affixed these artifacts to the wall space surrounding his desk. As the walls filled, the presence of these pictures became increasingly pronounced. Mr. Bergeron revealed that students in other classes had started to take notice and had also started to present him with images of him that they had drawn. Thus, just as he grew the meme wall in the corner opposite his desk, his students constructed a visual display of their own on the wall space surrounding his desk (see Figure 11). Importantly, the students were not responsible for attaching the images to the wall. Mr. Bergeron took the student-produced artifacts and found space for them in the corner that housed his more personal items and identity markers.



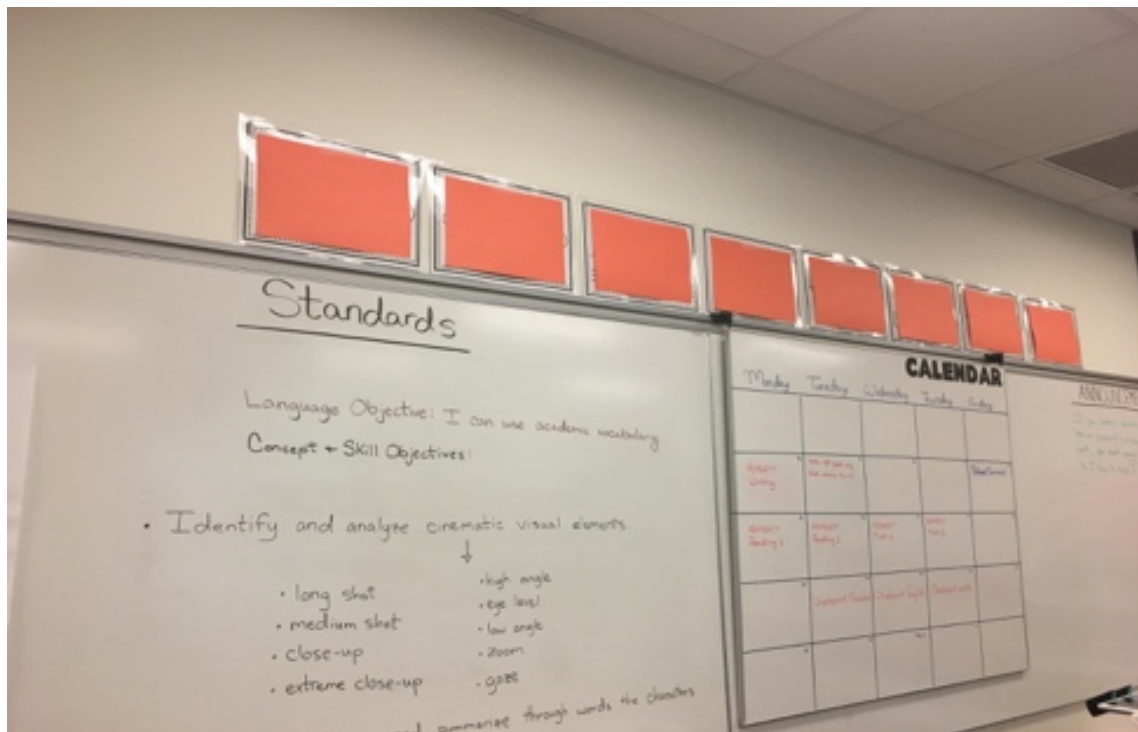
*Figure 11.* This photograph was taken during the final week and shows how the student-created cartoons featuring Mr. Bergeron spread across the wall surrounding the teacher corner.

**Permanent wall displays.** Several wall displays remained in place across the months I was present in the classroom. One display featured cutouts of the states in the American West. Surrounding the states were laminated school decals representing the logos of the major universities in the West. Next to the whiteboard at the front of a room was a display showing five “Reasons why attending college is important.” Above the whiteboard was a series of white pages containing graphic organizers designed to support the planning and drafting and writing. Some posters and quotes positioned above the bookshelves advocated for reading. One poster read: “Read. Light up your imagination.” One of the quotations read, “Asking if I like reading is like asking if I’m breathing.” Aligned with Mr. Bergeron’s interest in memes, this corner also contained reading-themed memes and comic strips. A colorful poster in the window by the door offered “Reminders for Good Readers” about the importance of previewing, inferring, picturing, asking questions, and summarizing. Another display near the meme wall was dedicated to the writing process. Mr. Bergeron commented on the writing process after one of our planning meetings, revealing that he had put it up at the start of the year, but he had not “done much with it” (fieldnote, February 11, 2019).

While these posters and artifacts were not removed from the classroom’s walls during the study, it is important to note that they were not visible to students throughout all the weeks of the study. This extract from my fieldnotes (April 9, 2019) explains the lack of visibility during some weeks: “Evidence of testing has descended upon Mr. Bergeron’s classroom. Where posters about the writing process used to appear or, for example, a poster about what makes good readers, bright orange construction paper squares now hang.” At this point, Mr. Bergeron and his class were three weeks deep into



the multimodal literacies unit. Any display feature dedicated to reading or writing written language was hidden beneath sheets of orange (see Figure 12). However, left uncovered were the artifacts and posters Mr. Bergeron created for the visual literacy unit. He had not deemed it necessary to hide this information. Ideas about visuality and multimodal texts would not be assessed through either their state or school-selected examinations.



*Figure 12.* A photograph showing how displays focused on language were covered-up during school testing. The whiteboard contains handwritten information about visual elements. This information did not violate testing codes of practice.

### **Classroom (Re)Making and Mess**

So, there's a lot of, there's so many directions to move in and it'll probably look really messy next year again. And that's fine. It's, I mean it's recursive and messy anyways, so I'm fine with that. I know that kids probably might struggle to follow, but, so for me the exploration is just moving away from the traditional idea that writing is the written word and its composition and that could mean words and it could mean no words. It could mean words, and so there's just a lot of areas to move forward in. It's cool. It's an exciting new direction that I feel like a lot of teachers like me, like last year without this unit, it's there on the horizon.

(Mr. Bergeron, exit interview, May 29, 2019)

But I'm thinking about maybe some guided questions, and we kind of have to be okay a little bit with messiness, but is this okay so far?

(Mr. Bergeron, classroom transcript, April 4, 2019)

While Mr. Bergeron's design decisions, priorities, and curricular intentions framed the learning that students experienced, the enactment of the curriculum was never going to match Mr. Bergeron's vision or plans precisely (Bezemer & Kress, 2016). As the multimodal literacies unit progressed, the "smooth-sailing" Mr. Bergeron predicted became "messy" (Mr. Bergeron's word) as his designs came into contact with the 31 students who comprised the other key social actors in the classroom. Mr. Bergeron reflected on the messiness of the learning in his voice message reflections, mentioned it to his students during class-time, and spoke with me about it. I understood this messiness

as evidence that Mr. Bergeron was engaged in both the remaking of an existing classroom community and the making of a classroom community structured around new learning goals, metalanguage, and practices. In my use of the terms “making” and “remaking,” I draw from Goodman’s (1978) theoretical take on worldmaking. As Goodman states: “Worldmaking as we know it always starts from worlds already on hand; the making is a remaking” (p. 6). As a classroom world-(re)maker, Mr. Bergeron was engaged in the process of deleting, adding, ordering, and weighting the components that would comprise his classroom community (Goodman, 1978).

Much has been written about how literacy routines and habits formulate over time into important literacy practices valued by specific communities of practice (Street, 1984; Street, Pahl, & Rowsell, 2017). In this study, I observed Mr. Bergeron create never-before-attempted literacy events (Heath, 1982; Heath & Street, 2008), articulate new concepts, use new metalanguage, and repeat instructional moves that, over time, became important to this classroom community as they explored multimodal texts and concepts together for the first time. Therefore, I was privileged to observe the literacy events that may later become sedimented into valued literacy practices that Mr. Bergeron may prioritize in future iterations of multimodal literacies pedagogy within future classroom communities of practice. My use of the present participle (*making*) acknowledges that Mr. Bergeron’s classroom world-making was in process. His classroom world was not a completed and made entity that would remain static.

In this section, I examine the classroom (re)making and messiness by exploring (a) how traditional and/or ubiquitous concepts associated with English Language Arts instruction underwent redefinition, (b) the literacy habits and routines that Mr. Bergeron

and his students repeated across the curriculum unit, and (c) the redistribution of authority and knowledge that occurred as a consequence of Mr. Bergeron trialing this curriculum and multimodal literacies pedagogy for the first time.

### **Redefining English Language Arts Concepts**

Entering the classroom today, I notice immediately that the board contains two handwritten-in-marker pieces of information about today's lesson:

1. Brainstorming, Drafting, Revising, "Done"
2. How Do You Decide: no. of pages, style of visuals, effort/detail, what to portray visually? What if I'm not artistic? (fieldnote, May 6, 2019)

This fieldnote demonstrates the meeting of traditional disciplinary English concepts with a multimodal literacies approach to classroom instruction. Written on the board to help students as they worked on their multimodal composition pieces, the first bullet point highlighted the stages of the writing process, a process ubiquitously discussed in many English classrooms. The second bullet point posed additional questions for the students to consider. Working with modes of representation and communication beyond language required additional considerations. It was interesting to me that the line dedicated to multimodal considerations were posed as questions. The question-marks suggested that these aspects of the task required discussion and further thought. The defined practice of adhering to the writing process provided a more stable frame of reference, whereas ideas about content and design represented deviations from the stability of the frame (Goodman, 1978). While positioned on the board as different and separate from the writing process, the questions posed cannot be answered separately



from the act of composing and/or the composed text itself. The traditional and the multimodal necessarily influence and change the other. This meeting and merging results in a redefinition or redesign (New London Group, 1996) of traditional and familiar English practices and understandings. In this section, I examine further instances of redefinition and redesign.

**From “writing” and “reading” to “meaning-making.”** The first major shift with regards to the terminology and language Mr. Bergeron used throughout the multimodal literacies unit was the verbal move from talking about “writing” and “writers” to “meaning-making” and “meaning-makers.” Mr. Bergeron was mindful and conscious about this shift in his language and the impact of this change. My fieldnotes (April 19, 2019) reconstructed a conversation I had with Mr. Bergeron following one of the mid-unit lessons focused on *The Marvels* (Selznick, 2015). He described how he saw “language as a focus with all the other modes circulating around it” and that talking about meaning-making was helping him “wrestle with how to fit the other [modes]” into his instruction. He thought forward to how he would approach incorporating multimodal literacies in his curriculum the following year. He said that he would “talk to the students earlier about the notion of meaning-making—as opposed to just writing. He talked about how he thought discussions about making meaning would also help students with their writing. Like conjunctions, for example, or where in the sentence you place additional clauses” (fieldnote, April 19, 2019). For Mr. Bergeron, his use of meaning-making enabled his instruction to span modes and allowed him to start to move past his modal preference for language. It is important to note that, in alignment with multimodality theory (Jewitt, 2017; Kress, 2010), he still believed writing to be an important mode of

representation and communication. The language he was using just better helped to address the existence and significance of multiple other modes of representation and communication.

Within the classroom, his use of “meaning-making” was present throughout the unit in all phases of the curriculum unit, including the opening lessons. When preparing for the class discussion on the *TIME Magazine* cover, he reflected that students “should be good to talk and share and make a lot of meaning” (voice message, March 20, 2019) and when describing how the students would share their Molly Bang-inspired visual work, he told the class that, “We’re going to look and try to make meaning and see if it conveys what you wanted ” (transcript, March 21, 2019). Mr. Bergeron, even in this early phase, also made it clear that meaning-making was not just restricted to interpreting the work of others. He also used the phrase to signal that text composers are meaning-makers, too: Talking about their Molly Bang work again, he said, “So when considering what you put in your image, think how am I making meaning and how can I convey that meaning?” (transcript, March 22, 2019).

At this point in the unit, he also recognized how tools for composing and the available materials impact meaning-making work. When discussing the parameters he had placed on the Molly Bang work, he described discouraging students from using pencils or markers “because it changes meaning in what they can do” and explained that “introducing other things to make meaning changes things” (voice message, March 22, 2019). While he “didn’t know what to do with that” knowledge during the early stages, this appeared to be an understanding that informed the multimodal composition task assigned to students at the end. The ideas he articulated resonated with Kress’s (2010)

notion of aptness and the idea that sign-makers make semiotic choices regarding available tools, materials, and semiotic resources with their audience in mind. In class, when dedicating the first segment of time to the multimodal composition, he stated: “I inspire you to see that you can do lots of things. This is very, very, open for you to play around with and try visual things” (transcript, April 23, 2019). In a voice message (April 22, 2019), he reflected: “Everything we do, we have to be asking ourselves, who's my audience? What's my purpose? And how can I best communicate that?” Mr. Bergeron opened up the final task as much as possible, permitting students to design their text using the tools, materials, and modes most suited to their designing. When reflecting upon his most important takeaways from the unit during the exit interview, Mr. Bergeron asserted, “Mastery can come later, as far as I’m concerned. Here we play around with things” (May 29, 2019).

Positioning students as meaning-makers increased their agency as interpreters of text (Kress, 2015). Students decided which aspects of the texts they considered salient, developed their own responses to the story, and identified the visual components that mattered to them. Responses to texts varied by student or student pairs. Mr. Bergeron felt some concern. After one of the lessons focused on Tan’s (2007) *The Arrival*, Mr. Bergeron worried, “I’ve just been really hands-off, trying just to let them make whatever meaning they make. Now I’m getting to the point where I feel lazy, and, probably, I should be giving them a little more guidance? I don’t know what that looks like” (voice message, April 3, 2019). Part of the messiness that Mr. Bergeron had to confront was student interpretations that veered from his expected readings of a text. He acknowledged this and appeared uncomfortable in his acknowledgment:

Some groups were really kind of going off on strange tangents that were straying from the, what I would consider, more...and I hate to say this, but text-dependent. Some of the things they were coming up with, in my opinion, were not related whatsoever to what they were seeing on the page. (voice message, April 3, 2019)

Increased student agency changed the classroom dynamics, resulting in a lack of comfort and frustration that Mr. Bergeron needed to reflect upon. This, again, was not the “smooth-sailing” he had expected.

The significance of Mr. Bergeron’s use of meaning-making also lies in its opposition to New Criticism notions of text and reading and the Common Core State Standards’ emphasis on reading for a singular main idea and text-dependent or close reading practices (Calkins et al., 2012). While Mr. Bergeron referred to meaning-making, some of his students referred to “a hidden meaning inside” (Regina, transcript, March 21, 2019), a notion Regina repeated three further times during the same lesson. Other students described seeing the “true meaning in” a text (Gabrielle, transcript, April 10, 2019) or testified to a “deeper meaning” (Ellie, transcript, April 16, 2019). Despite Mr. Bergeron’s emphasis on meaning-making and insistence that each reader or composer formulates their own interpretations, students tended to talk about meaning as if it were embedded within a text. Almost always, students spoke about meaning as a singular construct.

The first time I recorded a student talking about meaning as a plural possibility was on April 30, 2019. Via used the phrase “secret meanings,” and she described how “if you were just skimming through the book, you wouldn’t see them [the meanings]” (classroom transcript). Even here, while Via identified there are multiple interpretations

possible, her language did not imply her role in the meaning-making process. In all 667 pages of transcripts, no other student used the plural, “meanings,” and no student used the phrases “meaning-making” or meaning-maker.” So while this represented a shift for Mr. Bergeron and the way he talked about texts, the verbal shift was not witnessed in students’ classroom discourse. Students’ language continued in its alignment with New Criticism approaches throughout the curriculum unit.

One of Mr. Bergeron’s voice messages touched upon a possible reason for this mismatch:

When I talk about the meaning of a story or, a meaning of a story, I try to emphasize that there are multiple interpretations or meanings that students can make. In other words, when they look at images it means something to them, or they make meaning out of it...Maybe I'm throwing these words around, and students don't even understand, I don't know, I haven't stopped to ask them. But interpretation, again, trying to just say this with students so they understand that different people see different things and see things differently from each other. And so two people can look at the same thing and have two very different ideas, two different ways that they read it, interpret it, and going back to the other word, two different ways that they are finding meaning or coming to a meaning. So that's clear as mud, right? (voice message, April 4, 2019)

This reflection problematizes terminology and concepts central to the discipline of English: interpretation, meaning, and ideas, for example. These terms are so ubiquitous that their meaning has become assumed as opposed to directly discussed. Just as texts can result in multiple interpretations, so, too, can individual words generate different

interpretations and mean differently to different people. It appeared that Mr. Bergeron had thought through his stance and ideas in relation to these words and the theoretical and instructional shifts that his use of them signaled. He did not direct students' attention to this component of instructional change directly. On their own, students did not appear to have paid criterial attention (Bezemer & Kress, 2016) to this change.

**Altering notions of text simplicity and complexity.** Text complexity is an important principle within the Common Core State Standards. The tenth reading literature standard for each grade level states that the goal is for students to read a range of texts and to read texts located at the top end of the text complexity range for their age group. Text complexity is largely associated with quantitative measures that used numerical leveling systems to describe the vocabulary, sentence length, and sentence complexity. However, the Common Core State Standards do include qualitative measures as text complexity indicators and acknowledge that the reader's background knowledge and their purpose for reading will impact text complexity. Thus, issues of text complexity are prominent concerns for English teachers. Challenge and rigor in English Language Arts have become associated with text complexity (Jago, 2011). A complex text is not a simple text.

However, in Mr. Bergeron's classroom during this unit, ideas of complexity and simplicity were not assigned a binary or dichotomous relationship. Early in the curriculum unit, Mr. Bergeron realized that apparently uncomplicated images could communicate a lot of information and be interpreted in multiple ways by different readers. He learned that seemingly simple images, such as the visuals Molly Bang (2000) created from basic shapes with a limited color palette, could be abstract and complex.

During the second and final class period dedicated to their Molly Bang-inspired creations, Mr. Bergeron began by showing his students a few works-in-progress from the sixth-grade classes he had taught earlier. This extract from my fieldnotes (March 22, 2019) captured the following moment of interest:

During Mr. Bergeron's address to the whole group, he explained that his "favorite" pictures from the other class were those that used "simple shapes" to capture the story. He used the phrase "think differently" to explain this abstracted way of representing the story...When Mr. Bergeron held up the Princess and the Pea image, Celie called out, "I love that! I love it!"

In a voice message recorded a week later (April 4, 2019), Mr. Bergeron extended his commentary on his favorite student-created images. It was a timely recording because he had just hung the finished images of his wall. His favorite pictures had been given prominence on the large display wall. He explained that his favorite images were "not extravagant" and "used some very basic shapes." He returned to the Princess and the Pea depiction created by one of his sixth-grade students: "I love just the simple use of different colors over and over in a pattern to show different mattresses, and the princess is on top, is a triangle...So very simple but, I think, clever use of shape and color." He liked that some students were "using the basic elements to shape meaning" and found these images to be "clever." Thus, a simple text can be a complex text. Throughout the unit, Mr. Bergeron associated simplicity with abstract (as opposed to literal) and complex representation and communication, enjoying that abstract texts "can communicate something entirely different to every single person that comes to it" (voice message, May 7, 2019).

Another instance when “simplicity” lost its more derogatory connotations in this classroom was when Mr. Bergeron introduced *Giant Squid* (Fleming, 2016). He did not choose to read the entire picturebook and focused instead on his favorite parts of the book. One of the pages, before the length of the squid is revealed, depicts a giant ink cloud and shows nothing but a dark smear of color. It is devoid of any other details besides the ink cloud and was designed to show what an effective camouflage the cloud of ink can be. Mr. Bergeron asked students to “notice” the ink cloud and then reminded them, with their multimodal composition in mind, that “your images don’t have to be complex. If you are worried about that, think about how you can represent things more simply if you need” (transcript, April 23, 2019). He emphasized at the end of this segment that “sometimes your imagery doesn’t have to be complex to convey an idea.”

In a voice message (April 26, 2019), he elaborated on this further: “I thought it was a brilliant page, and someone might look at that and say there's not a lot going on here, but I think there is a lot going on. It's just expressed in a simple manner.” He wanted his students to understand that “you don’t have to necessarily put a whole bunch of things on the page...They really can use some simple techniques, some simple things, to convey a lot in their story.” He wanted to communicate the idea that less can be more. Simplicity can be complicated.

Matters of text complexity and simplicity were also raised by the students. In the mid-unit survey (April 5, 2019), Norman stated, “I feel like it’s [the unit] taught me a lot. I do feel like I learned from it. I learned what it’s like to read an image-only book. It challenged my adaptability to reading images instead of just words.” Despite this acknowledgment of his learning, Norman held onto his belief that picturebooks and



visual texts were for children because the images give the “forced mindset of what it already is” whereas a written language text means that the reader “gets to imagine what it’s like for them” (exit interview, May 9, 2019). He insisted that visual texts are for children “since younger children can’t read as well” and that “when they grow up, their mind evolves and then they get to do things. Get to read the good books.”

In contrast, Gabrielle, when discussing the Tan’s (2007) visual work, explained the importance of slow visual reading: “When you look at it quickly, you can’t pick up the smallest things...Even the smallest things matter” (exit interview, May 20, 2019).

Pinon, in her initial interview (March 4, 2019), also offered a counterargument to Norman’s opinion:

Pinon: You don't have to think, "Oh, that's the picture they're giving me. I guess that's what it looks like." Then, I'll have to choose that image to think about. They could be in wonderland or something.

Me: The picture, then on the page is just an option?

Pinon: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Me: You can still have your own image.

Pinon: Yeah, you don't have to follow it. No one is standing over slapping you with a newspaper saying, "No, that's the image you have to follow."

Pinon believed that the images represented a perspective on the story being told. Images, for Pinon, could be challenged and rejected for a reader’s alternative imagining of a story. Thus, text complexity and text simplicity varied from student to student, shaped by each student’s modal preferences, personal beliefs, and textual assumptions.

Pinon also posed an argument for varying degrees of visual text complexity within the same book. One of her favorite books from the unit was Pam Smy's *Thornhill* (2017). The story centers on two central characters living in the same place but at different times. One character's storyline is narrated through the words; the other character's story arc is depicted visually through image sequences. In her exit interview (May 15, 2019), I asked her about the image sequences. I had observed other students reading this book during independent reading time and noted that they flipped through the pictures fast and had to, occasionally, retrace their reading steps and flip back through the book to re-examine particular pictures.

When I asked Pinon about the rhythm and pacing of reading books where image sequences help comprise the narrative, Pinon explained her process for reading multimodal novels (exit interview, May 15, 2019). She identified some images in the sequence as "animation frames," a term she invented to name the images "that don't drive the plot forward...Animation is the same picture over and over again, but it moves slightly to make it new." Pinon described how one series of animation frames showed Ella gradually pulling a plank over a fence. It was important that she look at the first frame, but the next few images just showed the movement of the plank. Those animation frames you could flip through "like a stop motion animation." In contrast, she paid more careful attention to the images she did not count as an animation frame: "If it's an important one [image], take your time looking at it cause no-one's standing over you with the time...Take your time." Her identification of animation frames and the role they played within image sequences impacted and changed how she read each of the multimodal novels she encountered during the unit.

## New Metalanguage

So I've taught grammar traditionally, and I've used the metalanguage. I love the metalanguage. I don't mind using it. Probably what you're noticing is I always intend to use a lot of metalanguage, and then it just either happens, or it doesn't, in lessons. So when I recognize a student using that language, I try to thank them... Early on you remember in the planning sessions, I had questions about and just...I don't know about questions as much as just you know, I wasn't sure if there was a better way to go about it. Do I teach them all the words upfront and then kind of push them to use those words? Or do I let it happen more spontaneously?

(Mr. Bergeron, informal interview, March 28, 2019)

Throughout the unit, Mr. Bergeron continued to integrate the language of literature and writing prevalent in his previously-taught English Language Arts units: the key components of the writing process, thesis statement, perspective, and tension. As van Leeuwen (2018) pointed out, these concepts can play a role in a multimodal literacies curriculum. Van Leeuwen used “perspective” as an example. A reader can analyze a literary work for perspective, just as a reader-viewer of a moving image or still image can analyze those texts for perspective. How perspective is constituted through various modes of representation and communication may be different, but perspective as an analytical tool can be examined across modes. During the discussion of Molly Bang’s (2000) depiction of *Little Red Riding Hood*, for example, perspective was discussed in terms of the scale, distance, and proximity of various visual elements within Bang’s image composition. This is different from thinking about perspective in terms of narratorial

stance in literary texts. In the same lesson, Mr. Bergeron also discussed the tension present in Bang's image, another analytical tool familiar to students of English Literature.

However, the multimodal literacies unit also required students to become familiar with new academic and analytical language. Therefore, across the unit, Mr. Bergeron planned to teach some metalanguage directly, taught other metalanguage more responsively as the need arose, or decided not to address a particular concept or term.

**Planned and responsive metalanguage taught.** Mr. Bergeron used two key opportunities to introduce students to the language they might need to analyze visual texts. On day one of the multimodal literacies unit, Mr. Bergeron updated the learning objectives written on the whiteboard at the back of his classroom. The Language Objective was listed as "I can use academic vocabulary." The Concept and Skill Objective was: "I can explain visual elements and how they shape meaning." He had also attached a piece of flipchart paper to the board at the front of the classroom. The title on the flipchart paper clearly read: "Reading Visuals: Guiding Questions." He had planned in advance the visual aspects of the Trump/Pelosi cover that he wanted to cover. After the whole-class discussion, the students then generated the list of visual elements that had been discussed, and Mr. Bergeron recorded them in writing on the board. Figure 13 shows the flipchart with questions and the list of visual elements generated. This list stayed on the board through the introductory phase of the unit before being converted into a flipchart on April 4 (see Figure 13).

However, as shown in the flipchart rendering of the handwritten list, additional terminology was added as it was needed. As Mr. Bergeron taught with Molly Bang's (2000) text, he included in his online Language Lab (an hour-long class students

participated in each week in addition to English Language Arts) a series of PBS art videos on color, line, and space. “I love these videos,” he said. “They go through the art basics – like line, shape, dot, and color. “What I love about them is that they show artists who talk about how they use each element in their own work. I love that they show people who do art for their profession” (fieldnote, March 21, 2019). Mr. Bergeron introduced the videos to help students with their Molly Bang-inspired visual images, as well as the texts and tasks they would encounter later.

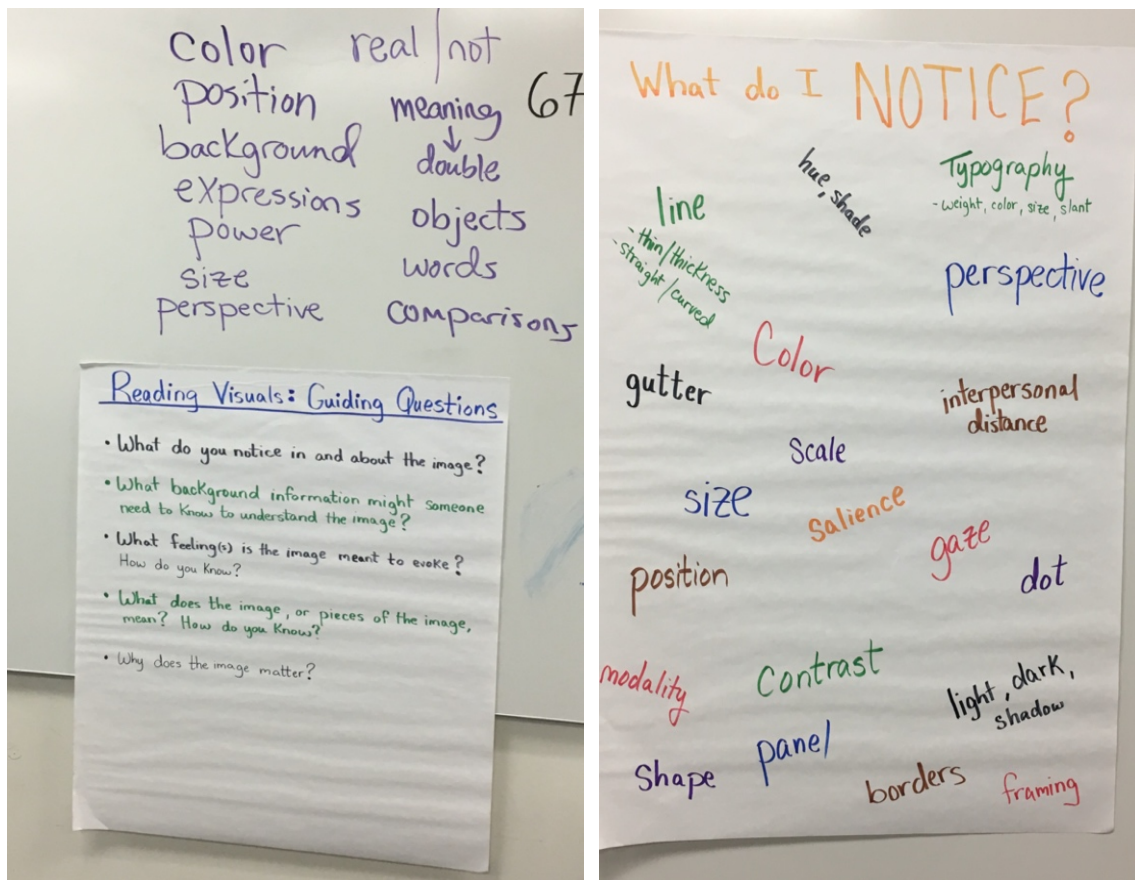


Figure 13. The list of metalanguage students compiled on the board and its later flipchart rendering by Mr. Bergeron.

The flipchart also contained “modality,” “salient,” and several terms—“framing” and “borders,” for example—associated with the panels found in graphic novels, comics, and some picturebooks (Serafini & Moses, 2015). In one of our planning meetings, I brought up the terms “salience” and “modality” as being significant visual analysis terms. Mr. Bergeron said that he would think about planning for the introduction of these terms and that he did not “have a problem making this an explicit part of the modeling and instruction” (March 28, 2019). Although salience was written on the chart, my transcripts show that “salience” was used just once, during a whole-class discussion of the differences between the animated and picturebook renderings of *The Lost Thing* (Tan, 2000/2011). Regina mentioned that the sound of the bell present in the animation helped emphasize how bizarre it is that none of the humans noticed the lost creature. Mr. Bergeron introduces the term after Regina makes her point: “That maybe in the visual alone we see it, but we don't make that connection. But when we hear the sound, suddenly it's more...I've got to use the word ‘salient,’ it stands out more to us.” (transcript, March 28, 2019).

Mr. Bergeron introduced other terminology because he believed that students might find *The Arrival* (Tan, 2007) challenging to read. During his introduction to this new text, he asked students what they noticed. In response to Regina’s point that the endpapers contained photos resembling a yearbook page, Mr. Bergeron introduced students to modality, panels, gutters, and frames:

Here's a word. You don't have to use it, but it's modality. You guys are old enough to know the words for things. Something that has higher modality is more realistic, more real life So this book of Shaun Tan's. So we're

going back to Shaun Tan. His illustrations in here have a higher modality.

They are more realistic. Two other things I wanted to point out in this book. At some points you may not notice, but others you will, that there are panels kind of like you would see in comics or graphic novels, there's separation between images, and there's these gutters as well. Pay attention to how images are framed. If there's any meaning to how the gutters and panels are working. Sometimes they look similar and sometimes they do not. So it's something to look into because it's a way of conveying meaning without words, by how you shape even the framing, the paneling, and the gutters of an image. (transcript, April 2, 2019)

This comment also revealed some of Mr. Bergeron's questions regarding teaching metalanguage, questions that he had also considered when teaching writing grammar, another form of metalanguage. In an informal interview (March 28, 2019), Mr. Bergeron explained his love for and comfort with using metalanguage but stated, "The kids say great things, and if they don't use the right, you know I say the right words, but if they don't use the academic language, it's not a big deal." Mr. Bergeron appeared to shoulder the responsibility for using the metalanguage and terminology associated with visual analysis. His approach to students' use (or not) of the metalanguage also seemed to reflect his approach to grammar instruction in prior units. Referencing his lessons on coordinating and subordinating conjunctions, he explained: "I don't care that they didn't say subordinating conjunction, but I often tack them together. I say, 'Thank you. That's an AAWWUBBIS word, one of our subordinating conjunctions.'" His instructional tactic was to use the metalanguage "as casually and often as I can."

**Use of metalanguage by students.** In terms of students' use of metalanguage in writing and talk, there seemed to be little uptake of these terms with regards to their reading and compositional work. During their more abstract composing using shape, color, and size for the Molly Bang assignment, students reflected upon their design decisions in their artist statements. All four focal students discussed color choices. Pinon and Regina also discussed shape. Pinon, for example, explained her use of lines to make one character seem more "spiky." However, in the artist statements that accompanied their multimodal texts, the students attended to their story and plot and did not talk about how they had used semiotic resources such as color, salience, proximity or distance, modality, or space. Students did, however, talk about the tools and materials they had decided to use.

Students' focus on ideational content was also emphasized in their responses to the visual texts they encountered. In her Reading Visuals Mid-Unit Reflection (artifact, April 5, 2019), Regina, for example, reflected upon learning to read slower "because you really should look at every little thing inside an image so you can get all the information." Pinon reflected that reading images involved looking for "clues, all the little things" and described how, during the class reading of Tan's *The Red Tree* (2001/2011), she had noticed "a lot of people taking their time and noticing the clues like the little leaf that was in every page." Blue also referenced the visual clues in an image "such as hand gestures."

When writing directly about the images in the picturebooks they read, students tended to analyze perceptually (Serafini, 2010), focusing on an image element that they noticed and considering why it might be significant. An example was Gabrielle's explanation of her favorite image in *The Red Tree* (2001/2011): "I had this sense that she



had depression. All the black leaves showed all the bad things in her life” (artifact, April 5, 2019). Norman, commenting on the same story, stated: “I think she’s sad and depressed. I believe the letters that are falling are her regrets” (artifact, April 5, 2019). Blue noticed motifs that repeated across Tan’s (2011) omnibus collection of three picturebooks: “All the stories have hidden aspects or symbols that are in each story. They might all be in the same universe” (artifact, April 5, 2019). These comments suggested that students’ interpretations allowed them to develop their perceptual interpretive repertoires (Serafini, 2010) but did not permit them to expand their analyses using structural or ideological analytical perspectives. Interestingly, the metalanguage Mr. Bergeron introduced represented the analytical tools needed to discuss the texts from a structural analytic process. However, students tended not to use those analytic tools to complete assignments (literary or compositional), thus restricting their interpretations to the perceptual analytical perspective involved in naming and noticing (Serafini, 2010).

Just as Serafini (2010) described the potential of structural analytical perspectives to expand readers’ interpretive repertoires, so, too, does Mr. Bergeron recognize the potential power in using metalanguage as an analytic tool. In a voice message (April 22, 2019), Mr. Bergeron stated: “To be able to talk about things in writing and in written language and how it works, I think it’d be powerful to...I think it would be neat to say in visuals, people can see where something is positioned in their visual techniques and elements to do that. How you position, how you size things, the shapes that you use, and so on.” However, while Serafini’s (2010) scholarship examined readers interpreting others’ texts, Mr. Bergeron made connections between visual analysis tools and grammar instruction, connecting both to students’ ability to communicate and compose.

**Metalinguage avoided.** In our conversations, Mr. Bergeron expressed great interest in multimodality theory and how it might inform practice. On the first day of the study, he described discussing readings on social semiotics with his university professor (fieldnote, February 11, 2019). He said he could have stayed reading the social semiotics theories “forever” and that he enjoyed thinking about how to apply all of this theory to what he does every day and the research in which he is interested. He said he feels that sometimes it means looking at things “this way” instead of “that way.” I said that a theoretical lens does direct attention to what seems significant and governs how we see certain things. He said he wasn’t sure how social semiotics applied to what he does or how he could use it. I replied that, for me, the most important idea about social semiotics was the notion that all modes have equal potential to contribute to meaning-making, which suggests that instruction should encompass more than language and that students need to know and be able to think about the affordances of different modes available to them. Mr. Bergeron replied that modal affordances are “something I’m interested in” as his work revolves around students learning strategies that help them improve their writing and composing.

Mr. Bergeron’s interest in the theory of a social semiotic approach to multimodality was present in his classroom instruction. Before making the transition from the picturebook to viewing the animated version of *The Lost Thing* (Tan, 2000/2011), Mr. Bergeron asked me if the list on the board was accurate (fieldnote, March 28, 2019). I looked at the list. He had written “modes” in blue marker, underlined it as the title, and written the terms, “aural,” “visual,” “spatial,” and “gestural,” beneath the title. I recognized these terms from the New London Group’s scholarship (1996). I

described those terms as representing families of modes. He passed me the marker, and I wrote the following list: written language, spoken language, image, gesture, sound effects, and music. He asked if moving image counted. I added that, too. He then asked if he should add facial expression, and I added that to the list. Then he asked about space, and I explained that layout, like color, has been debated as a mode (Archer & Stent, 2011; Kress, 2017; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2002) because neither have material manifestation. They can only be made material through something else. I did, however, add both to the list.

After transitioning to the animated short, Mr. Bergeron introduced the list of modes written on the board “that Mrs. Reid helped me with” and asked his students to think about how the use of additional modes changes their interpretations of the story. After the animated movie finished, Mr. Bergeron again highlighted some of the modes on the board, specifically “sound effects” and “moving images.” The students discussed their thinking. Regina, as noted previously, commented on the sound effects drawing attention to the bells on the lost creature. Sierra talked about the television commercial, and Patrick added that a picturebook could not include a television commercial because it has pages. Only a movie version could play the commercial. At the end of the class period, as students were filing out, I said to Mr. Bergeron, “Patrick was talking about affordances.” Mr. Bergeron said he wanted to say “affordances” because it is written throughout the literature on social semiotics (Kress, 2010). However, ultimately, Mr. Bergeron decided he did not want to use this terminology. He felt that this was a word that he understood but that the students would not (fieldnote, March 28, 2019).

Even though he expressed concern with regard to student comprehension, Mr. Bergeron was also aware of the importance of the concept of affordances to a multimodal literacies approach. He expressed this awareness in another voice message:

The other part of it is talking about the affordances and limitations and the different modes of communication, representation. The fact that you can't always perfectly communicate something in different, in certain modes, and that's why we might choose to combine or use other modes. (April 22, 2019)

Mr. Bergeron recorded this message towards the end of the study, and this commentary was embedded in a larger reflection on the year-long potential for a multimodal literacies curriculum. Woven across his curriculum units, as opposed to being introduced only in the context of a unit dedicated to explorations of visual texts, the concept of modal affordance may have been more readily introduced and explained.

Another phrase that Mr. Bergeron chose not to use with his students was “mode of representation and communication” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Kress, 2010, 2017). He used the phrase when communicating with me (voice message, May 7, 2019), and used “mode” (as evidenced above) with students but was hesitant to use the extended phrase with students. In his plans for the lesson during which he showed *The Lost Thing* animation (Ruhemann & Tan, 2010), he had written: “Introduce the term ‘modes’ using an anchor chart with modes listed.” In the margins, I had suggested introducing “modes of representation and communication.” At the end of this class period, I asked Mr. Bergeron about his rationale for using “mode” but not “mode of representation and communication.” He noted that he was not sure how he would explain the full term to his students and asked whether representation is not the same thing as communication. He

said he might stick with mode of communication because communication is something students will understand. He stated that he was “all for metalanguage,” but that representation might be too complex to explain to students (fieldnote, March 25, 2019).

This conversation was interesting because Mr. Bergeron did use variations of representation during his classes. It was not a word he avoided. In his discussion of the *TIME Magazine* cover, he described how it is common for “the democratic party [to be] represented with blue” (transcript, March 20, 2019). When he introduced the Molly Bang image-design task, he explained that, “What you’re doing is representing the story as a whole with one image... You need to think very carefully about what colors you want, what that represents for you” (transcript, March 21, 2019). In his explanation of the Marvel family tree task, Mr. Bergeron encouraged students to create an image of “something that represents them” (transcript, April 10, 2019). When he reflected upon this lesson in a voice message, he described “productive” conversations in which he challenged students to think more carefully about the images they were choosing to represent the Marvel family characters: “It was nice for kids to erase and rethink and represent in a different way” (voice message, April 12, 2019).

Students, too, used the word reasonably frequently when discussing visual texts. Regina’s reaction after reading *The Rabbits* (Marsden, 1998/2011) was that the story “represents us” (transcript, March 26, 2019). Blue decided that “what [the rabbits] looked like also represents the English because before they used to...wear these button-up shirts, these fluffy sleeves” (transcript, March 26, 2019). Reacting to *The Arrivals* (Tan, 2007), Pinon commented that one double-spread “is supposed to represent America with their

strange new machines, and these are immigrants escaping the country that's dangerous” (transcript, April 3, 2019).

In the majority of instances, like Mr. Bergeron, students seemed to use “represent” as a replacement term for “symbolize.” Their use of “represent” seemed to align more with Panofsky’s iconography (cited in Serafini, 2010, 2014; Rose, 2016). For Panofsky, the matter or meaning of a work of art was determined by the audience examining the signs and symbols in the art and using intertextual references to determine their interpretation of a text. This is different from Kress and Leeuwen’s (2006) theorizing of representation because they state directly that their interest does not lie in investigating connotation or symbolism (p.47). They view representation as a process in which a sign-maker makes motivated modal decisions regarding which semiotic resources can best materialize the meaning they wish to communicate.

When analyzing the visual texts, students tended to search and pay attention to single symbols or signs within double-spread pages. Their discussion of symbolism and symbols tended to be isolated moments of commentary or observation. Students did not tend to link page-based observations to additional observations elsewhere in the text. Neither did students compare what aspects of the narratives were represented in language to what aspects were represented visually. Theories of multimodality could broaden students’ interpretive repertoires, but critical terms already in use need to be examined and analyzed in order to be more fully actualized as a means of understanding human representation and communication.

## **(Re)Distributing Authority and Expertise**

Tomas decided to abandon his original idea, and he felt stuck. He didn't know what to do. I talked to him for a minute, gave him a couple ideas, and he was still very unsatisfied with my thoughts, and that's totally okay. I just told him, "You have support group members. It might be helpful to talk to some of them as well...He ended up talking with Celie for just a couple of minutes and seeing what she was doing. And Celie was very sweet about it, talked him through what she was doing in her story, and gave him some suggestions about what he could do to keep things simple but also make it a story. Kind of the neat thing about that is Tomas visibly seemed encouraged. He left from Celie and seemed to have a direction to move in. (voice message, May 7, 2019)

In their scholarship on communities of practice, Lave and Wenger (1991) understood membership in the community as moving from the periphery of the community to its center. Peripheral occupation indicated a member's novice status. However, over time and through interaction with other members, novice members learn the knowledge and cultural tools needed to attain full membership in the classroom. Previously, Mr. Bergeron had prioritized written and spoken language in his classroom and positioned himself as a writing expert, using the projector to showcase his own writing as a model text. However, during this unit, Mr. Bergeron considered himself a novice with regards to discussing multimodal texts and building a multimodal literacies curriculum. His awareness of his lack of experience with modes beyond language

resulted in the redistribution and remaking of authority and expertise in the classroom. Both the multimodal texts he used and his students gained authority and status.

**Mentor texts and modeling.** Mentor texts made a frequent appearance throughout the unit, often presented as examples of the kinds of work students could do. Molly Bang's (2000) visual rendering of *Little Red Riding Hood* was followed by student mentor texts, the texts Mr. Bergeron had identified as his favorite pieces. He accompanied the progress activities, which involved students creating visuals, with his own examples "to get the wheels moving on the task" (transcript, April 19, 2019). The picturebooks introduced in the week before students started composing their own multimodal texts to show students that they "have a lot of options of how you use visuals to tell your story" (transcript, April 24, 2019). When sharing a page from Shaun Tan's (2019) *The Singing Bones*, Mr. Bergeron told students that their assignment was "wide open" and to "have fun telling the story and playing with some of these different visual effects" (transcript, April 29, 2019). Thus, the mentor texts served two key purposes: (a) they provided students with a possible vision of the end-product (as with the fairytale and progress activity work), and (b) they provided students with ideas for materials and tools for creating the visuals in their own compositions.

When he shared his own visual work, Mr. Bergeron made interesting comments about his visual meaning-making abilities. As he demonstrated making a connection collection baseball card under the projector, he stated, "Alright, so mine doesn't look fantastic, but it doesn't have to be perfect" (transcript, April 19, 2019). Not being an expert illustrator impacted his text-modeling practice. When reflecting on his initial reluctance to create and share a multimodal composition with his students, he stated:



I'm still so new at the drawing that it does feel different. In a way, I'm less inclined to want to share just because I don't feel like I have a necessarily good example, which is fine. I mean, when I write in front of kids, I make mistakes and things like that, but I don't know. It's hard for me to want to share when I feel like I'm not that great. (voice message, May 10, 2019)

The vulnerability Mr. Bergeron felt when sharing his visual work contrasted with his confidence when sharing his writing. Building expertise in multimodal ways of communicating and representing also required attention to tools, materials, and the technologies used during the composition process, as well as the ability to use those tools with skill. Mr. Bergeron had decades of experience being a writer in command of both language conventions and the technologies used to produce physical manifestations of written text. He was new to using the semiotic resources made available through the modes of image and graphic design.

**Students and mentor texts were attributed authority and expertise.** In contrast, students like Pinon and Gabrielle, who had spent many hours of their free time watching YouTube videos and teaching themselves to draw, demonstrated a higher degree of confidence. These students considered themselves artists and were identified by other students as visual artists. Mr. Bergeron referred to Pinon, Gabrielle, and another student, Nanami, as “little artists” (initial interview, February 14, 2019). Other students also became recognized as visual artists, skilled at visual representation work. During lessons when students had time to work on their visual compositions, I recorded in my fieldnotes (May 2, 2019) the emergence of what I termed “artist hubs.” These hubs developed as students walked around the room, gathering materials and resources for

their text-making. The visual work some students were doing caught other students' attention. Pinon's image-making during the Selznick unit drew other students' attention. Pinon's desk was a spectacle of materials and art tools she had brought in from home (see Figure 14). During the final week, students realized that Lea was creating some interesting images using a red ballpoint pen. Students started to assemble around her desk, too, picking up her work to look more closely at it. Students watched both student-artists at work.



*Figure 14.* Pinon's image-making and supplies caught students' attention.

In whole-class settings, students also began to insert their voices and work into Mr. Bergeron's planned classroom proceedings. During one lesson of the final week (May 8, 2019), Mr. Bergeron showed his visual story's progress. As he concluded his

sharing, Gabrielle waved her hand in the air and asked to share her work. When Mr. Bergeron explained that this would mean other students sharing, Joey asked, “Well, can we? I want to share!” Six students shared their stories with the class. When Gabrielle shared her work, she covered up each panel of her work with her hand so she could control the reveal of each image. She also manipulated the projector, zooming in and out to showcase different aspects of her work.

After students finished sharing, Mr. Bergeron commented to me as he walked by: “Well, unexpected—but delightful” (fieldnote, May 8, 2019). In a voice message recorded the following week, Mr. Bergeron reflected on why the sharing had been delightful to him: “I mean it was neat to see students want to share, and the neat things they were doing, the different styles of visuals, the things that they're playing with and trying” (May 10, 2019). He added that he was trying to “be more aware” of those kinds of delightful moments “and to not always just clamp down and do what I want to do.” He saw value in “spontaneous things fostering a learning moment for the class.” Mr. Bergeron was no longer the only text-modeler in his classroom.

One final attribution of authority that needs to be considered is the authority assigned to the books positioned as mentor texts for students’ composition. Although we had talked in some of the planning sessions about critical literacy and critiquing the visual texts, Mr. Bergeron explained the challenges involved in critiquing visual texts. He explained:

In reading visuals, when it's published work, I have a hard time believing that myself or anyone would criticize. We just take things that are published to be good, and that's a fault culturally and also in schools. We just kind of push that

things that are published are automatically worthwhile models. (voice message, May 7, 2019)

At the start of the unit, during an informal interview in the second week of the study, Mr. Bergeron stated that, “I’ve been thinking about the critical aspect” and that he “would be pleased if we get it in” (March 28, 2019). Representational critique of the multimodal texts they studied did not occur, even though *The Rabbits* (Marsden, 1998/2011), a book in which Marsden and Tan represent the processes of colonization through images and words, and *The Arrival* (Tan, 2007), a book that offers a representation of the immigrant experience, both connected to sociopolitical issues central in today’s world. From his comments, it seemed as if Mr. Bergeron had positioned these texts as an art object (Giorgis, 2018; Serafini, 2015). As art sanctioned and verified through publication, these books were admired as art and their components analyzed for symbolism. However, the authors’ and artists’ representational work was neither critiqued nor challenged. In this sense, the use of the books as mentor texts aligned with how mentor texts have been conceived in writing scholarship. These texts allowed published authors and illustrators “to step into the classroom and act as writing coaches” (Premont et al., 2017, p. 291). While students experienced increased agency and authority as composers of their own texts, they did not appear to exercise their potential power as text-critics (Janks, 2010; Luke & Freebody, 1999; McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004; Serafini, 2012).

### **Play, Work, and Drudgery**

As Cowan and Kress (2017) stated, the goal of a multimodal literacies approach to teaching and learning is, ultimately, a democratic project that seeks to value all students as meaning-makers within the classroom community. However, as this was an

eight-week unit, Mr. Bergeron made decisions regarding the texts and modes he would privilege. While he expanded the modes of representation and communication to include image, graphic design, and moving image and extended the range of texts made available to his students, this expansion did not fit the modal preferences of all the students all of the time. Below, I examine how the students experienced the enacted curriculum as play, work, and drudgery. The social actors' experiences cannot be categorized strictly as either play, work, or drudgery. The students and Mr. Bergeron's experiences spanned categories with different moments and tasks, offering differing and personalized degrees of value. The range of student modal and task preferences added to the complexity and messiness of enacting a multimodal literacies curriculum.

### **Students at Play**

Discussions of play (for example, Wohlwend, 2008) in literacy education scholarship tend to focus on much younger students in the early elementary grades. Indeed, Vasudevan (2015) noted how little attention has been paid to adolescents' play and laughter in secondary school contexts. However, it appeared to me that Mr. Bergeron's students sometimes engaged in play, defined by Dewey as spontaneous activity with no pre-conceived endpoint or outcome. I coded students' play as either "shared laughter" or "solo laughter." "Shared laughter" referenced moments when more than one person was engaged in text-based play. "Solo laughter" identified instances when only one person was playing and when others did not join in.

**Shared laughter.** The lesson sequence that generated the most visible play was the curriculum segment dedicated to the wordless picture books, *Bluebird* (Staake, 2013) and *The Arrival* (2007). Both books, it could be argued, present sad stories that offer

insight into human trials and difficult life situations. Regina, for example, offered what could be considered a more expected response to *Bluebird* (Staake, 2013): The bluebird “is trying to cheer him up cause the boy looks really lonely. Cause the kids at school were bullying him...The bird is trying to get his attention so that they could be friends” (transcript, April 1, 2019). Other students echoed that this was a story about bullying, loneliness, and finding friendship.

Blue and Benjamin veered away from this more expected reading. Their laughter could be heard from across the room, and they smiled as they flipped through the pages of their copy of the book. They created a story in which the depicted bluebird became the character, Blue Face, and in which the bullied human character became Jorge, the Sad Boi. In the following transcript excerpt (April 1, 2019), Blue transitions the class into their rendition of *Bluebird* during the whole-class discussion, changing the tone of their classmates’ comments from somber meditations on the possible death of the bird and what that loss might signify to a more entertaining and light-hearted version starring Blue Face:

Patrick: Then his bird friends fly him up to the cloud and then he lets him go, and he goes to heaven or something.

Blue: He's gone, bro. He's gone.

Mr. Bergeron: We have a heaven interpretation of this bird. Benjamin?

Benjamin: I think Blue Face was here to show Sad Boi his true powers. I think Blue Face was trying to show Jorge that he can fly and bring things back to life.

Mr. Bergeron: The bird came back to life?

Benjamin: Yes and then Blue Face flew away because he had gone  
back to his missus.

Savannah: Can I add to that? Okay, you said that the bird-

Blue: Blue Face.

The class was visibly entertained by Blue and Benjamin's version of *Bluebird* (Staaake, 2013). In his exit interview, Blue reflected on this story as his favorite part of the multimodal literacies unit: "We had so much fun with that story...I just liked that there were no words in it because it's whatever you want. It's your story kind of. Like he wrote it for you to write your own story" (May 21, 2019). Although he felt "students did really well with the story," Mr. Bergeron wondered about this kind of interpretation, stating "there were a lot of silly interpretations that I would consider silly," but ultimately decided that "I see students engaged, I see them happy, I see them talking to each other and sharing and those are some positive things that I like, which I cannot say is the case for all the units" (voice message, April 3, 2019).

Pinon and Regina, too, had fun with this particular story. Their task was to write words for the wordless story—a sentence for each page. Regina suggested they write, "It's a bluebird in a sad town," for the first page (transcript, April 1, 2019). Pinon responded with a curt, "No." Pinon instead proposed that they call the bluebird anything but a bluebird. She suggested calling it "Flappity," "Tweet Tweet," "a flaming blue ball of fury," and an "indigo." At this point, Regina protested to Pinon that "we have to be good students," but Pinon responded that it was "my way or the highway." Regina laughed. Pinon said she would bribe Mr. Bergeron with more Dr. Pepper pictures if they got a bad grade. While Mr. Bergeron had assigned the attribution of words to the story as

an end goal (Dewey, 1915), the students used the end goal as the foundation and starting point for their play.

**Solo laughter.** One student's playing, however, did not result in shared laughter. When Norman worked with Herb on reading *The Arrival* (Tan, 2007), Norman avoided more serious conversation about the book, what might be happening, or any associated classroom task that Mr. Bergeron had asked them to complete. Iser (2000) viewed reading as an act in which the reader fills in the gaps left by the text to construct meaning. Norman, however, did more than fill gaps. He focused on a small visual detail in the text—an alien and unfamiliar-looking fruit—and created a spin-off tale in which addiction to sproleberries, the name he created for the peculiar fruit, was the root cause of the destruction featured in Tan's (2007) text. Herb attempted to offer interpretations that seemed closer to what might be the expected or preferred reading of *The Arrival* (Tan, 2007) as a story about immigrants' experiences in strange territories. The transcript (April 3, 2019) below shows Norman resisting Herb's preferred interpretations.

Herb: So he gave him what looks like an eggplant kind of, and he started eating it. He's like, "Yes, it's good." And then the kid gave him a whole bowl of something.

Norman: Oh, he's eating a sproleberry! No, dude, don't get hooked on those!

Herb: This looks like it's probably a cucumber-zucchini. This is like a dragon fruit.

Norman: But why is he eating a sproleberry?

Herb: A shrimp. Like maybe they're showing them all their different foods and cultures and stuff?



Norman: But sproleberries, dude.

Herb: And then, they're showing him boats and stuff.

Norman: But, dude, the kid's gonna get hooked on those sproleberries.

During the following lesson, Norman added to his narrative, naming the human characters “Goopy Gumans” and the soldiers, “pinheads.” Mr. Bergeron assigned students a task to write a thesis statement about *The Arrivals* (Tan, 2007) using one of three thesis statement writing frames. For example, one thesis statement prompt offered this frame: “We think [blank] is important to the story because [blank].” Herb repeatedly tried to get Norman to attend to this task, but Norman persisted in his playful storytelling.

In his exit interview, Norman thought back to this text. He stated, “Without words, if you only have pictures, it’s a little hard to understand what the story is going with itself” (May 9, 2019). He also claimed that he had not been “paying attention” to *The Arrival* (Tan, 2007) and that he “couldn’t follow the story because of the pictures.” I asked Norman if his story had helped him “string the pictures together,” and Norman replied, “Not really. I got too distracted with the sproleberries. They were just too good.” When I asked Mr. Bergeron about Norman and his sproleberries, Mr. Bergeron told me that he told Norman to leave behind the topic of sproleberries and that he did not want drug-taking and stories about drug-taking in his classroom. Therefore, while Blue, Benjamin, Pinon, and Regina had engaged in sanctioned and shared play, Norman’s perceived deviation from the text was not condoned. Neither Mr. Bergeron nor Herb, the student he worked with, participated or appeared to find entertainment in his play.

## Students at Work

Dewey (1915) defined play as child-directed, spontaneous, without following clear guidelines towards a defined outcome, and he differentiated “play” from “work” by describing how people engaged in work are committed to an intrinsically-satisfying and defined end goal. Both work and play, however, should be pleasurable. In this study, I found that work could be categorized two ways: as classroom work and as lifework. When a student engaged in classroom work, they were happy to follow the teacher’s directives and accomplish the tasks presented. They were satisfied with the tasks and learning experiences designed by the teacher and found the classroom work pleasurable. Lifework was different. When a student enacted the curriculum as lifework, they worked towards completing tasks connected to their futures and lives beyond school. They saw how the classroom work could be integrated into their future career-paths and its relevance to passions that they pursued outside of school. The classroom work was of secondary importance to the lifework that would fuel their professional and personal trajectories.

**Classroom work.** The only student who enacted the curriculum as classroom work consistently was Regina. Regina’s commitment to school work was consistent with her love for Mr. Bergeron’s version of English Language Arts. Mr. Bergeron described Regina as representing one of the “extremes for enthusiasm for Language Arts” in his class (planning session, February 25, 2019) and, whenever he needed a student volunteer, as he did when selecting the student discussants for the fishbowl discussion on *The Marvels* (Selznick, 2015), he typically opted for Regina first, knowing that she would enthusiastically commit to these leadership roles in his classroom. If Mr. Bergeron did

not select student volunteers, Regina always volunteered. She also raised her hand to share ideas and participate in the class whenever there was an opening for her to do so.

Regina confirmed Mr. Bergeron's assessment of her enthusiasm for English. In her initial interview (March 1, 2019), she stated, "I just really love English and all. It's my favorite subject" and concluded the interview by saying, "Mr. Bergeron is the best Language Arts teacher I've ever had." She compared herself to Hermione Granger, the smart and dedicated student from the *Harry Potter* series, and said she loved to read the texts in class and found writing to be fun. She loved that, in Mr. Bergeron's class, students "got to create things of our own and let our imaginations go wild." Her comments suggested that, although a multimodal literacies approach was not yet intentionally incorporated into instruction, Mr. Bergeron's curriculum designing had always left space for student input and interactive design (Kress & Selander, 2012).

Regina's dedication to classroom work meant that she understood and adhered to the curriculum learning goals created by Mr. Bergeron. In her exit interview, Regina expressed that the multimodal literacies unit

is probably my favorite unit so far in English classes because I never really looked at images this way. I just looked at them to understand the story, but I never thought that they had the potential to tell a story all by themselves...I think it was probably the first week that we started doing it, and I was like, 'Whoa, this really cool.' I would get home and I would tell my mom everything. I was like, "This is cool. This is what we did today." (May 13, 2019)

As Regina reflected on the unit, her language often aligned with the learning objectives expressed by Mr. Bergeron verbally and written on the board. In her exit interview, she

demonstrated the use of some of the academic language learned by discussing some of the visual elements of art, such as line and shape. She also talked about the importance of slowing one's reading process down to "look at every single picture and try to understand every single detail when you're looking at it so you can understand the book." She reflected on a wide range of texts and how each text required differing degrees of attention to the images, from *The Arrival* (Tan, 2007) and *Bluebird* (Staake, 2013), which required careful focus to each picture and some "flipping" back and forth to check understanding, to *The Marvels* (Selznick, 2015) and *Thornhill* (Smy, 2017), which required her "to slow down and look more into the book" because "there was stuff that they were saying with the images, but not the words." Regina was not just enthusiastic about the unit; she could articulate and speak to her learning and learning experiences.

Of the focal students, Regina most closely followed the curriculum structures designed by Mr. Bergeron and most closely aligned her classroom work with his goals. Regina was also the only focal student who completed all aspects of the final multimodal composition task and was able to showcase both her multimodal composition and her artist's statement. She laid her work out carefully in preparation for sharing with the class, following Mr. Bergeron's instructions precisely (see Figure 15).

However, although there was evidence that she was using some of the content learned in class in her life beyond school, I did not constitute this as lifework because her application of content had no application to a lifework goal and defined endpoint. For example, in an informal interview (transcript, April 18, 2019), she described watching Pixar Animation Studio's *Up* with her mother. She stated that she felt her "mom was getting really annoyed me because I was like, 'This is what I learned! This is the visual

elements and why they made Carl a square head and why Elle’s round.” Regina also said that her mom asked if she could “just watch the movie.” Regina said she responded, “I want to talk, though!” Regina spontaneously enacted classroom work outside of school and applied her learning to some of the visual texts that inhabited her everyday life. The visual work undertaken in class did not (at this point in time, at least) appear to form part of a persistent movement towards Regina’s life goals.

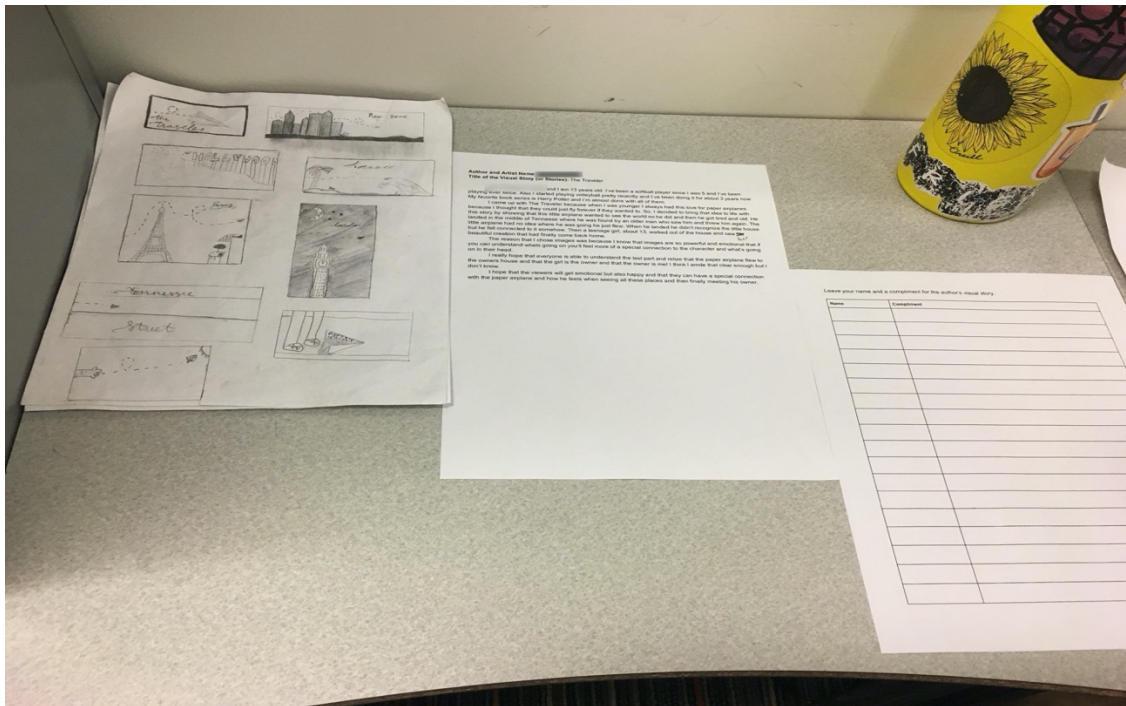


Figure 15. Regina’s multimodal story, artist’s statement, and her compliments sheet.

**Lifework.** Pinon, in contrast to Regina, found that aspects of the class were useful to her as she worked towards her goal of being a professional artist. She was already working as an illustrator for a family relative who published picturebooks. In her initial interview (transcript, March 4, 2019), Pinon discussed in detail her love of creating

visuals and the careful work that her art entailed. She read and wrote to learn about art and how to be an artist. For example, in our first interview together, she brought a manga book to show me and guided me through its pages, pointing out several visual details (including the fan art in the back) and providing an overview of the story. Pinon explained that she never reads her manga books once:

I go back and reread the whole story and look at the pictures some more and realize this girl's ribcage was also a birdcage, and when I first read it, I thought it was just a design in the dress or something. After I finished reading it for the third time, I thought this artist must have taken so long with all this detail. Especially this part.

She read manga and graphic novels so she could learn from the artists responsible for the visuals, remixing visual details from their work into her own: “I like how they drew the hair and their eyes, so I started drawing my eyes like that a little bit. I just meshed how I draw people with this one, this one, this one and this one.”

In the same interview, she offered insight into the meticulous remixing she undertook when creating her art. After explaining that she does not like to copy or mimic other artist’s work because that “is not original,” she described in detail her act of “meshing”:

I created a new outfit for Effie Trinket from The Hunger Games. I looked at her pictures for an hour, then I looked at another lady from the Capital, and then I took what I liked about their hairstyle and their face or their lipstick or their clothes, and I gave Effie a Yorkie that was purple. I drew it on another page, and I drew her in a realistic style, and my mom was like, "Wow. That's pretty good."

Then, she took a picture of it, and it was on Christmas day, and I was just in my room drawing, and my mom had to drag me out to open presents.

Pinon's description of her absorption in her work—despite it being Christmas day and there were presents to be opened—demonstrated her commitment to the task she had assigned herself. Pinon undertakes self-initiated, pleasurable, life-oriented work.

Throughout the study, Pinon's backpack acted as a portable art studio. I noted this backpack in the second fieldnote I constructed (February 12, 2019). After she turned in a beautifully designed and eye-catching dystopian elements poster, I asked her what she loved to draw. My fieldnote reconstructed the ensuing interaction: "She replied, 'Everything.' She was leaning against a desk, and her backpack was slung over her shoulder. She nodded her head towards her backpack and said, 'I'm thinking about what's in my sketchbook. It's in there.'" At numerous other points in the unit, when allowed to create visuals, Pinon revealed other materials and tools from the depths of this backpack. During the class time dedicated to the progress activities on *The Marvels* (Selznick, 2015), Pinon's desk was full. She worked on her connection cards while surrounded by pencils, various pencil cases, and sketches that were works in progress. Her sketchbook laid open on a drawing of Frankie and Joseph, two characters from the book. The drawing in her sketchbook was not required by Mr. Bergeron for any class project (see Figure 16). This drawing was something upon which she had decided to work.

Similarly, on the final day of the unit, during the sharing of the multimodal stories, Pinon's desk was filled with her visual work, materials, and art tools brought from home (see Figure 17). Unlike other students who had constructed their work on

single sheets of paper, her story was a pile of notecard-sized cardstock. When Mr. Bergeron approached and encouraged her to speed-up her display, she told him, “They need to go in order.” She continued to lay them out in rows on the desk (see Figure 18). Mr. Bergeron saw that there was not enough room on her desk and brought over a stack of stools for her to use for her artist’s statement and compliments sheet. Pinon’s finishing touch was a white notecard with blue marker writing on it that signaled her work represented only the ending to a much longer story. When students looked at her work, they had to lean over a stack of stools. The stools acted as a barrier, preventing her peers from picking up or touching her work, as if these were pieces on display in an art gallery or museum (see Figure 19). Students interacted differently with everyone else’s work, holding the work in their hands or pressing buttons on a laptop (fieldnote, May 10, 2019).



*Figure 16.* Pinon’s open sketchbook.





Figure 17. Pinon works down to the last minute on her multimodal story.

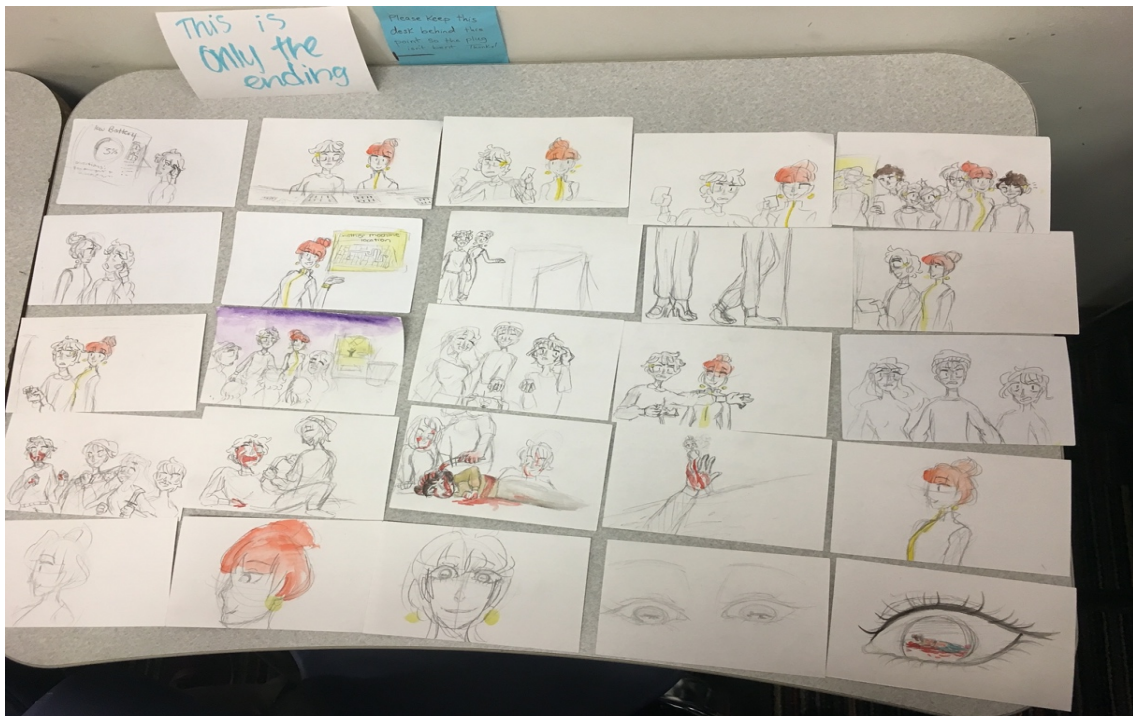
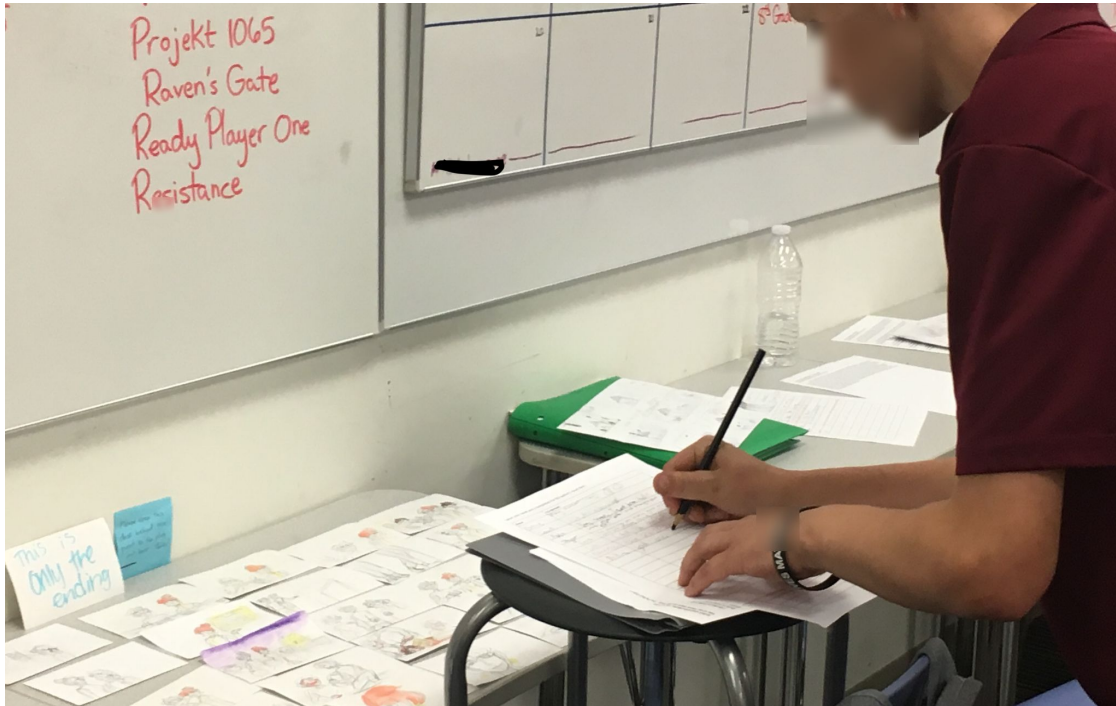


Figure 18. Pinon's finished display of her work.



*Figure 19.* A student reads Pinon's work and leaves feedback.

One striking difference between Regina's classroom work and Pinon's lifework arose regarding ownership and possession of the work. Regina exhibited very little attachment to the material products she created and was happy to let me keep the original artifacts (I checked with all students). Regina's lack of attachment to the products she made contrasted with Pinon's attachment to her texts. Pinon's visual work represented lifework and were artifacts that she wanted to keep. She brought up this issue of authorship and ownership in her final interview. For the progress activities, Pinon created a beautiful set of connection collection cards (see Figure 20). During her exit interview (May 15, 2019), she shared:

I felt like the trading cards, those ones were really good because I liked them. I like to do it, and Mr. Bergeron said, "I'm going to keep these cards to show people



in the future." I was like, "Can I have them back?" Because one of the reasons I did a lot on those cause I wanted to glue it in my sketchbook. But then I was like I don't know about that though. He wants to keep them, but I'm like, but I want to take it back cause like when I'm an adult I want to see what I did when I was 12. She also recounted a conversation with her mother, who, according to Pinon, told her, "You should have gone right up to him and said, 'Hey, hand those back. Those are mine. I won't let you take them.'" Pinon described how her sketchbook motivates her work. The quality of her pieces is determined by their potential placement in her sketchbook. Pinon had maintained a sketchbook since kindergarten, and she regularly looked back at those books and enjoyed seeing how much her drawing has improved over time.



Figure 20. Pinon's Connection Collection cards.

Pinon's sketchbook is filled with images drawn during a range of situations and contexts. There are school projects (such as the connection collection cards, which I gave back to her after creating color copies for myself and Mr. Bergeron), landscapes and animals created at home (because during class time, she does not have the time to do the visual research she needs to craft these), and more eclectically-created doodles. She described cutting doodles off her math worksheets and using white-out to erase the typed language over which she had drawn. She also described an incident that took place in a laundromat:

Another time I was at a laundromat, and I drew in their little coupon book cause I had nothing to draw with, and they only had a state park pen, so I drew in it [the coupon book], and then the laundromat lady got all mad at me. So then she gave me some Bible pamphlets, and I drew in those, and then she got mad at me again, but we are leaving. So then I cut them out and like put them in there [the sketchbook], and I remember looking at it and showing it to my sister. She's like, "Cool. Right there it says 'Jesus.'" I'm like, "Yup." (exit interview, May 15, 2019)

Her drawing infiltrated her life and her inspiration for art came from many sources: her school work ("If I look back at the drawing I did, I can hear her [the science teacher] saying the lesson again, kind of like a superpower"); her food ("As soon as I finished eating it [an ice-cream from the Asian market],...I drew the realistic version of it"); and even her clothing purchases ("I got a purple pastel rain jacket...I drew myself wearing it, or I'll draw a dog wearing it").

Pinon communicated transmodally, drawing from multiple semiotic resources to communicate, blending visuals with either written or spoken language. Interestingly, at

the start of the study, one of the classroom aides had expressed surprise that Pinon was willing to participate in the study as a focal student because she rarely contributed verbally to classroom discussions. Yet, in all our communicative scenarios, she willingly contributed ideas and shared her experiences. However, our connection was noticeably multimodal in nature. When I looked back across my data, I noticed our verbal interactions were always accompanied by a visual text: either a published text authored by another, Pinon's own artwork and sketchbook, or materials and utensils that she used to illustrate her points as we talked. In our interviews, the camera was necessary because she would pause her speech to communicate additional information through image. In her exit interview, she answered verbally and through illustration. Her skill in blending images and spoken language during our conversations was evident across the study.

In her initial interview, Pinon shared her views on most school reading and writing. As apparent in Regina's account of Mr. Bergeron's English class, Pinon also referenced the freedom of expression that Mr. Bergeron gave her during English Language Arts class. This space and autonomy were features that predated the multimodal unit, thus suggesting again that Mr. Bergeron had invited students to interactively design the curriculum before (Kress & Selander, 2012). Below is an extract from the transcript from Pinon's initial interview (March 7, 2019):

Me: What do you think of the reading and writing that you do in school?

Pinon: Boring.

Me: Why?

Pinon: I don't really get to choose what I want to write about, except in Mr.

Bergeron's class. He lets me write about what I want. In my old teachers'

classes, they give me prompts I have to write about, and I just do them against my will because I have to do it. I have to get a good grade in order to do it. That's basically it. Reading. I like reading. Even if they make me read something that no one else likes to read, I'll read it anyway and just draw pictures on the side while I'm reading it.

While Pinon's comments give the impression that she only writes what she wants in Mr. Bergeron's class, that is not quite the case. Instead, Pinon often completed the writing task (for instance, a reading response on a text) but coupled the writing with drawings and illustrations (see Figure 21). Mr. Bergeron permitted her to draw and use class time to create her drawings. She described other teachers' reactions to her drawing: "The teacher is gonna be like, 'Hey, Pinon, put that away. What's wrong with you? Pay attention.'"

Much has been written about writing to learn (Ackerman, 1993; Atwell, 1990; Newell, 2006), but Pinon also appeared to draw to learn. In the mid-unit reflection for the multimodal literacies unit, one of her comments testified to the role of the visual in her learning: "This unit was one of my favorites because it was actually something I fully understand...Everything I read or listen to I can imagine as a visualization or animation. It makes me so happy to see this happen." Writing is the valued and privileged symbol system of learning, and so Pinon's visual learning tactics had not typically been valued. She was aware of this fact, stating in her final interview (May 15, 2019) that, "in Language Arts, I feel powerful."



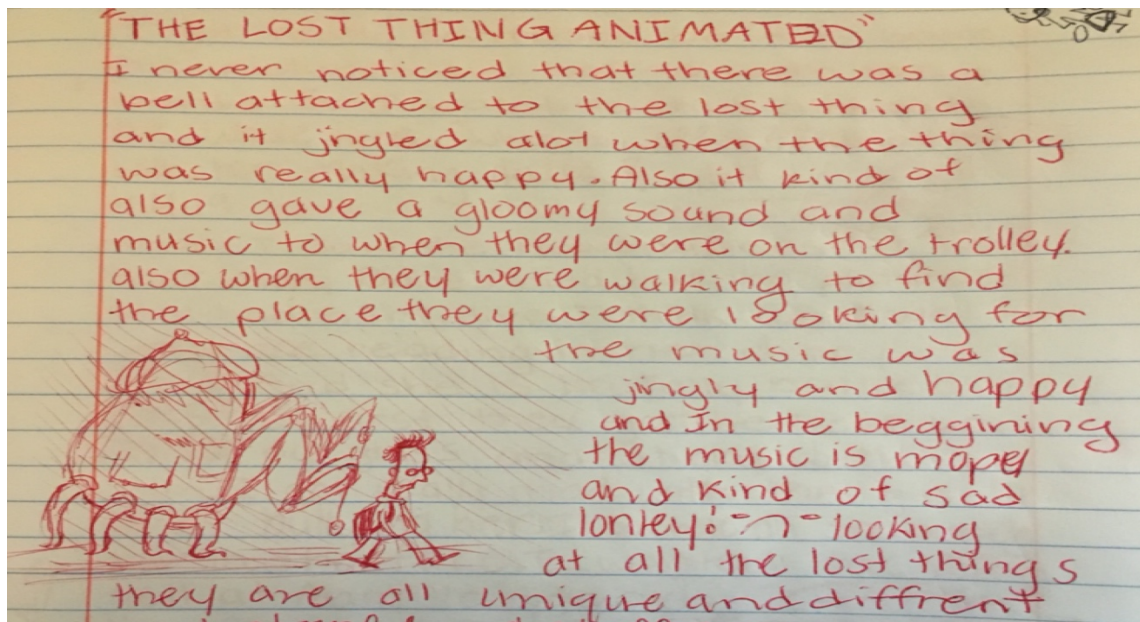
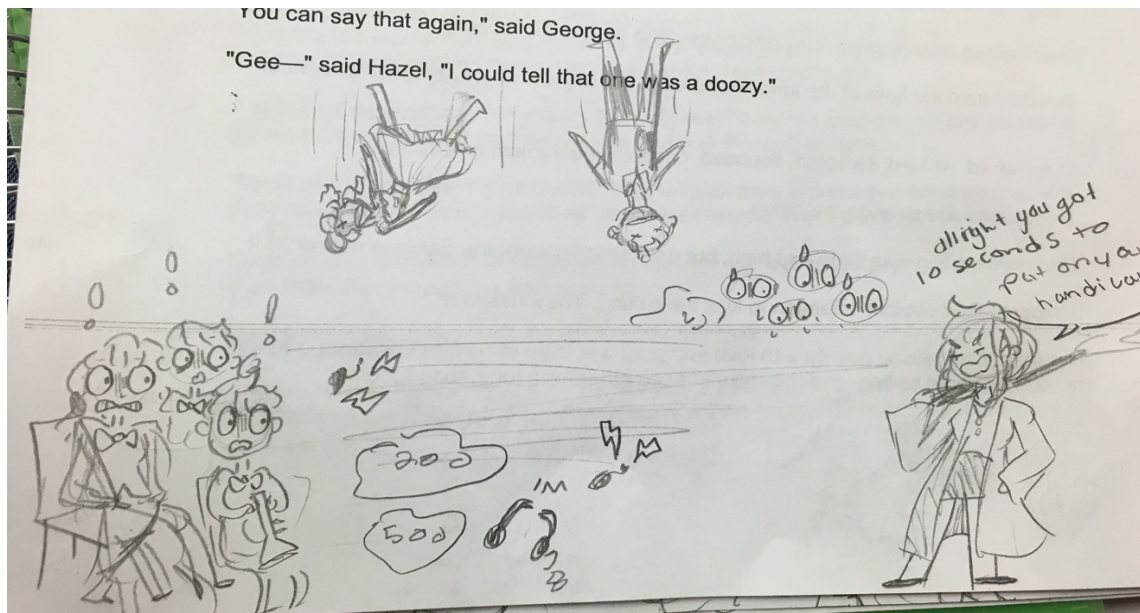


Figure 21. Two examples of Pinon combining images with reading and writing words.

Within this unit, Pinon was the only focal student who connected the curriculum to her lifework. However, Blue, one of the other focal students, connected other curriculum units to his lifework. In his initial interview, Blue described his lifework:

I'm a rapper-writer. I've been writing my own music since two years ago...since I was 10, so three years ago. And I like to write a lot. I like to write. I think it just gets my brain working. And I like expanding my vocabulary with different stuff to put in...When I edit and revise, most of my work has a beat. So I look at the beat. I go over in my head. And then if it goes with the flow, like if it fits onto it, then I will keep it. (March 5, 2019)

The moments in English Language Arts he valued the most were the moments when he was able to represent and communicate his thinking through rap, spoken word performance, and music. He loved the performance aspect of the poetry unit, and he enjoyed the opportunity to rap about dystopian society at the end of the dystopian literature unit.

When reflecting on the multimodal literacies unit Mr. Bergeron designed and the visual texts that made up its core, Blue expressed that “he wasn’t good at the visual stuff” and said he “doesn’t need pictures to make a song” (exit interview, May 21, 2019). Blue, however, did see value in doing visual work in English class because he recognized that other students might enjoy and benefit from this kind of work: “If it's more fun for a kid then they're going to understand it more and then they'll do better in classes.” However, outside of his playful interactions with Benjamin, Blue found other aspects of this particular curriculum unit less engaging and more akin to drudgery.

### **Students Experiencing Drudgery**

As defined by Dewey (1915), drudgery represents those moments when pleasure is not a component of your work or play. In the context of a classroom, I determined drudgery to be student completion of tasks designed for them by the teacher for the



purpose of grades alone or other extrinsic motivators (e.g., disciplinary actions).

Drudgery does not feel pleasurable or beneficial to students. There is no intrinsic reason for students to complete a task.

For Blue, one task that he did not enjoy was the Molly Bang (2000) *Picture This* task. He stated, “I didn't do that. I didn't finish it actually” (informal interview, April 25, 2019). When asked why he did not complete it, he explained: “I'm not a good cut and paster. I can't really cut straight. I also didn't finish it. I just had a hard time putting together the pieces like the shapes. It seems easy, but for me it's just hard.” When I asked about the visual progress activities, he responded similarly: “I didn't do that either because I didn't.” Blue described how he felt like he needed more time during these moments in the unit, mainly when he had to blend the reading of *The Marvels* (Selznick, 2015), a long text that he found challenging because of the image sequence, with the progress activities: “It's weird. I have weird brain, but I just find it hard to do everything at once.” Thus, interpreting the visual creations of others was something he enjoyed, but, when called upon to create visual representations himself or combine reading others’ work with the creation of his own visual work, he found it difficult to enjoy the task and complete it in the time given.

Another student who experienced drudgery during the unit was Norman. In his initial interview, he expressed his love for words and his disinterest in texts that combine images with words. During the lesson when Pinon had spread her art tools and materials across her desk while working on her connection collection cards, Norman, just one desk over was working on his cards, too. My fieldnotes (May 2, 2019) captured what I observed:

Norman is also noticeable during this lesson. He asked to borrow my pen numerous times, thinking he's done writing, returning it, but then needing it to write more. When I watched what he did with my pen, I soon realized what he was doing. He was working on the connection cards at top speed. He scribble-colored in green the border of each card. Drew rapidly. Norman then returned my pen, marched quickly across to the classroom to where Mr. Bergeron stood, who then insisted that he explain each connection. Norman asked for my pen again and added a brief sentence. I tried to capture him working on the cards on camera, but he told me I missed it: "I'm already done. All my connections are green. Easy ones." He grinned broadly before handing me back my pen, marching up to Mr. Bergeron with the cards one last time, and returning to *The Imaginary*, propping its pages open with his elbows. Order was restored to Norman's reading.

Unlike Pinon, who brought her own art materials and tools into the classroom, Norman needed to borrow mine. The only item he brought to his desk was the book he wanted to read. Also, Norman was incorrect about one thing: my video camera did capture him working on his cards. He took just 17 seconds to add the borders and explain each connection. He wrote the same explanation for each connection on all six cards: "Because they are both in the book."

Later, Mr. Bergeron told me that he had mentioned to Norman that he had nothing in the grade-book for him. Instead of completing assignments, Norman had spent class periods reading the multimodal novels, starting with the novels containing the fewest number of pictures. During this conversation, Mr. Bergeron walked towards a small sign on the wall above his bookshelves. He told me that Norman epitomized the sign: "There

is reading and that is all.” “Everything else,” Mr. Bergeron said, “just gets in his way” (fieldnote, May 2, 2019). When I asked Norman about the connections he made, he responded: “Okay...my six connections are fake, unreal, not real, imagined, boring, and fake.” He demonstrated no visible interest in the progress activities.

There were also other moments when Norman made a visible stand against engaging with the visual texts. During the discussion of *The Lost Thing* animation (March 29, 2019), Norman continued to read the book he chose from the library until Mr. Bergeron instructed him “to go ahead and close that.” During the lesson in which *Wolves* (Gravett, 2006) and *Giant Squid* (Fleming, 2016) were shown to the class, he displayed a similar nonchalance towards the visual texts under discussion. Many of his classmates occupied the space in front of the whiteboard and engaged in discussion about the picturebook pages projected on the board. Norman, however, remained seated at his desk, elbows (as usual) pinning the edges of the pages down. His fingers clasped the edges of his ears, and his body was bent over the book. He did not look up at any point during Mr. Bergeron’s storytelling. He stayed in this position, turning page after gold-leafed page of the verbal section of *The Marvels* (Selznick, 2015). At times, he would put his fingers in his ears to block the sound of the classroom discussion.

He appeared to ignore, as much as possible, the picturebooks used. The exception was *The Arrival* (Tan, 2007) because this particular visual text enabled Norman to develop his alternative storyline about spoleberries. When it came to the multimodal novels, he sped through the images but concentrated on the words. In one video clip, Norman flipped through the pages of the 400-page image sequence in the Selznick (2015) text at speed. The only images he paused on to study more carefully were the pictures

that contained verbal information, such as the page showing the newspaper report of the shipwreck or the marriage license belonging to two characters. During the following conversation (informal interview, April 17, 2019), Norman explained how he found the written language section more interesting to read:

Me: Do you prefer the word part to the image part?

Norman: Yes.

Me: Why do you say yes?

Norman: It takes longer to read and it's funner.

Me: Could you have slowed down with the images if you wanted to?

Norman: No, they were boring.

Me: Why do you say that?

Norman: Because, they didn't have words.

Me: So you wanted words. What is so fascinating to you about words?

Norman: You can make words in that you don't have a set mindset.

Despite the speed with which he read the images, Norman demonstrated during conversations with me and the fishbowl discussion that he had understood the plot of the images and how they fit with the verbal section in the novel. He understood that “there's no real ‘real’ to the story” (Norman, informal interview, April 17, 2019).

His modal preference for written language was also demonstrated through his multimodal story. He crafted a nonfiction text about natural toxins. To satisfy requirements, he copied and pasted a visual from Google images into his typed text and drew a front cover-like first page and created a one-page visual (see Figure 22). The sticky note he left for his audience read: “Its lessons aren’t complete, and most pictures

aren't complete." His artist's statement provided his viewers with a chance to understand his perspective on words and images in texts. In his third paragraph, he explained: "I believe that words open up a whole new world of possibilities to the reader while pictures kind of give them a forced picture, never really letting them imagine the story like it was meant to be." He also explained that the writing was a continuation of a project started in another academic class. He did not have time in that class to finish, and so he chose to persist with the project for this assignment.

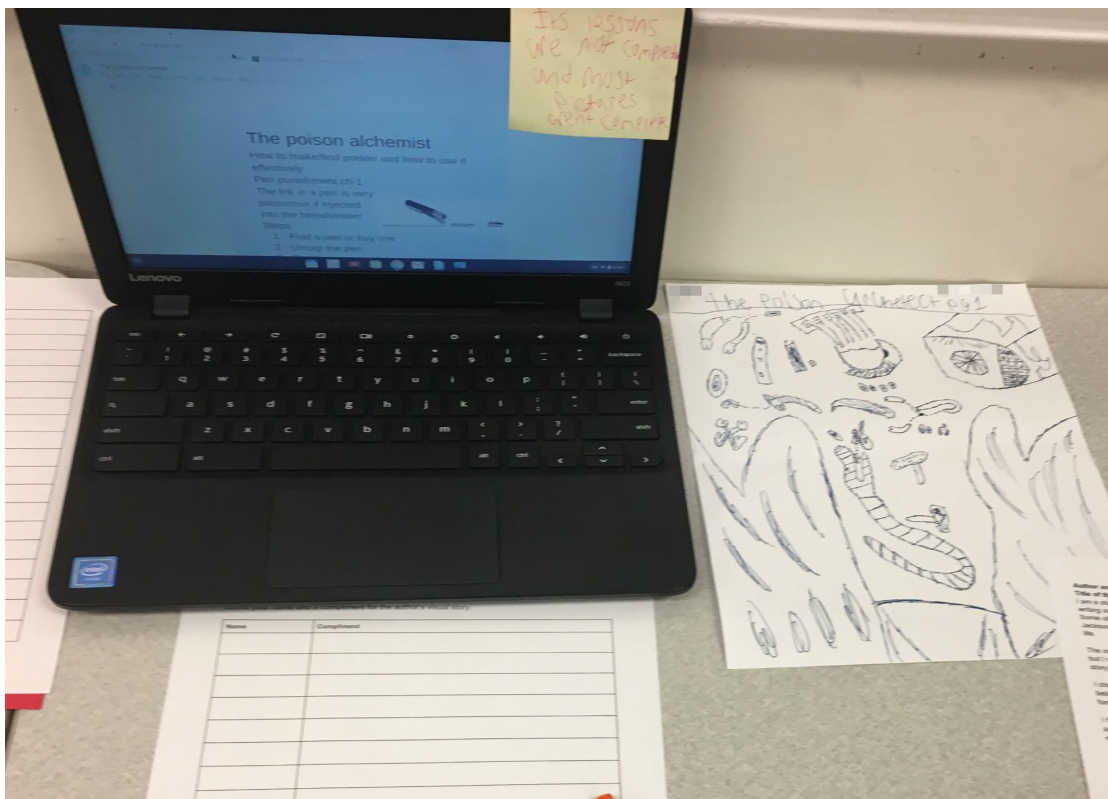


Figure 22. Norman's multimodal composition display.

It is important to note that Norman did not feel that this continuation of his project represented completion. His sticky note suggested that completion would be achieved

another time. Just as he had exhibited modal preference regarding segments of the multimodal novels, so, too, did he express modal preference during his composition work. He enjoyed the writing and was thoroughly engaged in it. He never chose to read during writing time. The image component, however, was still perceived by Norman as drudgery.

Across my examinations of play, work, and drudgery, issues with curricular time emerged. The students appeared to need different timescales (Lemke, 1998). Pinon, who was completing lifework, needed time beyond that allotted by the teacher. In contrast, for those students experiencing drudgery, only a few minutes were needed for them to conclude the same tasks. Lemke's (1998) "interactive learning paradigm," which resembles the kind of learning that takes place in museums and libraries, seems relevant to this classroom study. Students needed differing amounts of time and worked according to their own purposes and interests. Different students paid attention to and valued different aspects and opportunities made available to them through the multimodal literacies curriculum unit. It may be that, in a literacies curriculum founded in multimodality, interactive design (Kress & Selander, 2012) should allow multiple learning timescales and learning paths.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I described what happened when a seventh-grade English Language Arts teacher designed and enacted a multimodal literacies curriculum for the first time. I showed how, despite careful design decisions made by Mr. Bergeron, the enactment of the curriculum resulted in messiness that illuminated questions and challenges that other teachers new to multimodal literacies might also face. Changes to

known metalanguage, the introduction of new metalanguage, and shifts in the distribution of authority and expertise all contributed to the (re)making of Mr. Bergeron's English Language Arts classroom. Adding to this messiness was the modal preferences, motivations, interests, and purposes that each student brought to the multimodal unit. The focal students experienced the curriculum as play, classroom work, lifework, and also drudgery.

In chapter five, I explore in detail the six assertions I constructed as a result of conducting this study. I support each assertion by drawing from a range of data sources, and I describe the significance of each assertion to future research on the design and enactment of multimodal literacies pedagogy in classroom contexts. I conclude chapter five by outlining the limitations of this study and describing how this work will contribute to my future research agenda.

## CHAPTER 5

### ASSERTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine what happened when an English Language Arts teacher purposefully assumed a multimodal literacies pedagogical stance for the first time. My study was guided by a theoretical framework that drew predominantly from a social semiotics perspective on multimodality (Kress, 2010; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001), sociocultural approaches to literacy (New London Group, 1996; Street, 1984), and theories that center on understanding how visual artifacts work (Barthes, 1972; Rose, 2016; Serafini, 2012, 2014). In addition, my understanding of a multimodal literacies pedagogy was informed by scholarship that focused on the interpretation and composition of multimodal texts in classroom contexts (Callow, 2008; Pantaleo, 2012a; B. Smith, 2017). Using an interpretive research design (Erickson, 1986), I collected data in Mr. Bergeron's classroom over a 12-week period in order to answer the following research questions:

1. What did the classroom teacher do when literacy learning was expanded to include multimodal concepts and texts?
2. What did the focal students do when literacy learning was expanded to include multimodal concepts and texts?

I analyzed my data corpus across two coding cycles (Saldaña, 2016) and constructed three conceptual bins (Tracy, 2013) that formed the major categories discussed in my findings sections. I explored the pedagogical design decisions made by Mr. Bergeron in the first category, the messiness involved in introducing new theoretical concepts into an



established curriculum in the second category, and the work, play, and drudgery that students experienced in the third category.

For this chapter, I looked across the categories I formed for my findings section, as well as the data I generated, and I established six assertions (Erickson, 1986):

1. In a classroom that previously privileged written and spoken language texts and newly embraced multimodal concepts and texts, the exposure curricular phase (Serafini, 2014) took precedence.
2. Enacting a multimodal literacies curriculum that incorporated multimodal texts and multimodal literacy concepts necessarily meant that adapted and new multimodal literacy practices became valuable ways of reading, writing, and knowing in this classroom.
3. Enacting a multimodal literacies curriculum for the first time also meant that multimodal literacy events occurred without being firmly grounded in the literacy practices deemed valuable within this environment.
4. In an English Language Arts classroom committed to more traditional writing and composition practices, inclusion of multimodal texts and concepts in the curriculum extended the tools, materials, and semiotic resources available to students for their own composition purposes. Thus, the classroom became a compositional makerspace (albeit one framed by the teacher and the classroom context) and writing became a combination of writing and making.
5. Assuming a multimodal literacies approach required the teacher to (re)make their classroom and their role within the classroom, just as students needed to negotiate and (re)make their roles. The expanded curriculum provided

students with spaces and opportunities for agency, expertise, and power that were not always available in the version of this English Language Arts classroom that prioritized written and spoken language.

6. The multimodal literacies unit was not drudgery for any student all of the time. Students also engaged in play, classroom work, and lifework.

In forming my assertions, I read my data corpus for both confirming and disconfirming evidence. Below, I present each of the six assertions and explain how they contribute to current scholarly conversations on multimodality and literacy education. I conclude this chapter by considering the implications of my scholarship, its limitations, and my plans for future research.

#### **Assertion One: The Dominance of the Exposure Curricular Phase**

My first assertion is based on evidence throughout my data corpus that suggested the curriculum unit designed and enacted by Mr. Bergeron did not fully shift beyond the exposure phase detailed by Serafini (2014). I assert: In a classroom that previously privileged written and spoken language texts and newly embraced multimodal concepts and texts, the exposure curricular phase (Serafini, 2014) took precedence.

In his work, Serafini (2014) structured multimodal literacies units around three phases. During the exposure phase, teachers immerse students in reading a wide range of multimodal texts. During the exploration phase, a key aspect is “the development of a specific vocabulary or metalanguage for discussing and analyzing the textual, visual, and design elements” of multimodal texts (p. 93). During this second phase, Serafini recommended that students identify mentor texts to support them during the engagement

phase. During the third phase, the engagement phase, students compose their own multimodal texts.

Below, I show how Mr. Bergeron incorporated a wide-range of texts designed to support students as they transacted with increasingly complex and longer multimodal texts. I also demonstrate how aspects of the engagement and exposure phases were included but that Mr. Bergeron's curriculum design and enactment lacked key components that would have enabled a more complete realization of each phase.

### **Textual Variety and Slow Reading**

One key piece of evidence that the exposure phase dominated the curriculum is the number of multimodal texts that students were exposed to across the unit. Over the course of eight weeks, Mr. Bergeron brought students into contact with a magazine cover, an animated short, Molly Bang's *Picture This* (2000), 12 picturebooks, one whole-class multimodal novel, and 12 different multimodal novels that students could read during independent reading time. The classroom was stocked with multimodal texts, and students read them independently, in pairs or small groups, and as a class.

In this classroom, there also seemed to be two distinct parts to the exposure phase. The first part of the exposure phase was designed to prepare students for grappling with the longer multimodal novels. In his initial interview (February 14, 2019), when outlining his vision for the unit, Mr. Bergeron explained that he "always front-loaded a lot" and that he will start "with shorter stories" and use those to introduce the longer novels. He referenced lesson time, too, stating, "I don't know how many, how many stories we need to go before I feel like they're ready to take on the whole-class novel, but my inclination is to go slow." He equated the slowness of this initial introduction to the visual and

multimodal texts to students learning to read images slowly: “I want the kids to really understand...you can keep looking at an image and making meaning for a long time.” His curriculum design moved students from reading single-page multimodal texts (for example, the magazine cover and Molly Bang work) to reading short multi-page multimodal texts (the picturebooks) to reading multimodal novels. This part of the exposure phase was designed to scaffold students and help build their reading stamina (Kittle, 2012) regarding multimodal texts. Even though these texts were multimodal, the majority of classroom time was spent focused on the images in these texts, as that was the unfamiliar mode of representation and communication privileged in this unit.

While the first part of the exposure phase focused on supporting students as they read multimodal texts, the focus shifted during the second part of Mr. Bergeron’s exposure phase. In this second part, students’ access to a wide range of multimodal texts was designed to support students’ experimentation with multiple modes, semiotic resources, tools, and materials. During the final two weeks of the unit, Mr. Bergeron dedicated time during each class period to sharing picturebooks that he felt might give them important guidance for their final composition work. This was a goal from the beginning, for students to “feel like they can use these ideas not only for the reading but also for their own making meaning that they can do things like that” (initial interview, February 14, 2019). Mr. Bergeron, then, in this part of the exposure phase, positioned the multimodal texts as mentor texts and models for students to imitate.

### **Aspects of the Exploration and Engagement Phases Included**

While his curriculum plan and lessons emphasized access to a wide-range of visually-oriented multimodal texts, certain lessons and tasks corresponded with specific

elements of the engagement and exploration phases. For example, learning key analytical metalanguage is an essential component of Serafini's (2014) exploration phase. To be sure, Mr. Bergeron introduced semiotic resources such as line, color, and space in a planned way through the video sequence he made available through his online Language Lab. He also encouraged students to name the components of the image brought up through discussion of the *TIME Magazine* cover. These were recorded on a flipchart, and students were encouraged to use the terms in their writing. However, my findings showed that the students did not take up new metalanguage in their talk or writing. They talked about color and line but did not use new terminology such as "mode," "salience," or "meaning-making." Students' lack of use suggested that the metalanguage was not taken up by the students as analytical tools or used to interrogate how multimodal texts work. Students may have understood what the words meant, but they did not seem to understand how the metalanguage might be leveraged during interpretive work.

Mr. Bergeron himself recognized the potential power of metalanguage as a means of expressing how multimodal texts work (voice message, April 22, 2019). Still, his students did not demonstrate that they understood the metalanguage as analytical tools. To shift the curriculum experienced by students into the engagement phase, Mr. Bergeron may have needed to provide a more explicit rationale for teaching them metalanguage. He may also have needed to create more structured opportunities for students to use the metalanguage as visual analysis tools. Without direct instruction (New London Group, 1996), it is possible that students understood the metalanguage as academic vocabulary to be learned and understood but not as analytical tools that help readers investigate how texts work. On his curriculum unit cover page, Mr. Bergeron wrote: "Students will use

academic vocabulary when discussing visual texts.” In future iterations of this unit, problematizing “use,” “academic vocabulary,” and “discussing” may benefit Mr. Bergeron and his students. Linking the metalanguage students will learn more explicitly to the analytical and critical work students will undertake—what they will actually *do* with this language—may help students understand metalinguistic terms as tools to be used and not just words to be learned.

Aspects of Serafini’s (2014) engagement phase were also evident in Mr. Bergeron’s curriculum design in that students had numerous opportunities to compose multimodal texts. For example, students spent the final week of the curriculum unit composing their own multimodal texts. However, Serafini (2014) described the intentional decisions students make during their engagement with multimodal text construction and explained that students need to understand the affordances of modes to determine their aptness for use (Kress, 2010). Although his voice message (April 22, 2019) demonstrated Mr. Bergeron’s understanding of this theoretical concept, Mr. Bergeron veered away from using “affordance” with students. Students’ artist statements tended to focus on the plot of the story they were telling through words and images. No student (focal or otherwise) discussed why they used images to convey certain ideas and information while relying on language or another mode to do different semiotic work.

Theoretical knowledge is powerful because it offers a way of explaining how things in our world work. Understanding the concept of affordance might enable students to argue for the modes of representation and communication they choose to use and advocate for the modal combinations they decide to use in the texts they make. This

theoretical concept may help teachers and students justify moving away from more traditional English Language Arts texts and formats such as the five-paragraph essay.

For students to learn multimodality theory, teachers need to be prepared to teach with multimodality theory. In his exit interview (May 29, 2019), Mr. Bergeron shared how his understanding of affordances has evolved. He recalled hearing about multimodality during both his undergraduate and Master of Arts programs and described how an assignment was deemed multimodal if an image was included. Through teaching this unit, Mr. Bergeron realized that a multimodal literacies approach to pedagogy involves more than just reading or creating texts with images in them. A multimodal literacies approach necessarily involves students “using and examining or analyzing how modes are representing differently.” In the final moments of the interview, Mr. Bergeron reflected, “There’s a lot of area for this to come into education and do better, and I’ve just gotten a taste of that with this unit. There’s a lot more to it than just do it.”

His evolved understanding showed that learning theory means “moving past the surface” (Mr. Bergeron’s words) and getting past the more ubiquitous buzzwords that simplify complicated theoretical matters. His concluding comments also showed that connecting theory with practice is no easy matter. Teaching is also learning, and just as I argued that Pinon was undertaking lifework during the curriculum unit, so, too, was Mr. Bergeron. By working through the unit and reflecting upon his teaching practice, Mr. Bergeron developed a rationale and set of explanations for teaching multimodal theoretical concepts that could prove useful when presenting these ideas to future groups of students.

## **Significance of Assertion One for Multimodal Literacies Pedagogy**

Assertion one is significant for two key reasons. First, Mr. Bergeron self-identified as a “novice” when it came to multimodal literacies pedagogy and teaching with visual narratives. For Mr. Bergeron, teaching this unit was also a means of gaining exposure to visual texts and the multimodality concepts that enables reader-viewers to interpret word-image constructions of narrative. He modeled reading these texts and used independent reading time to read as many of the multimodal texts as possible. This study occurred because Mr. Bergeron was “very much convinced, persuaded” towards the work on multimodal literacies pedagogy “in terms of moving away from very traditional understandings of what should be in a language arts class” (exit interview, May 29, 2019). Mr. Bergeron’s curriculum represented a move away from a logocentric English Language Arts curriculum. The pedagogical journey forward will likely be marked by further curricular decisions as Mr. Bergeron continues to pay critical attention (Bezemer & Kress, 2016) to the intersection of multimodality theory and pedagogical practice.

This first assertion is also significant because it suggests that visual literacy instruction and multimodal literacies pedagogy may be absent from traditional school curricula. Mr. Bergeron justified teaching this unit by explaining that “no one is teaching [students] how to read those kinds of [visual] messages” (initial interview, February 14, 2019). My initial interviews with all four focal students supported Mr. Bergeron’s claim that they are not learning about multimodality and images in other subjects. All four students stated that they had not studied visuals or discussed reading images outside of the infographic work they had undertaken with Mr. Bergeron. While Pinon read manga books, which rely heavily on visuals, the other three focal students did not. Norman,



Blue, and Regina associated books with pictures with their childhood and elementary school years.

If multimodal and visual literacies instruction is left to an individual teacher, particularly at the middle and high school levels, then that teacher may always have to start with an extended exposure phase because students will lack the cumulative experience of working with multimodal theories and texts during past curricular engagements. Teachers may feel the need to implement a significant exposure phase in order to orient their students towards interpreting and composing multimodal texts. Mills and Exley (2014) detailed the difference between the U.S. and Australian English Language Arts national standards, pointing out that multimodality concepts are woven throughout the grade-level expectations for English Language Arts in Australia. For teachers to have time to move past the exposure phase and anchor their instruction in the other additional phases, future scholarship could map how a multimodal literacies pedagogy might take shape across the grade levels and disciplines. Mapping multimodality across the U.S. K-12 curriculum means extending the conversation to teams of teachers, schools, districts, and beyond.

### **Assertion Two: The Development of Adapted and New Literacy Practices**

My second assertion focuses on the literacy events (Heath, 1982) and literacy practices (Street, 1984) that this study makes visible. At the foundation of this assertion is my understanding that a literacy event is an observable occasion when people interpreted or talked about a text (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanič, 2000). Heath (1982) emphasized that the text should center on written language, even in the revised definition that included multimodal means of representation and communication (Heath & Street, 2008). I,

however, would propose we define a literacy event as an observable event where texts comprised of any modal combinations are integral to social interactions. Street (1984) stated that literacy practices represented a broader theoretical concept. Literacy practices, for Street, include literacy events. However, literacy practices also refer to socially-held beliefs, values, and attitudes regarding what constitutes valuable reading and composing activities in any given community. Literacy practices reveal what people do with literacy regularly and invite investigation into why people have developed these literacy routines and habits (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanič, 2000).

As Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanič (2000) suggested, literacy practices can change or be adapted, and new practices can become important within communities. Literacy practices both shape and are shaped by people's engagement with texts. My second assertion builds upon their proposition: Enacting a multimodal literacies curriculum that incorporated multimodal texts and multimodal literacy concepts necessarily meant that adapted and new multimodal literacy practices became valuable ways of reading, writing, and knowing in this classroom. Below, I consider the adapted and new multimodal literacy practices that took shape in Mr. Bergeron's classroom and discuss the significance of the second assertion for multimodal literacies pedagogy.

### **Adapted Multimodal Literacy Practices**

In moving from designing curriculum centered on written or spoken language to a curriculum that centered on visual and multimodal texts, Mr. Bergeron adapted writing-oriented literacy practices that had been previously important in his classroom. For example, Mr. Bergeron adapted the widely used practice of crafting thesis statements for use with visual texts. Instead of using quotations extracted from written language texts to

support their thesis statements, students used specific images and image-components as supporting evidence instead. Similarly, the writing process (brainstorming, planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing) was used to assist students in creating multimodal compositions. Mr. Bergeron's adaptation was including the additional considerations about which students needed to think. To create their multimodal compositions, students also needed to consider visual style, what images they might use, how they might structure image sequences, and how they would make their images. These are decisions not usually factored explicitly into the typical presentation of the writing process.

The multimodal decisions students would need to make also impacted how Mr. Bergeron modeled text-creation for his students. The multimodal literacies unit called for multimodal modeling. Mr. Bergeron was used to modeling written language for his students—but not creating images or using design features such as panels or speech bubbles. Composition and modeling were not new practices for Mr. Bergeron and his classroom community, but they were adapted to highlight how students might use meaning-making resources beyond language.

Mr. Bergeron also adapted two reading practices that were important to his classroom community. First, Mr. Bergeron's daily independent reading practice changed. Students could still choose a text to read, but they were required to select and read a multimodal novel from the 12 novels available. Due to limited book availability and the need for Mr. Bergeron's other classes to access the novels, there was no continuity between independent reading at school and home. Students read different choice books at home. The availability of the multimodal novels, rather than beliefs about the importance

of independent reading, appeared to drive this adapted practice. Future iterations of the multimodal unit will determine if this adaptation becomes a permanent practice. Mr. Bergeron may determine that he values students reading books of their choice with no parameters or restrictions on what or where they can read their chosen texts more than independent reading time dedicated solely to multimodal novels.

Additionally, the class still experienced “togetherness” (initial interview, February 14, 2019) by reading and discussing multimodal texts as a class. However, instead of students staying at their desk referencing their copy of the text (for example, a photocopied short story), Mr. Bergeron invited students to occupy the space he had created in front of the board so they could collectively view the same projected text. In the adapted version of reading together, students could also interact physically with the text in full view of their peers. Often, students would stand up, move to the whiteboard, and point to the image components they wished to discuss. Only Norman consistently resisted this togetherness, preferring to stay at his desk reading the novel of his choice. It would be interesting to document future instruction to see if this practice of togetherness that Mr. Bergeron developed around multimodal texts continues to be valuable. It would also be interesting to see if this practice only informs interactions with multimodal or visual texts.

### **New Multimodal Literacy Practices**

The most noticeable new literacy practice implemented during the curriculum unit was the naming and noticing routines (Serafini & Ladd, 2008) that guided conversations focused on visual texts. Students often engaged in dialogue (whole-class, paired, or small group) that revolved around using language to name what they noticed. Whether it was

the *TIME Magazine* cover, *The Arrival* (Tan, 2007), or *The Marvels* (Selznick, 2015), students had time to talk about what they noticed. In his exit interview (May 29, 2019), Mr. Bergeron elaborated on this practice:

Me: You've mentioned the word, "learning," a couple of times. What does that mean in the context of this unit?

Mr. Bergeron: In the context of this unit, really it was being able to notice and discuss...Some kids were getting to the point of analyzing and doing a nice job, and some kids were just still describing and kind of basic noticing, so for a first go at it, I felt okay. In the future, I'd like to make sure that everyone getting to the point of analysis.

Me: What do you mean by analysis?

Mr. Bergeron: ...Being able to break down the parts and talk about...the artist is meaning this, and this is why, this is what I'm seeing, this is why I think this is what's being represented, so having students break down the parts, and look at it that way, and then kind of bring it back to the whole...What does it mean to the page? What does it mean to the whole story?

Mr. Bergeron articulated this present literacy practice as an important part of the meaning-making process in his classroom. Students enjoyed sharing what they noticed and talking about the image components that appeared salient to them. However, Mr. Bergeron also stated his plans regarding the development of the naming and noticing practice. As a new literacy practice, naming and noticing will not stay statically bound to its initial rendering in this classroom community.

As both my observations and Mr. Bergeron identified, students' naming and noticing tended to restrict them to the perceptual analytical perspective (Serafini, 2010). Naming and noticing can remain at the level of description and "basic noticing" if students do not consider why what they notice might matter—in terms of the page, the story, and the story as a sociocultural artifact. Students tended to notice and name image elements but did not often connect those elements to the story being told. Neither did students tend to synthesize their noticings into broader statements about the texts they read or texts' connections to sociopolitical issues in the world. Mr. Bergeron articulated his future vision for this practice as "zooming in and out," moving from particular components to the syntagmatic whole (Barthes, 1986). In future curricular iterations, this practice will likely become more refined and targeted towards the analytical moves Mr. Bergeron described.

This aspect of the study illuminates the potential benefits of practice-based research (Hinchman & Appleman, 2017) that bring researchers and practitioners together in partnerships that highlight important intersections of theory and practice. The reflective component of the study enabled Mr. Bergeron to describe and name the practices that became important when visual texts were centered in his curriculum, and his reflections also led him towards a conscious reshaping of the practices that inform the textual work he asks students to undertake. Visual theories could assist with this reshaping, as theory also names what otherwise might remain hidden. For example, in thinking about the act of zooming in and zooming out, Mr. Bergeron might benefit from thinking about how this practice could "zoom out" beyond the text to address the ideological components of visual images and how they can be read and/or critiqued in

relation to sociopolitical issues. Serafini's (2010) tripart framework with its ideological analytical perspective, or Barthes's (1972, 1977) notions of denotation, connotation, and myth, could support future formations of this literacy practice.

### **Significance of Assertion Two for Multimodal Literacies Pedagogy**

First, my second assertion established the relationship between theory, literacy practices, and literacy events. Assuming a theoretical perspective such as a social semiotic approach to multimodality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Kress, 2010) means that the world is seen through a particular lens and that certain ideas and activities are highlighted as significant. Teachers are often advised to provide a rationale for their curricular and instructional decisions (Wilhelm & Novak, 2015; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005), but thinking about theory and its connection to literacy practices moves beyond justifying a topic, text, or academic content. Developing an understanding of literacy practices as the social embodiment of valued ways of meaning-making with text may assist teachers as they design curriculum with multimodality theory in mind. Multimodal literacy practices, when understood as a shaping influence on literacy events, could represent curricular strands that span units, grade-levels, and even disciplines. Mr. Bergeron demonstrated the theoretical knowledge necessary to establish potential curricular strands and link together some of the more seemingly isolated literacy events. In establishing such literacy practices, Mr. Bergeron may also have had the opportunity to name the practice and provide a rationale for the practice, explaining why the practice is valuable to this particular classroom community.

Second, Bomer (2012) argued that the next step in adolescent literacies research should be to help students name "their own practices and knowledge" (p. x). There were

moments during the curriculum unit, particularly in the opening lesson, for example, when Mr. Bergeron directly challenged students to think about what interactions with texts count as reading and what resources count as text. He also asked students to recount and name the image-components they had used to make meaning from the *TIME Magazine* cover. In his exit interview (May 29, 2019), Mr. Bergeron stated that he enjoyed the playful exploration that this unit entailed. When asked to expand upon this idea of playful exploration, he answered:

This visual unit, again, partly because it's new for me, but just in general it's this exploration with the kids, from the get-go, kind of the what is writing? What counts as writing? What do you think we should be doing in this classroom? Is it okay to do visuals? Or is that just strictly an art teacher's job? And so, those conversations are very playful for me.

These conversations with students introduced them to key questions that circulate throughout literacy education scholarship, and Mr. Bergeron's students showed they were able to think about and respond to these questions that challenged traditional conceptualizations of English as an academic discipline.

Scholarship, such as Pantaleo (2011, 2012a, 2017, 2019) and Reid (2020), has demonstrated that students can work with complex theoretical constructs, both in their interpretive and composition work. This kind of conceptual thinking around literacy practices within particular social contexts could position students critically, too, helping them build awareness of the ideological nature of literacy (Street, 1984; Luke, 1995) and construct the understanding that literacy practices, too, can be challenged and critiqued. Such theoretical understanding could also frame the metalanguage they learned as



analytical tools (Serafini, 2010) to support them in understanding how multimodal texts work.

Third, although intended as a unit focused on assuming a multimodal literacies approach to English education, the unit actually centered on the mode of image, which was less of a focus before the unit. Part of the work of multimodality scholars is to examine single modes and catalog the semiotic choices, tools, and materials that enable meaning to be made visible through those modes (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; van Leeuwen, 2005). However, Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) emphasized that focusing on individual modes of representation and communication was not enough. Scholars interested in multimodality need to explore modal intersections to understand how the use of multiple modes impacts a text's meaning-potential (Hull & Nelson, 2005; Jewitt, 2017; Jewitt et al., 2016; Lemke, 1998). Establishing practices that focus on multimodal texts and incorporating them consciously as strands that connect and sustain classroom literacy events might support teachers in moving beyond instruction that emphasizes individual modes. Consciously working to construct and define multimodal literacy practices could also present teachers with a means of incorporating multimodal literacies throughout their yearlong curriculum, instead of concentrating on a particular mode of representation and communication within a specific unit.

### **Assertion Three: Literacy Events Can Become Literacy Activities**

The practices described as noticing and naming resulted in frequent and observable moments where the class or groups of students transacted with the visuals in multimodal texts in often patterned ways, particularly when Mr. Bergeron was involved in the conversation. The frequency of this kind of literacy event pointed towards the

value that Mr. Bergeron had assigned this practice. There were, however, other literacy events that were not repeated during the unit or will not be planned by Mr. Bergeron in future curricular iterations. Thus, my third assertion contends that enacting a multimodal literacies curriculum for the first time also meant that multimodal literacy events occurred without being firmly grounded in literacy practices deemed valuable within this environment. Instead of pointing towards broader practices linked to values and beliefs, some literacy events seemed more detached. These observable textual interactions took place once and would never be repeated.

I assert that these literacy events did not become frequent occurrences because they were not grounded in literacy practices that had been determined as valuable by the classroom community. Instead, I viewed these literacy events as literacy activities, stand-alone tasks that participants did not find particularly meaningful. Such activities required students to interact with multimodal texts, but the activities might also serve other school purposes. They might be used as a break from reading or as an accountability check or perceived as “busy work.”

### **Literacy Activities**

The most noticeable literacy activities that I felt were not grounded in valued community literacy practices were the three progress activities that Mr. Bergeron designed for students to complete as they read *The Marvels* (Selznick, 2015). During these literacy activities, students created three different texts in response to Selznick’s (2015) text: (a) a visual depiction of something from the word portion of the novel; (b) the connection collection of six trading cards that feature different connections between the image and word portions of the novel; and (c) a video showing their reaction to the

novel, which was to be recorded upon completion of the novel. In a voice message (April 17, 2019), Mr. Bergeron explained his rationale for these activities. He wanted students to read at their own pace, to take breaks from reading the long novel if they needed, and to stop at times and think about certain things. Thus, the progress activities were an accountability tool, a classroom management tool designed to support students moving at different paces, and an academic tool that highlighted the literary qualities to which Mr. Bergeron wanted to draw their attention.

However, Mr. Bergeron's rationale for these activities was not solely grounded in pedagogical practices. When describing his rationale for the first progress activity, he stated that he wanted them to think: "If this was not in a textual mode, a written language mode, if I had to make this in a visual mode, what might I represent? So I'm curious to see what they choose to represent and how they represent it" (exit interview, May 29, 2019). Essentially, he is referring to transduction (Kress, 2010), a term from multimodality theory that describes how meaning is made anew when knowledge is re-represented in a mode different from the initial representation. Transduction asks that meaning-makers consider the choices they make, the affordances and limitations of the modes of the first and next rendering(s), and the differences in the meaning potentials offered through both versions.

It is significant that Mr. Bergeron did not choose to use "affordances" or "representation" with students because, without this metalanguage, it would have been difficult to discuss the idea of transduction with students. This missing theoretical component could have shaped a literacy practice that might have grounded this work and signaled more clearly its potential value. Transduction as a literacy practice could have

linked this task with previous literacy events, such as Molly Bang's (2000) transduction of *Little Red Riding Hood* from a written or oral text into a single image or the transduction of *The Lost Thing* (Tan, 2000/2011) into an Oscar-winning animated short (Ruhemann & Tan, 2010). These linkages could have established transduction as a literacy practice that was repeated across the unit.

Additionally, Mr. Bergeron's rationale for the connection collection task also connects with important multimodal text scholarship. *The Marvels* (Selznick, 2015) opens with a 400-page image sequence before transitioning to a 200-page written language sequence of chapters. Mr. Bergeron described this activity as "one of the important things" about reading this novel, stating:

It's natural as they're reading the word portion now to think about how it connects or might connect back to the image sequence in the beginning. So I want a record of that...Those cards are a way for them to think about it, but also to make it available for me to see." (voice message, April 17, 2019)

When Mr. Bergeron explained this connection collection progress activity to the class, he provided only the directions, not the task's broader purpose, which was to examine the link between the images and the words. It was Gabrielle, one of his students, who touched upon the purpose: "So, um. These connection collections, is it a connection between the text and the images?" (transcript, April 16, 2019). The activity's broader purposes connected to scholarship that examined word-image relationships in multimodal texts (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2000; Sipe, 1998, 2012; D. Lewis, 2001). Examining word-image relationships as a literacy practice could have connected this literacy activity to the

earlier picturebooks they studied and provided students with theoretical tools they could use to both interpret and compose multimodal texts.

### **Significance of Assertion Three for Multimodal Literacies Pedagogy**

Assertion three is important because it shows how literacy events can become literacy activities that are unlikely to be repeated. They will not reference literacy practices that are valued as important meaning-making work. Classroom practitioners could use the concepts of literacy practices, literacy events, and literacy activities to examine their pedagogy and reach decisions regarding what curricular components should stay and what components should be deleted. Just as it is important for teachers to name literacy practices and work towards shaping practices that will benefit and empower their students, it is also important for teachers to be able to identify literacy activities. Once identified, literacy activities can be eradicated, or they can be revised and adapted into more longstanding literacy practices.

I am also reminded of Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen's (2014, 2016) work on teacher growth. They described how teachers must assume a pose "and name the practices they want to improve" (2014, p. 67). Teachers will inevitably experience "wobble" as they work towards improvement and refinement of practice before experiencing "flow," when the desired transformation of practice has been achieved. Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen (2014) describe the iterative nature of the pose/wobble/flow sequence and argue that any mastery is only ever temporary. Mr. Bergeron assumed a new pose when he decided to adopt a multimodal literacies approach to English Language Arts. He experienced flow with some of the new and adapted literacy practices he put in place, and he felt the wobble of implementing literacy activities (as opposed to

practices). He realized that some of his lesson designs worked better than others and was prepared, after reflecting upon his pedagogy, to change and revise his designs.

In his exit interview (May 29, 2019), Mr. Bergeron reflected on the practices that would stay in place, the practices that would change, and the activities that would not be implemented again. Teachers have agency as “shaping agents” (Bezemer & Kress, 2016) to continually remake their curriculum and mold the literacy practices that will help shape and be shaped by classroom communities. The ability and willingness to reflect upon the intersection of multimodality theory with practice will likely be critical to any teacher looking to design and enact a multimodal literacies curriculum, especially if they are attempting this stance for the first time.

#### **Assertion Four: The Classroom as Compositional Makerspace**

My fourth assertion is rooted in Mr. Bergeron’s emphasis on communication. From the outset of the study, Mr. Bergeron expressed that interpreting others’ multimodal texts was an important goal. However, students using their knowledge and understanding to create their own texts was also important to Mr. Bergeron: “Everything we do, we have to be asking ourselves, who’s my audience? What’s my purpose? And how can I best communicate that?” (voice message, April 22, 2019). Together with his emphasis on play and exploration, his commitment to students communicating their ideas resulted in a classroom context that permitted self-expression, student autonomy, and process-oriented composition work.

Therefore, I assert that, in an English Language Arts classroom committed to writing and composition practices, the inclusion of multimodal texts and concepts in the curriculum extended the tools, materials, and semiotic resources available to students for

their compositional purposes. The classroom became a compositional makerspace (albeit one framed by the teacher and the classroom context), and writing became “writing/making” (Cantrill & Oh, 2016, p.108). Cantrill and Oh (2016) used the term writing/making to signal the similarities between the writing process and the act of making. Both involve producing physical artifacts. They noted, too, that communities of practice shape what is written and made and that communities of practice determine the audiences for writing and making. I also use this term to differentiate between writing as a process traditionally associated with written language and writing/making as a process involving multiple modes of representation and communication, a range of semiotic resources, and various materials and composing tools (both digital and analog).

### **Expanding Available Semiotic Resources, Tools, and Materials**

Mr. Bergeron left open the final week of the unit for students to compose their visual stories and dedicated the last two Language Lab sessions to students’ multimodal composing. He also permitted them to start work on their texts in class if they finished *The Marvels* (Selznick, 2015) early. Mr. Bergeron also used class time during the final two weeks to introduce different picturebooks that might help students “play around” and “try-out” different ideas with their visual and multimodal compositions. Ideas he presented to the students included using “simple” images, creating pages that fold outwards, photographing sculptures, and constructing mixed media art.

One of my fieldnotes (May 7, 2019) reconstructed the sounds involved in students’ multimodal composing during 30 minutes of quiet work time (implemented to help students concentrate on their work). I noted the “slight pop of air as marker lids are pulled off,” the scratch of pencils shading in drawings, the pages of sketchbooks being

turned, the tapping of a pencil being used to make dots, the controlled tear of scissors through paper, and the noise of keys on a laptop. Pinon sat surrounded by her paints and markers and notecards, Regina and Blue worked with pencils on paper, and Norman worked on a laptop. Another student, Sierra, used Google Draw to computer-generate the images. After printing her images, she cut and glued them into a construction-paper book because the texture and 3-D movement were important to her story. This kind of composing resembled “making” as well as “writing.” Mr. Bergeron had constructed a classroom community in which writing/making was both permitted and valued.

Likely due to the positioning of the picturebooks as mentor texts from which they could freely draw, remixing from available designs (New London Group, 1996) was absolutely accepted. For example, students used design features to which they had paid attention during the unit. For example, inspired by *Bluebird* (Staake, 2014) and *The Arrival* (Tan, 2007), many students, like Regina and Blue, incorporated panels and gutters into their texts. In addition, students also remixed designs from popular culture into their work (Knobel & Lankshear, 2008). Andrew worked diligently on his visual project, his drawing guided by YouTube tutorials on creating different skins for characters from *Fortnite*, a computer game. Regina used her laptop to locate and trace a particular font she needed for the title of her story. Gabrielle, a fan of the *Phineas and Ferb* television show, created a page-based visual narrative for the show’s two main characters. Remix became an integral part of students’ making.

While Norman remained true to his modal preference by creating a predominantly linguistic text, all the other students prioritized the mode of image. Both Regina and Pinon’s compositions featured very few words. When I asked Regina why she focused on



image and why she decided to communicate her story through predominantly illustration, she responded: “I really like this unit because I’ve never thought of images that way. Of how important they are to a story...So, I want to see that you could write a whole story and understand what it is with just images” (informal interview, April 18, 2019).

Regina’s decision to create a visually dominant narrative was significant. Unlike Pinon, who considered herself an artist and practiced visual representation as part of her lifework, Regina was successful with traditional school literacy practices that involved mostly words. Mr. Bergeron created a classroom environment in which students could choose to try new ways of representation and communication. Even though Regina knew the task was “going to be hard because I’m not a good drawer,” she was willing to take the risk of completing a composition task using an unfamiliar mode, a risk Mr. Bergeron himself had taken when modeling his visual composition.

### **The Process of Writing/Making**

Consistent with his belief in the value of playful exploration, Mr. Bergeron emphasized the process of making the visual stories as opposed to looking only at the finished product. While the shortened amount of time may have contributed to this emphasis, Mr. Bergeron understood the extensive amount of time that creating complete and polished visual narratives entailed. He wanted the students “to have fun with this” and use “some of the things we’ve learned in this unit about how to tell a visual story” (transcript, May 6, 2019). He told them that his own piece would not be finished. On the final day, Regina had a complete project, but the other focal students did not. Norman’s writing was not finished, some of Pinon’s drawings lacked paint and color, and Blue’s final project was not displayed. A completed artifact was less important than the act of

writing/making and the opportunity to “practice what we’ve studied” (voice message, May 7, 2019). The focus on practicing writing/making meant that students did not think in-depth about the sites of dissemination or shape their work for an audience (Rose, 2016). They knew that an audience of their peers would see their texts, but their text tended to satisfy their own desires to make and produce. These particular texts were not designed to impact or move an audience viewing their work, although their writing/making experiences could prepare students to create such texts in the future.

The playful exploration of different modes of representation and communication and their associated semiotic resources suggested alignment with Lemke’s (2000) work on timescales in that his emphasis on process (as opposed to final product) meant that Pinon and Norman had the opportunity to continue working on their projects beyond the timeframe of the classroom. Pinon was adamant about finishing her project over the summer and adding it to her portfolio. Regina, whose uptake of the assignment as classroom work, was satisfied with the timeframe presented. For Pinon, in particular, the work she displayed on the final day and turned in to Mr. Bergeron was an example of punctuated semiosis (Kress, 2010). Her meaning-making activity was temporarily paused but would be likely taken up again later, thus continuing her chain of narrative semiosis (Newfield, 2015). Mr. Bergeron’s emphasis on process permitted Pinon to carry out the lifework to which she was committed.

### **Significance of Assertion Four for Multimodal Literacies Pedagogy**

As Cowan and Kress (2017) suggested, taking a multimodal literacies approach to education means valuing the meaning-making activity and work belonging to all students. This study provided evidence that supported their claim. Norman’s predominantly written

language product was valued as much as Pinon and Regina’s image-based work. Furthermore, Regina’s completed visual story was awarded the same grade as Norman and Pinon’s unfinished and still-in-process work. Pinon described feeling “powerful” in Mr. Bergeron’s class, whereas, in other classes, teachers did not permit or value her drawings, even when her illustrations helped her understand academic concepts.

Indeed, a social semiotics perspective on multimodality (Kress, 2010, 2015) emphasizes the agency and interests of the sign-maker or rhetor and describes how meaning-making is always motivated. This emphasis permits students to be understood as text-designers with the power to make motivated decisions regarding the message(s) they wish to represent, the material forms those message take, and the modes they use during representational and communicative labor. Assuming this theoretical perspective means valuing the semiotic labor of all meaning-makers and providing students with curricular time and space to design texts for purposes of their choosing (Cowan & Kress, 2017; Reid & Moses, 2019). Mr. Bergeron honored the meaning-making capabilities and decisions of all his students.

However, a second implication emanates from the critique that multimodality scholarship can become too focused on the text-maker and the texts that text-makers produce (Jewitt et al., 2016; Kress, 2015). When the text-maker and their texts are illuminated, the other potential sites at which meaning-making occurs are obscured. Rose (2016) reminded us of other interpretive sites also worthy of investigation—the sites of production, reception, and dissemination (in addition to the site of the text itself). An examination of the classroom context as a site of production could put students’ texts in

conversation with what has happened in the classroom community, the wider school environment, and the community in which the school is situated.

Shifting attention to the addressee who receives the text at the site of reception (Rose, 2016) would likely emphasize the interpretation of students' work. This shift may help students understand more completely the multiple ways their work may be received and interpreted by an audience. In this study, while Mr. Bergeron asked students to write compliments during the visual narrative sharing session on the final day of the unit, students did not practice the kind of naming and noticing (Serafini & Ladd, 2008) witnessed during their interactions with published picturebooks.

Furthermore, in thinking about the site of dissemination (Rose, 2016), teachers might consider the implications of displaying and circulating students' semiotic work within the same context it was produced (Rose, 2016). Rarely in the social communities beyond schooling institutions do texts remain attached to the site of production. It could be argued that schools could further support students in creating audience-ready products for circulation and reception. Students may recognize their power as text-producers, but they might not recognize that the importance of their design decisions and intentions fade into less significance as their texts move away from them before "land[ing] in specific places where they are seen by people: their audiences" (Rose, 2016, p. 38). While the texts students make might constrain audiences' interpretations (Kress, 2010, 2015), students cannot control or pre-determine the chain of semiosis (Newfield, 2015) that follows the publication of their work. It is important for students to know that people will interpret the texts they might make and send out into the world in multiple ways, particularly as dissemination is so readily available through the Internet and social media.

### **Assertion Five: The (Re)making of Classroom Participants' Roles**

Part of the “messiness” experienced by Mr. Bergeron involved his self-expressed lack of expertise with regards to multimodal and visual ways of representing and communicating ideas. For my fifth assertion, I suggest that assuming a multimodal literacies approach required the teacher to (re)make his classroom and his role within the classroom, just as students’ needed to negotiate and (re)make their roles. Below, I examine the shifts in Mr. Bergeron’s role and the changes experienced by the focal students.

#### **Shifts in Mr. Bergeron’s Role**

In alignment with Nahachewsky’s (2013) study, this research suggested that implementing a multimodal literacies pedagogy in this English Language Arts classroom resulted in a flattening of the traditional classroom power structure. As an English Language Arts expert, he had felt confident modeling writing and instructing his students. His expertise matched the authority traditionally expected of an English Language Arts teacher. In a voice message (May 7, 2019), Mr. Bergeron reflected that: “What’s different is my confidence level. I feel like I know more when it comes to writing.” He also stated: “There’s things teachers are needed for and things teachers aren’t really needed for, and more and more, I’m finding more things that I’m just not needed for.” He explained that many students knew more about drawing and were better at creating visuals than he was. He had not thought about modeling his multimodal composition until I asked him about modeling his visual narrative because he wanted to demonstrate something that would be helpful to students.

The flattening of the traditional classroom hierarchy, it could be argued, manifested in several different ways. First, he did not position himself as a knowledgeable expert on the multimodal texts. He had not, as with the short stories he previously taught, read and studied them repeatedly. As Mr. Bergeron was new to the multimodal texts, he often read alongside the students during independent reading time, which meant that he sometimes encountered multimodal books for the first time alongside his students. When presenting *Making Up Megaboy* (Walter, 1998) as a possible reading option, he told the students he was still reading it and had yet to finish the book. During another class segment, he asked which students would be meeting about *The Imaginary* (Harrold, 2015) because he was reading the book, loving the book, and wanted to touch base with them regarding the book.

Second, as the multimodal literacies unit progressed, students increasingly assumed leadership of the conversation and discussion. Sometimes the students' leadership followed an explicit invitation from the teacher, such as the discussion of *The Lost Thing* animation (Ruhemann & Tan, 2010) when he asked, "Did one of you want to talk about, maybe, instead of me?" (transcript, April 12, 2019). In another class, he stated that he would "get out of the way" so that Celie could pose a question about an image in *The Marvels* (Selznick, 2015) to the rest of the class (transcript, April 12, 2019). He also discussed the "fuzziness" (fieldnote, April 1, 2019) surrounding his vision for the literature circle book discussions. He later asked students directly for their feedback, stating that this was his first-time implementing literature circles (fieldnote, April 4, 2019). Students' input impacted future literature circle discussions.

Other times during the multimodal composition phase, Mr. Bergeron also referred students to each other instead of positioning himself as the expert who held all the answers. In one voice message (May 7, 2019), Mr. Bergeron recalled how Tomas “was very unsatisfied” with the help Mr. Bergeron had provided him when he became stuck for ideas on what to create. Mr. Bergeron suggested he talk to Celie, who, after “just a couple of minutes,” had seemingly provided Tomas with “a direction to move in.” In the final week, Gabrielle suggested that students share their work as model texts. Although not in his plans, Mr. Bergeron referred to this student-initiated literacy event as “unexpected—but delightful.” Students started to respond to this by initiating ownership in how lessons unfolded (C. Lewis, 2001.)

### **Observed Changes for the Focal Students**

The flattening of the hierarchy within the classroom permitted those with expertise in visual narratives to assume authority in ways I did not observe before to the multimodal literacies unit. In my fieldnotes, I described how “hubs” developed around students who were skilled at drawing. Lea, Pinon, Gabrielle, and Peter were four students whose desks students frequently assembled around. Regina, who sat next to Pinon, called me over several times to look at the visual work in which Pinon was engaged. Lea, in particular, appeared unused to the attention and blushed and covered her face when students arrived to look at her drawings. Mr. Bergeron talked about how Lea’s classmates did not know that she could draw but that “suddenly we have some equally amazing [to the known artists], right, and is kind of a hidden talent in a way, and she was recognized for that” (exit interview, May 29, 2019). At the end of one class, Mr. Bergeron mentioned how Lea could sometimes be “‘meh’ about English class. It’s good to see her invested

and doing good work” (fieldnote, May 6, 2019). Another student, Benjamin, connected with Wiles’ (2013, 2017) documentary novels. In his exit interview, Mr. Bergeron also reflected that he felt Benjamin had “blossomed a bit with this unit” and was voicing his ideas more often. Gabrielle was frequently asked by her peers to draw components that other students struggled with, and Celie was a source of useful advice for both Tomas and Bill.

One of the students whose role in the class may have been impacted was Regina, who was, according to Mr. Bergeron, one of the most successful English students. She had excelled at the school literacy tasks assigned in previous units. In the weeks I observed before the multimodal literacies unit started, Regina would often be the only (or one of a few) students with her hand up to contribute to class discussions or volunteer to read aloud. While Regina continued to “love” English Language Arts and Mr. Bergeron, she had to compete with more voices, particularly during whole-class discussions around images when a large number of other students also wanted to contribute. In a few discussions, when it looked like Mr. Bergeron might not have time to call upon her, she would vocally catch his attention. Mr. Bergeron remembered, “I think it was Regina that would say things like, ‘I have a better comment than that,’ just outright, or ‘I have an actual comment to make’” (exit interview, May 29, 2019). This shift did not seem to decrease Regina’s enjoyment of Mr. Bergeron’s class or appear to affect her commitment to classroom work.

Mr. Bergeron also believed he had perceived a considerable difference in Pinon, who had sometimes not turned in work throughout the year. He described how she had not liked showing him or other students her writing. While he felt that a poetry unit that



he had enacted previously had aided their connection, Mr. Bergeron thought that she seemed most comfortable during the multimodal literacies unit. While Pinon did not contribute verbally to class discussions, she allowed other students to watch her as she worked on her visuals, and she talked to peers about what she was drawing or coloring. In her free time, she drew cartoons of Mr. Bergeron, which he then placed on the walls and shelves around his desk. Her sense of humor showed through her comedic illustrations of Mr. Bergeron. Other students in the class soon mimicked her drawings, also presenting Mr. Bergeron with cartoons of himself. Students in his sixth-grade classes also followed Pinon's artistic lead. Pinon's visual work was valuable and visible within the context of the classroom, as well as in the social space between official classroom work.

While there were not necessarily any noticeable shifts in their roles (as observed by me or noted by Mr. Bergeron), both Norman and Blue found ways to engage in pleasure and play. The autonomy Mr. Bergeron extended to his students meant that students had space to pursue their interests. Norman was able to exercise his preference for written language by choosing to read the most novel-like books, those in which the images enhanced the words (Reid & Serafini, 2018). He dedicated himself to the linguistic component of his multimodal composition. For Norman, whose quest was to read as many books and write as much as possible, his reading and writing may have counted as lifework. Similarly, Blue's preferred mode was neither image nor written language. He enjoyed spoken language and, therefore, seemed most enthusiastic when interacting verbally with other students about texts. In particular, he recalled particularly enjoying the partner work with Benjamin and their reimagining of *Bluebird* (Staake, 2013).

### **Significance of Assertion Five for Multimodal Literacies Pedagogy**

First, expanding the curriculum to include a range of modes of representation and communication has significant ramifications regarding the content area expertise of English Language Arts teachers. Prior (2014) argued that “is hard to imagine a viable English Studies that takes up language only as an abstract ideal or that privileges only a single semiotic means” (p. 171). However, as this study showed, while Mr. Bergeron was committed to pursuing a multimodal literacies approach to English pedagogy, he did not consider himself an expert in modes of representation and communication beyond written and spoken language.

Therefore, my study might also speak to the potential of building school-wide interdisciplinary partnerships with the intent to combine people with different modal specialties. Most schools contain teaching personnel that, together, represent a wide range of expertise across sign systems: language, writing, music, math, art, physical movement, theatrical, speech. Understanding human representation and communication as multimodal could provide the impetus for interdisciplinary relationships between staff members with differing modal expertise. Such relationships would remove the need for teachers to feel they need to become experts in many modes of representation and communication. Still, teachers would benefit from common knowledge of crucial social semiotic and multimodality concepts (Suhor, 1992).

Second, understanding classrooms as affinity spaces defined in part by the distributed responsibility for knowledge construction (Gee & Hayes, 2011) would remove the emphasis on the teacher as the expert knowledge-broker. Indeed, as this study demonstrated, a teacher’s students may have more experience making meaning material

with particular modes than the teacher does. Pinon spent hours of her own time working with images, as well as with the tools and materials that enabled her to make her ideas visible. Mr. Bergeron could not match the semiotic knowledge or experiences belonging to Pinon. As Dalton (2012) noted, teachers cannot possibly learn how to use all the tools and materials that could be used in digital multimodal composition. Dalton's point is also relevant to teaching and learning with non-digital multimodal texts.

Distributed expertise (Gee & Hayes, 2011) could also contribute to understanding multimodal literacies pedagogy as a democratic project (Cowan & Kress, 2017; Reid & Moses, 2019) that values all students as meaning-makers. Kress and Selander's (2012) vision for learning as interactive design offers a democratic vision of the classroom community as a space in which all social actors contribute to the knowledge generated. The teacher sets the frame for meaning-making, but students also have input—in terms of the learning products they design, the modes they choose to use for their specific purposes, and their criterial attention to the academic content at hand. This flattening of traditional school hierarchies (Nahachewsky, 2010) may mean that students like Lea do not have to wait until the end of her seventh-grade year for her “hidden talent” with visuals to become visible. Pinon may be able to use illustration to support her understanding of academic content areas in the classrooms that “shut down” her image-use. Celie would not worry that she “will never get a chance like this again in college or high school” to study the visuals and images in multimodal texts (mid-unit survey, April 5, 2019).

In addition, this study highlighted students' authority and expertise in exercising their modal preference for a particular sign-system. Pinon's statement that she felt

“powerful” in Mr. Bergeron’s classroom is a poignant reminder of the literacies and meaning-making experiences students bring to their classroom communities. However, multimodality scholarship advocates for developing knowledge of multiple modes and how various modes work together within a multimodal ensemble (Kress, 2010). Teachers might consider their curricular designs and the frames they set (Kress & Selander, 2012) to ensure that students can build expertise across modes and intermodally. Norman’s reflection in his mid-unit survey demonstrated his understanding that growing knowledge of modes beyond written language was beneficial to him: “I feel like it’s [the unit] taught me a lot. I do feel like I’ve learned from it. I learned what it’s like to read an image. It challenged my adaptability to reading images instead of just words” (April 5, 2019). Providing opportunities for students to work with their modal preference is essential, but so, too, is providing students with the chance to try something new and test out different possibilities for making meaning.

Such experimentation will likely impact teachers’ curriculum designs, but it will also possibly affect how students’ work is graded and assessed. How, for example, should Pinon, who dedicated hours of her free time to creating 25 panels of images for a visual narrative she did not have time to complete, be assessed? How should Norman, who worked diligently on the written language component of his story but not necessarily on the visual aspect, be assessed? How should Regina, who did not have the artistic range of Pinon or access to the tools and materials that Pinon used, be assessed? In Mr. Bergeron’s exit interview, he talked through some of his assessment dilemmas, concluding that “feedback maybe is the answer.”

Rose's (2016) scholarship may also help inform such assessment dilemmas. One form of assessment could emanate from the site of reception and be provided by one audience (or multiple audiences), as advocated for by McGrail and Behizadeh (2017). A second useful form of assessment could be self-reflection so that making and doing is united with critical textual analysis of one's own work, processes, tools, and materials (Wysocki et al., 2019). Teachers could support students with guiding questions that promote reflection on the multimodal aspects of the texts students produce (Callow, 2018). In this era of accountability, teachers may face challenges in designing assessments that deviate from standardized ways of representing and communicating knowledge (Davis & Willson, 2015). Such deviation from traditional methods of assessment may be necessary in classroom communities practicing multimodal literacies.

#### **Assertion Six: Students Experienced Play, Work, and Drudgery**

Using Dewey's (1915) definitions of work, play, and drudgery, this study asserted that students experienced the multimodal literacies curriculum unit as work, play, and drudgery. The vital promise of this assertion is that the multimodal literacies unit was not drudgery for any focal student all of the time. Even Norman, who was the most resistant focal student to the prioritizing of multimodal concepts, created opportunities to play and made sure he read as many of the novels as he could in the time given.

My study added to Dewey's (1915) definitions by distinguishing between classroom work and lifework. Classroom work is dependent on the precedence of the teacher's learning goals. For example, Regina found classroom work mostly pleasurable and expressed satisfaction in working towards and meeting Mr. Teacher's learning goals. Pinon also enjoyed most of the work Mr. Bergeron assigned, but for more personal and

professional reasons. Every opportunity to practice her image-making was lifework for Pinon. Even classroom activities, like the connection collection cards, were viewed by her as opportunities to add to her artist's portfolio. That Pinon was able to undertake lifework and feel powerful in a classroom context speaks to the potential significance of a multimodal literacies approach to literacy and learning. Building relationships with students and learning about their life trajectories and timescales (Lemke, 2000) may aid teachers invested in interactive design (Kress & Selander, 2012). Students' broader purposes could play a significant role in how they interact with the curricular frame designed by the teacher.

When reading through my data corpus seeking confirming and disconfirming evidence, I discovered that some students experienced the curriculum in ways that I could not categorize as play, classroom work, lifework, or drudgery. One student, Bill, stood out. At the beginning of the curriculum unit, Bill participated in class discussions and looked forward to reading the multimodal novels. In an early fieldnote (February 13, 2019), I noted that he was reading a multimodal novel during independent reading time. In an informal interview (March 4, 2019), Bill shared his interest in reading books with images. As he described the current series he was reading, he drew parts of the storyline and used props lying around the room (a mug, for example) to represent certain characters. He spoke passionately, too, about drawing: "I love drawing...I like space creatures. Blocks, like squares, to make figurines. I draw caves and stick figures mining in them." Unlike Norman, who stated that images did not allow him to imagine, Bill described feeling similarly about words. According to Bill, words just tell the story. Images allow the reader to imagine.

With his love for drawing, writing illustrated stories, and books that combined images with words, Bill seemed poised to undertake lifework, play, or, at least, classroom work. In some instances, the limited data I collected regarding Bill's experiences suggested that he undertook classroom work, particularly when Mr. Bergeron projected visuals on the board for classroom discussion. He was often a participant in these discussions. However, the multimodal composition aspect of the unit was not pleasurable for him, and Bill did not want to display his comic (fieldnote, May 10, 2019). Although Mr. Bergeron eventually persuaded him to share his work with his peers, Bill wrote the following statement on his own compliments sheet: "It's bad. Keep trying, though" (artifact, May 10, 2019). Even though both Pinon and Bill used personal time to make multimodal texts, only Pinon was willing to share this lifework with her peers. Bill did not exhibit the same audience-readiness as Pinon.

It may be that the emergence of several talented student-artists, such as Lea, Pinon, and Gabrielle, had resulted in the devaluing of Bill's identity as a writer-artist (Chisholm & Olinger, 2017). It may also be that the inclusion of multimodal composition in a school space had led to the "schoolification" of literacy practices that he preferred to remain in the domain of his personal life (Noddings, 1993). Certainly, Bill's reluctance to participate in the sharing event challenged Mr. Bergeron's assumption that all students would find the unit fun (initial interview, February 14, 2019). I could not categorize Bill's experience with the multimodal composition aspect as either play, classroom work, lifework, or drudgery. His multimodal composition sharing experience seemed to lack the pleasure component of the first three designations, but he also did not express that he found the task meaningless, dull, or empty of purpose. Further research is needed to

understand more completely how students experience multimodal literacies teaching and learning and how this impacts students' identity work.

### **The Significance of Assertion Six for Multimodal Literacies Pedagogy**

My study highlighted the presence of play, classroom work, or lifework in this classroom community of practice. However, the omission of the kind of textual critique and interrogation called for by critical literacy scholars (Luke & Freebody, 1999; Janks, 2010; Luke, 1995) and composition scholars (Wysocki et al., 2019) raises important questions: Does the pleasure involved in play and work lie in tension with the labor of critique? Does pleasurable play and work need to end for critique, interrogation, and challenge to take place? According to Wysocki et al. (2019), criticality should not become separated from making and doing. Critique of others' and one's own texts should be an intrinsic part of composition work. Criticality and pleasure, then, should coexist within a curriculum unit.

When considering how to connect pleasure to students' work as powerful text-producers with the potential to act upon and transform their social worlds (Freire, 1968/2018), the work of Dewey (1915) and Noddings (2003) make useful reference points. Dewey (1915) wrote about the pleasure involved in both play and work, a pleasure that all the focal students seemed to experience at different points in the study. Noddings (2003) also discussed the role of happiness in education. However, both also understood the happiness of the individual in terms of connection to communities. Critical inquiry and communication form part of Dewey's (1915) vision for the democratic potentials of education, and Noddings (2003) argued that critical thinking offers a means to maintain the health and wellbeing of communities. Thus, in addition to



classroom work, lifework, and play, perhaps considering a fourth kind of experience—community work—could benefit teachers looking to entwine critical work with curriculum design. Talking openly with students about classroom work, lifework, community work, and play (and how they might overlap) could also support students in shaping their purpose(s), choosing their audience(s), and selecting the most apt semiotic resources for their representational and communicational semiotic work.

### **Final Reflections**

So let's have this on the record, really tying this back to why this is important to their lives. Sometimes I feel like you just have to tell students and remind them and show them like, you know, when you walk out of my classroom, when you walk out of this school, a lot of what you're doing at that moment, it's visual.

(Mr. Bergeron, initial interview, February 14, 2019)

In this section, I offer my closing thoughts on this dissertation study. I consider the significant implications of this study, I discuss the limitations of this research study, and I share my plans for future research.

### **Implications**

I believe this study demonstrated the potential of a multimodal literacies curriculum to honor the different ways in which students represent and communicate their thinking and highlighted how English Language Arts teachers could help prepare students to consume and create the kinds of multimodal texts that saturate their social worlds (Serafini, 2014). Additionally, certain conditions allowed Mr. Bergeron to design and enact an English curriculum unit that did not privilege linguistic modes. Mr.

Bergeron had the autonomy to create and implement a unit using texts that he introduced into the classroom. In an educational era where standardized forms of assessment have led to the increasing prevalence of standardized ways of reading and writing (Davis & Willson, 2015), this kind of teaching freedom may not be found in every school. As researchers, then, it is essential to maintain a dialogue about multimodal ways of constructing knowledge with various stakeholders in literacy education, including administrators at local and state levels and policy-makers. I argue that researchers must remain committed to school contexts (Vasudevan, Schultz, & Bateman, 2010) in support of teacher autonomy and interactive curricular design (Kress & Selander, 2012).

In his interviews and reflections, Mr. Bergeron demonstrated that he understood the central tenets of a social semiotic theory of multimodality. Yet, there were times when he was hesitant to deploy this knowledge in his seventh-grade classroom. He found it challenging to teach students about the difference and connection between representation and communication, to explain the notion of modal affordances and transduction, and to make clear the idea that modal components within a multimodal ensemble may or may not cohere. Researchers can support the teachers with whom they work in developing robust understandings of these concepts themselves. However, researchers also need to continue to support teachers in findings ways to introduce these concepts to students in a comprehensible and purposeful manner.

Theories allow scholars to name the intangible and describe how things work. A social semiotic approach to multimodality is a way of understanding and thinking about how humans make and share meaning. Teaching students key multimodality concepts may support them in becoming proficient reader-viewers of multimodal texts because

knowing the theory prepares them to interpret or create any kind of multimodal text. Students may benefit from a more theory-centric approach to literacy education (Suhor, 1992). Teachers cannot possibly include every type of multimodal text that students might encounter in their curriculum. Still, teachers can equip their students with theoretical knowledge that can be used to make sense of a broad range of texts. Theory should not be wielded by teachers and researchers alone—but by students, too.

While I included student perspectives in this study, future iterations of similar work would, I believe, benefit from practice-based research partnerships that include both teachers and students. Students would bring to the research partnership their epistemologies and knowledges, thus also assuming responsibility for noticing, naming, and potentially challenging the practices and texts important to the classroom contexts they inhabit and beyond (Petrone, Watson, Green, Mirra, & de los Rios, 2019).

### **Limitations of this Study**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) listed four criteria for establishing trustworthiness. The first criteria to which a qualitative inquirer should attend is credibility. To attend to credibility, I triangulated my findings by drawing from multiple data sources and participant perspectives. I purposefully chose four focal students who would provide me with different perspectives on the multimodal literacies curriculum. My methods and findings were also shared with Mr. Bergeron before publication for credibility purposes as a form of member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). We also discussed my questions and observations during planning sessions, through informal classroom conversations, and via the voice messaging software application. I also practiced “persistent observation” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), maintaining detailed fieldnotes immediately

following each observation and logging each piece of data collected. My theoretical memos enabled me to illuminate what was salient to me within this classroom and helped direct my inquirer's gaze. The origins of my assertions can be found in these memos, which are dated and time-stamped. My data management was meticulous and routine.

While I did much to build the credibility of this study, there were some limitations. Both limitations are connected to time. First, the multimodal literacies curriculum unit took place during the final eight weeks of the academic school year. After the study concluded, there were only a few days left of the school semester. Therefore, I was not able to member check my findings and assertions with the four focal students and hear their perspectives on my thoughts. The opportunity to carry out this form of member checking would have enhanced the credibility of my study. Also, more "prolonged engagement" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in the environment may have added to the credibility of this study. More time could have enabled me to study multimodal literacies pedagogy across the academic school year as opposed to a single curriculum unit, thus permitting me to construct greater in-depth knowledge of the four focal students and Mr. Bergeron's pedagogy.

Transferability is the second criteria cited by Lincoln and Guba (1985) for trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry. They did not suggest that findings based on inquiry within a specific context can be transferred to another site precisely and do not make an argument for generalizability. However, they indicated that enough information and description drawn from a wide range of data sources might help future researchers decide if the findings and assertions might hold in similar contexts. My findings were constructed from multiple data sources across various perspectives. I also selected four

focal students using purposeful sampling (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to ensure that each focal student would provide me with a different perspective on the curriculum unit. I could have extended the study to incorporate more students who may have offered different information for inclusion in the study, but increasing my data collection beyond five core participants would have rendered the study unmanageable. Importantly, the classroom practitioner in this study was new to designing and enacting a multimodal literacies curriculum. Therefore, the findings of this study may be more transferable and relevant to teachers in similar circumstances than in classroom contexts led by teachers with more experience in implementing this approach to English Language Arts.

In terms of dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), this study is limited in that a single researcher designed the study, collected the data, managed the data, and analyzed the data. I was solely responsible for constructing the findings. My dissertation committee was tasked with determining the “fairness” of my findings and with ensuring the soundness of my research design and data collection and analysis plans. Throughout the study, I maintained a Researcher’s Journal (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As part of my Journal, I kept a methodological log. The methodological log contained all the decisions I made together with my rationale for those decisions. Citations for the methodological literature that guided my choices were also recorded in this log. Although I worked alone, my methodological log, with its compendium of the decisions I made, should help persuade readers of my work that my findings and assertions are supported by evidence from across my data sources.

My journal and methodological log also supported me in establishing the confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of my study. My memos are dated and time-

stamped and demonstrated a record of my in-process thinking and coding work (Saldaña, 2016), and I kept all work on category construction that took place between the two coding cycles (Bazeley, 2013; Saldaña, 2016). My data management system enabled me to log each piece of data collected. I kept both raw data, as well as data that had been cleaned mainly for transcription purposes, and I made notes in my data log why specific recorded material was not transcribed. I also kept both the jottings (Emerson et al., 2011) and the detailed fieldnotes into which they were transformed. All iterations of my interview protocols were saved. I kept a record of all the materials and sources I shared with Mr. Bergeron. My data is accessible through folders created for each day of the study. Some data, such as my fieldnotes, classroom transcripts, and interviews with participants, were collated into separate, single files. These assembled files enabled me to access, code, and search these data sources more efficiently. I recognize that another researcher examining my data from their theoretical perspectives may construct different findings and assertions (Stornaiuolo, 2019). Still, I believe my data trail is comprehensive and would show a potential auditor of my research how I constructed my findings and assertions.

### **Future Research**

Four different strands comprise my future research agenda. I first intend to continue investigating how multimodal texts work. To date, I have researched multimodal novels (Reid & Serafini, 2018) and picturebooks (Serafini & Reid, 2019a). I wish to extend my research to other multimodal narrative platforms. In particular, I am interested in studying text-based digital games and transmedia stories whose narratives span different media and digital platforms. Increasing my knowledge regarding how

multimodal narrative texts work will support me as I work with teachers to build curricula that incorporates multimodal texts and concepts.

I also plan to engage in formative research that takes place over an extended period and lasts beyond curriculum units and, perhaps, academic years. This study was notable in that it highlighted certain concepts that Mr. Bergeron found challenging to discuss with students. Long-term, formative studies would enable such challenges to be identified, discussed, and then targeted. Pedagogical responses to those challenges could then be documented and disseminated for the benefit of others working on designing multimodal literacies instruction. Working with teachers new to converging multimodality theory with pedagogical practice will continue to be a focus as I look to understand how multimodal literacy practices both shape and are shaped by their situation in specific classroom contexts.

As literacy underpins all academic disciplines, extending my work to teachers across the school curriculum would be an important extension of the work initiated by this study. This scholarship would include working with educators who teach outside the mainstream subject areas, such as those with expertise in special education. I believe that a multimodal literacies approach to teaching and learning has the potential to aid the construction of more inclusive and democratic classrooms. As a researcher, this also means working across disciplinary lines with other scholars in different fields to help meet the representational and communicative needs of all students. The intersection of multimodal literacy with maker education (Gauntlett, 2018) might also yield interesting findings. Such work has been initiated in early childhood places (Wohlwend, Buchholz, & Medina, 2018) but less so in secondary contexts.

Finally, I believe it is essential that criticality becomes an integral part of multimodal literacies pedagogy. Further research work with students could continue to build analytical tools that enable interrogation of multimodal texts, including those texts created by themselves and their peers. Critical examinations of texts could target the narrative represented but also the modes, tools, and materials used. Extending analysis to multiple sites of interpretation (Rose, 2016) would also expand students' understanding of how texts move, circulate, and land. While the students in this study appeared to experience the curriculum as classroom work, lifework, and play, a fourth notion—community work—may help students realize their potential as textual composers with the power to act upon and transform their world (Freire, 1968/2018). Connecting school work to students' communities could be an important means of avoiding drudgery (Dewey, 1915). A critical multimodal literacies pedagogy could empower students as consumers of other people's texts and enable students to “see themselves as authors with something to say, as writers with the power to initiate texts that command the others” (Graves, 1994, p.44). Listening to and learning from students will continue to be an essential hallmark of my future scholarship.



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APPENDIX A

RESOURCES SHARED WITH THE CLASSROOM TEACHER

Picturebooks / Graphic Novels	Copies
Brown, M. (2011). <i>Pablo Neruda: Poet of the people</i> . Henry Holt & Company.	1
Bryant, J. (2008). <i>A river of words: The story of William Carlos Williams</i> . Eerdmans Books for Young Readers.	1
Burgess, M. (2015). <i>Enormous smallness: A story of E. E. Cummings</i> . Enchanted Lion Books.	1
Cordell, M. (2017). <i>Wolf in the snow</i> . Feiwel and Friends.	1
De La Pena, M. (2018). <i>Love</i> . G. P. Putnam's Sons.	1
Fleming, C. (2016). <i>Giant squid</i> . Roaring Brook Press.	1
Gravett, E. (2006). <i>Wolves</i> . Simon & Schuster.	1
Jeffers, O. (2006). <i>The incredible book eating boy</i> . Philomel Books.	1
Joyce, W. (2012). <i>The fantastic flying books of Mr. Morris Lessmore</i> . Atheneum Books for Young Readers.	1
Mattlick, L. (2015). <i>Finding Winnie: The true story of the world's most famous bear</i> . Little, Brown and Company.	1
Myers, W. D. (1997). <i>Amiri and Odette: A love story</i> . Scholastic Press.	1
Myers, W. D. (1997). <i>Harlem: A poem</i> . Scholastic Press.	1
Santat, D. (2014). <i>Beekle: The unimaginary friend</i> . Little, Brown and Company.	1
Santat, D. (2017). <i>After the fall</i> . Roaring Brook Press.	1
Skarmela, A. (1998). <i>The composition</i> . Groudwood Books/House of Anansi Press.	1
Sis, P. (2007). <i>The wall</i> . Frances Foster Books.	1
Staake, B. (2013). <i>Bluebird</i> . Schwartz & Wade Books	20
Steptoe, J. (2016). <i>Radiant child: The story of young artist Jean-Michel Basquiat</i> . Little, Brown, and Company.	1
Tan, S. (2006). <i>The arrival</i> . Arthur A. Levine Books.	20
Tan, S. (2019). <i>Cicada</i> . Arthur A. Levine Books.	1
Tan, S. (2015). <i>The singing bones</i> . Arthur A. Levine Books.	1
Tan, S. (2011). <i>Lost and found</i> . Arthur A. Levine Books.	20
Thomson, B. (2010). <i>Chalk</i> . Amazon Publishing.	1

Multimodal Novels	Copies
Almond, D. (2008). <i>The savage</i> . Candlewick Press.	5
Harrold, A. F. (2014). <i>The imaginary</i> . Bloomsbury Children's Books.	5
Ness, P. (2011). <i>A monster calls</i> . Candlewick Press.	5
Said, S. F. (2016). <i>Phoenix</i> . Candlewick Press.	5
Selznick, B. (2007). <i>The invention of Hugo Cabret</i> . Scholastic Press.	5
Selznick, B. (2011). <i>Wonderstruck</i> . Scholastic Press.	5
Selznick, B. (2015). <i>The Marvels</i> . Scholastic Press.	35
Smy, P. (2017). <i>Thornhill</i> . Roaring Brook Press.	5
Walter, V. (1998). <i>Making up Megaboy</i> . DK Children.	5
Wiles, D. (2010). <i>Countdown</i> . Scholastic Press.	5
Wiles, D. (2017). <i>Revolution</i> . Scholastic Press.	5
Yelchin, E. (2015). <i>Breaking Stalin's nose</i> . Square Fish.	5

## Scholarship

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APPENDIX B  
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL  
FOR INITIAL INTERVIEW WITH TEACHER



Protocol Notes: This protocol represents the initial interview conducted with Mr. Bergeron. This semi-structured interview protocol was developed for this initial interview to garner preliminary information regarding the teacher's approach to and ideas about teaching multimodal literacy and multimodal texts. Twelve questions have been developed to help structure the interview. In line with Olson (2011), when deemed appropriate by the interviewer, the interviewer will formulate questions during the interview to further explore ideas the participant has articulated.

Prior to recording: Greet participant, reiterate the study goals, explain the study timeline, and remind participant that they have the right to withdraw at any point. Ensure the participant is ready to be recorded.

[Begin audio recording]

Interview Questions/Prompts:

1. Tell me about your education and teaching background.
2. Please tell me about your 8<sup>th</sup> / 7<sup>th</sup> grade Language Arts curriculum.
  - a. What texts do you teach? What do you focus on when teaching those texts?
  - b. What units do you teach?
  - c. What are key learning objectives and curriculum goals?
  - d. What are the major assignments that students work on and produce during these units?
3. How have you talked about or used image and visual design in your class previously?
  - a. What concepts have you discussed?
  - b. What did students produce?
  - c. How did students respond?
4. Why are you interested in young adult multimodal novels?
5. Which young adult or middle grade multimodal novels did you select for your curriculum unit and why?
6. Please tell me about your plans or ideas for the curriculum unit.
  - a. How will you use the books you have chosen?
  - b. Which book will you start with?

- c. Are there visual literacy concepts you know you want to teach?
  - d. What activities or tasks do you have in mind for the unit?
  - e. How do you plan to incorporate the self-selected reading into the unit?
7. Tell me about the novel you have chosen for the whole class study.
- a. Did you run into any challenges?
  - b. Did you have favorite moments in the book?
  - c. Which moments in the book do you want to highlight / discuss with students?
  - d. What do think students need to know in order to understand this text?
  - e. What questions do you have?
8. How do you think students will respond to the multimodal novels?
- a. What are your hopes?
  - b. What are your concerns?
  - c. Are there particular students whose potential reaction you thought about as you read these texts?
9. What are your hopes for the multimodal literacy unit?
10. Do you have any issues or concerns right now?
11. How can the research team best support you in multimodal literacy instruction?  
What kind of collaboration or input are you looking for from us?
12. Do you wish to offer any final thoughts or comments not addressed in any of the questions above?

APPENDIX C  
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL  
FOR EXIT INTERVIEW WITH TEACHER

Protocol Notes: This protocol represents the exit interview conducted with Mr. Bergeron. Twelve questions have been developed to help structure the interview. When deemed appropriate by the interviewer, the interviewer will formulate questions during the interview to further explore ideas the participant has articulated. In line with Olson (2011), information gleaned from the previous interview and from the informal interviews conducted throughout the curriculum unit duration may impact the design of this final semi-structured interview with the teacher.

Prior to recording: Greet participant, reiterate the study goals, and remind participant that they have the right to withdraw at any point. Ensure the participant is ready to be recorded.

[Begin audio recording]

Interview Questions/Prompts:

1. What are your overall reactions to the young adult and middle grade multimodal novel curriculum unit?
  - a. [if not already mentioned] How was it to teach this curriculum unit?
  - b. [if not already mentioned] How was the experience of using multimodal novels as curriculum unit texts?
2. How was it to teach the multimodal short stories and novels?
  - a. How was it different/similar to teaching traditional novels?
  - b. Were there texts that worked better than others?
  - c. Did you enjoy teaching these texts?
3. What were the most important take-aways or learning for you?
4. What were moments of success during the curriculum unit sessions?
5. Did you run into any challenges?
  - a. Please describe those challenges.
  - b. What did you do to address the challenges?
6. How did the students react to the curriculum unit?
7. What are some specific moments you remember from the curriculum unit lessons?
8. How did the students react and respond to the multimodal novels?

9. Would you be interested in teaching this curriculum unit again?
  - a. What would you keep the same?
  - b. What would you do differently?
10. How do you think other Language Arts teachers might react to these novels?
11. How well could these texts be incorporated into other English Language Arts classrooms and grade levels?
12. Any final thoughts or comments?

APPENDIX D  
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL  
FOR INITIAL INTERVIEW WITH EACH FOCAL STUDENT

Protocol Notes: This interview protocol was developed so the researcher could learn how individual students experienced English Arts prior to the multimodal literacy curriculum. The protocol has been designed for interviewing an individual student. Seven questions have been developed to help structure the interview. When deemed appropriate by the interviewer, the interviewer will formulate questions during the interview to further explore and link ideas the students articulate.

Prior to recording: Greet students, reiterate the interview goals, and remind students that they have the right to withdraw at any point. Ensure the participants are ready to be video-recorded and audio-recorded.

[Begin recording]

Interview Questions/Prompts:

1. Tell me about English Language Arts this year.
  - a. Talk to me about what you have read?
  - b. Talk to me about what you have written?
  - c. Talk to me about moments in class that stood out?
2. How would you define reading and writing?
3. What makes a good reader and a good writer?
4. Tell me about any experiences or expertise you have with regards to images and graphic design.
  - a. Do you read comic books and other graphic texts?
  - b. Do you create visual art?
  - c. What have you learned about in art class?
  - d. What about picturebooks in elementary school? At home?
5. The upcoming unit focuses on short stories and young adult novels that contain both words and images.
  - a. How do you think reading short stories and novels with images will be different from reading traditional novels that are primarily made from words?
  - b. How do you think this reading experience will be similar?
6. I'm going to hand you a book of illustrated short stories by an author called Shaun Tan. He wrote the stories and designed the illustrations. Take five minutes to read the short story. Feel free to use the post-it notes to record some

of your thinking about what you read or flag pages/sections that you want to talk about. We'll share ideas when you have finished reading.

- a. What's the story about?
  - b. What did you notice?
  - c. What was the most significant moment in the words? Why?
  - d. What was the most significant image in the story? Why?
  - e. Tell me about how you used or read the images in this story.
  - f. What did you think of the artwork?
7. Do you have any last thoughts, questions, or comments that you wanted to share?



APPENDIX E

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

FOR EXIT INTERVIEW WITH EACH FOCAL STUDENT

Protocol Notes: This interview protocol was developed so the researcher could learn how individual students experienced the multimodal concepts and multimodal novels featured in this curriculum unit. The protocol has been designed for interviewing one student. Thirteen questions have been developed to help structure the interview. When deemed appropriate by the interviewer, the interviewer will formulate questions during the interview to further explore and link ideas the students articulate.

Prior to recording: Greet students, reiterate the interview goals, and remind students that they have the right to withdraw at any point. Ensure the participants are ready to be video-recorded and audio-recorded.

[Begin recording]

Interview Questions/Prompts:

1. What are your overall reactions to the multimodal literacy curriculum unit?
  - a. Describe to me learning about reading images and multimodal texts.
  - b. How was the experience of reading multimodal texts and novels?
2. Tell me about the whole-class multimodal texts and novel you read. What did you think?
3. Tell me about the multimodal novel(s) you chose to read independently.
4. Tell me about the images and words in the novels you read.
  - a. How did the images help tell the story?
  - b. How did the words help tell the story?
5. What would happen to the story if the images were taken away?
  - a. Would the story be better / worse?
  - b. What would the story lose?
  - c. Would the story gain anything by losing the images?
6. What are some specific images you remember from the novel(s) you read?
  - a. Why do you think you remember this/these image(s)?
  - b. How did these images benefit the story?
7. How is reading novels with images different from reading traditional novels that are primarily constructed from words?

8. What were the most important things you learned about reading images or visuals during the curriculum unit?
9. Would you be interested in reading more of these kinds of books?
  - a. Why?
  - b. Why not?
10. What advice would you give to readers who are not used to reading novels made from images and words?
11. At the beginning of the unit, I asked how you would define reading and writing. Would you add anything to your original definitions or thoughts?
12. I also asked how you would define good readers and good writers? Would you add anything to your original definitions or thoughts?
13. Do you have any last thoughts / closing comments / advice for us if we decide to run this teach this multimodal literacy curriculum again?

APPENDIX F  
INFORMAL STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Protocol Notes: Informal interviews with students will take the form of a conversation with the students during curriculum unit lessons. This recorded conversation will provide students with the opportunity to briefly summarize session content, reflect on what they are reading, think through ideas they have regarding the multimodal novels, and explain their thinking or writing. With these goals, in mind, the interviewer will choose one or more of the following four questions to guide these informal interviews. When deemed appropriate by the interviewer, the interviewer will formulate questions during the interview to further explore ideas the participant has articulated.

Prior to recording: Reiterate the purpose of this interview and remind participant that they have the right to withdraw at any point. Ensure the participant is ready to be recorded.

[Begin audio recording (if recording)]

Informal Interview Questions/Prompts:

1. Talk to me about you are reading / working on.
2. Think about what you have read today. What images stood out to you and why?
3. What else did you notice or think about when reading?
4. Talk to me about the novel/text we are reading. What are your thoughts?
5. I'm interested in what you are writing / working on? Why did you decide to \_\_\_?

APPENDIX G  
DAILY SCHEDULE TEMPLATE

Date	Summary of Daily Activities in Classroom	Resources & Materials
	•	
	•	
	•	
	•	
	•	
	•	
	•	
	•	
	•	
	•	

APPENDIX H

EXCERPT FROM METHODOLOGICAL LOG



Date	Methodological Decision / Research Activity	Rationale / Notes
02/10/19	Data Collection Preparations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher’s Journal Memo Contents Page</li> <li>• Researcher’s Journal Methodological Log Page</li> <li>• Study Calendar / Daily Schedule</li> <li>• Fieldnotes Contents Page</li> </ul>	Following plan mapped out in my Dissertation Proposal regarding Researcher’s Journal and the three sections: Memos, Methods Log, Daily Schedule. Meets criteria set out by Emerson et al. (2011) and Lincoln & Guba (1984) – as well as Miles et al. (2019) regarding visual representations of data. One addition I came up with – Key Words for fieldnotes and memos – may assist with development of codes, construction of patterns, and searching the data.
02/10/19	Preparing for Jottings in Notebook. Decided Foci: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literacy practices</li> <li>• Literacy events</li> <li>• Materials / Resources</li> <li>• Key social actors</li> <li>• Interactions</li> <li>• Discourse / Language Used</li> <li>• Deviations from usual patterns</li> <li>• Space</li> <li>• Arrangement of furniture</li> <li>• Physical description of classroom</li> </ul>	Following plan outlined in dissertation outline. My rationale is twofold: these foci are aligned with sociocultural theory and my understanding of the classroom as a community of practice; and, thus, will enable me to understand the classroom community in which I will be working. Key questions from my theoretical framework include: what counts as literacy and text in this classroom? How do students participate within this community of practice? These foci are listed, along with the weekly schedule, on the front page of the notebook purchased for jottings, so I can reference them during observations. Deviation from dissertation proposal: jottings will be in notebook. More portable and less intrusive than a laptop computer. No need to worry about battery.
02/10/19	Made further decisions regarding jottings notebook. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Page layout: date at top, day of week, time</li> </ul>	See above my decision to handwrite notebooks. As well as each day’s jottings being recorded in my notebook, I will scan each page at the end of each day and preserve my

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Column on right side for my comments and thoughts.</li> <li>• Reminder: Jottings mean that I capture fragments of what transpires – brief descriptive phrases regarding setting, snatches of conversation, and brief verbal portraits of students.</li> <li>• Added Emerson’s (2011) fieldnote code questions</li> <li>• Included my current research questions</li> </ul>	<p>jottings as digital files for storage online. My jottings are informed by Emerson et al (2011) and will be re-constructed as fieldnotes immediately after class.</p> <p>To help me focus my jottings and construct my fieldnotes, on the second page, I listed Emerson et al.’s (2011) questions – p.177. These questions support ethnographic approaches to qualitative inquiry – will assist with memo writing and the coding of fieldnotes. In addition, I recorded my current research questions.</p>
02/10/19	<p>Re-read Emerson et al. (2011) for information on Jottings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Note initial impressions (p24); What is significant or unexpected (p24); what those in setting see as significant or important (p.25) – what stops people, is watched, listened to, talked about, evokes strong emotions, reactions; focus on how – not why – causality not what I’m investigating.</li> <li>• Jottings: “jot down details that remain sharp and that easily transform into vivid descriptions,” prelude to written fieldnotes (p.31)</li> <li>• Jottings recommendations: key components of observed scenes, actions, events – fragments of interaction and action that serve as focal points for fieldnote writing; concrete sensory details – help “reconstruct the feel of what happened” (p. 32) – visual, kinetic, auditory; avoid evaluative, opinionated phrases; “short or more extended direct quotes are particularly useful for capturing such detail” – show, not tell; details of emotional expressions and experiences – “as expressed and attended to by those in the setting” (p.33); signal my general impressions and feelings.</li> <li>• Active rather than passive verbs, sensory rather than evaluative adjectives, verbatim rather than summarized dialogue.</li> </ul>	
02/10/19	<p>Re-read Emerson et al. (2011) for information on Fieldnotes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• P.46: Writing as construction of social reality – not mirror-image – create reality (p.86)</li> <li>• P.49: Notes written immediately after leaving setting = “fresher, more detailed recollections”</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't worry too much about choice of words – use memory and abbreviated jottings</li> <li>• Construction of relatively coherent sequences of actions and evocations (p.57) – decisions about what to include / not.</li> <li>• Significance shifts and emerges during the course of writing notes – even minor incidents help signal significance (p.57)</li> <li>• Strategies: description (sensory imagery, ambience, appearance, metaphors explained), dialogue, and characterization (dress, talk, acts, relates to others – central and periphery members).</li> <li>• Judgements / thoughts / interpretations in written asides (p.62)</li> <li>• Sketches and episodes as write-up strategies: sketch (p.75) – vivid sensory impression – scene described w/ detailed imagery. Static snapshot. Episodes (p.77) – recounts actions and events in time “to narrate a slice of life” – often one or two paragraphs. Shifts in time and place should be noted. “Transitional summaries” can link episodes (p.79)</li> <li>• Asides and commentaries: (p.80) – brief questions, ideas, reactions researcher writes into body. Commentaries = more elaborate. Questions for commentaries: What did I learn today? What did I observe that was particularly interesting? What was confusing or uncertain? Did something happen that was radically different? (p.85).</li> </ul>
02/12/19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decided to add a Data Accounting Log to my Researcher's Journal folder. This may later be used or transferred to my data analysis folder. As I have started to collect fieldnotes, interview data, jottings, and photographs, I am realizing the need not just to track field note entry or memos written but to track data collected, too.</li> </ul> <p>Miles et al. (2019) – the benefits of presenting data in a visual way. (Chapters 7, 8, 9). Miles et al. (2019) describe how visually presenting data may help focus the researcher by presenting information in a coherent and systematic fashion. Closely connected to data condensation, data displays support researchers' decisions regarding which portions of collected data are relevant to the research questions. I plan on keeping a <i>data accounting log</i> (Miles et al., 2019, pp. 120-122), a matrix-style chart that I will use to record the different types and quantities of data collected.</p>

APPENDIX I

DATA ACCOUNTING LOG EXCERPT

M, Feb 25	F, Feb 22	Th, Feb 21	W, Feb 20	T, Feb 19	Th, Feb 14	W, Feb 13	T, Feb 12	M, Feb 11	
*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	Jottings
*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	Field-notes
									Vignette Memo
*		*					*		Photos Setting
*		*						*	T/R Audio
					*				T Audio – Interview
									T - Materials
									T Audio Voxer
									WG Video
									S Audio – Interview
									S Video - Interview
									S Video - Discussion
	*	*							S Work & Presentation
									Photos Students

T, Mar 5	M, Mar 4	Fr, Mar 1	Th, Feb 28	W, Feb 27	T, Feb 26	
			★	★	★	Jottings
	★		★	★	★	Field-notes
	★		★			Vignette Memo
					★	Photos Setting
						T/R Audio
						T Audio – Interview
						T - Materials
						T Audio Voxer
						WG Video
★ B ★ P	★ P	★ R	★ N			S Audio – Interview
★ B ★ P	★ P	★ R	★ N			S Video - Interview
						S Video - Discussion
						S Work & Presentation
						Photos Students

### Key

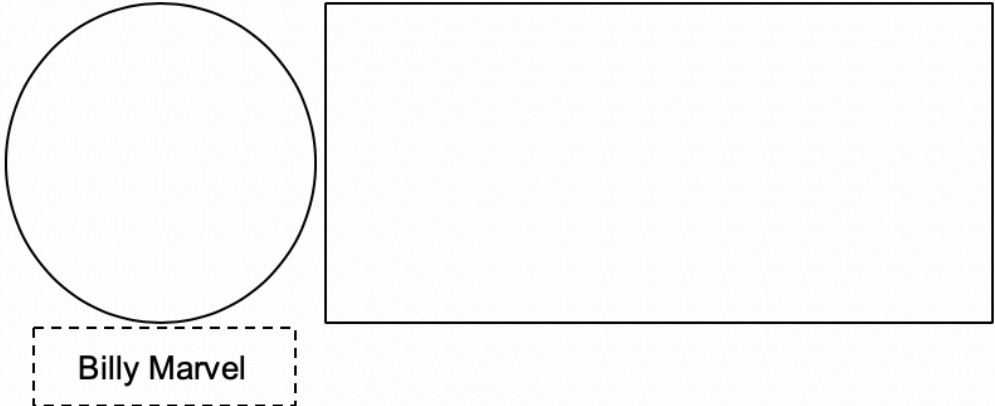
- T—Teacher
- R—Reflection
- S—Student
- B—Blue
- N—Norman
- P—Pinon
- R—Regina

APPENDIX J

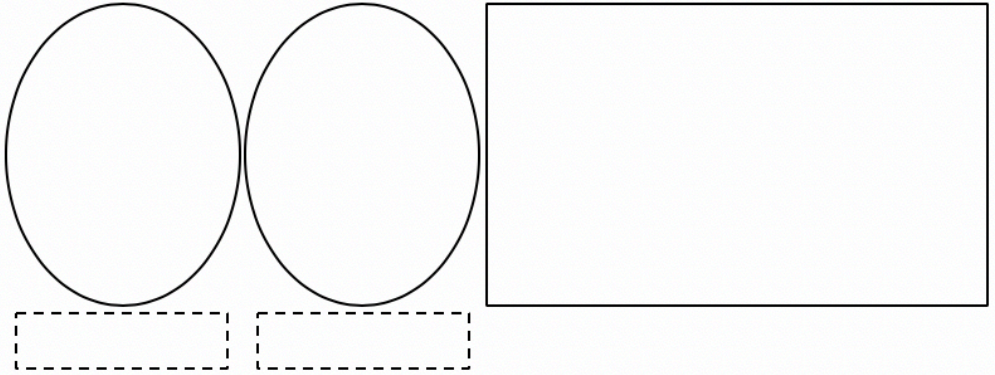
THE MARVEL FAMILY TREE VISUAL TASK

Name:

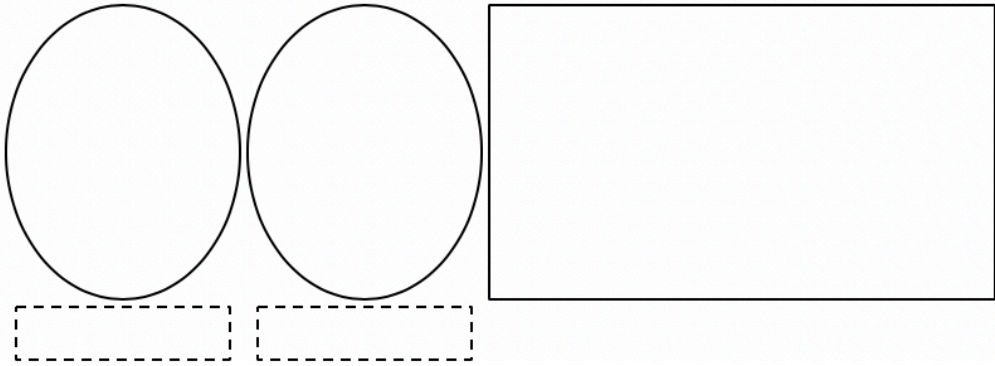
Character Snapshots and Family Line in *The Marvels*



A large empty circle on the left and a large empty rectangle on the right. Below the circle is a dashed rectangular box containing the text "Billy Marvel".

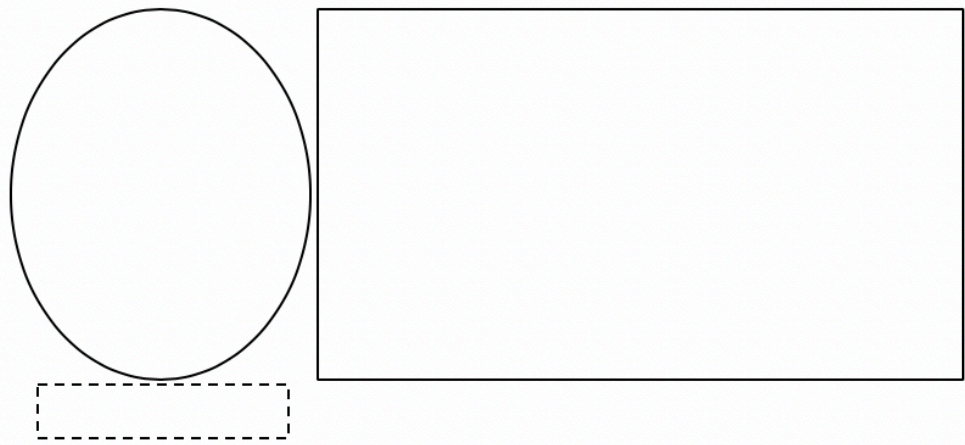
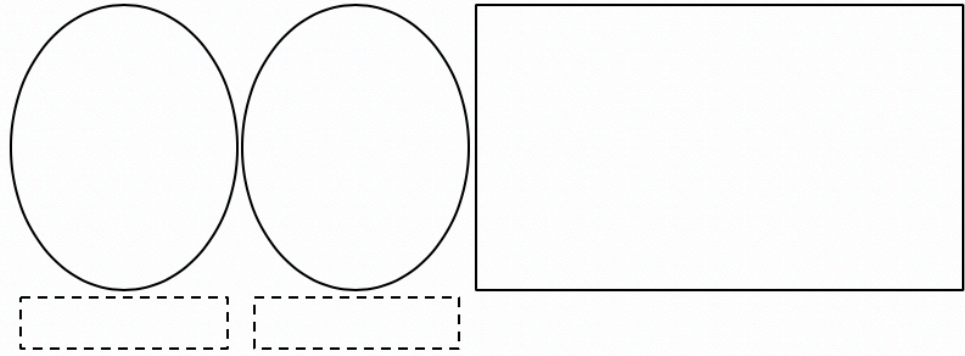


Two empty ovals on the left and a large empty rectangle on the right. Below each oval is a dashed rectangular box.



Two empty ovals on the left and a large empty rectangle on the right. Below each oval is a dashed rectangular box.





APPENDIX K

VISUAL ANALYSIS OF A PAGE FROM THE MARVELS

Name:

Cinematic Visual Elements in *The Marvels*

Directions: Choose 1 image-page from the first half of *The Marvels* and complete an analysis of the visual techniques Brian Selznick uses to convey meaning.

Consider visual elements we studied earlier in the unit (e.g., line, shape, shading, size, position, framing, salience, modality) as well as the cinematic visual elements we recently studied (e.g. long, medium, close-up, and extreme close-up shots; high, low, and eye-level angles; zoom; gaze).

1. Give a basic description of who and/or what is on the page for readers to reference.

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2. Write your detailed analysis (at least 8 sentences) of the visual techniques on the page.

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APPENDIX L  
THE MARVELS PROGRESS ACTIVITIES

## PROGRESS ACTIVITY #1 – Sketch/Drawing

For this activity, you will choose some part of the word portion of *The Marvels* and make a sketch or drawing in Brain Selznick’s style, using pencil and cinematic visual techniques. Choose your visuals and techniques purposefully:

- What character(s) do you want to portray? What emotions or actions?
- What distance is best for what I want to portray? Long shot? Medium? Close-up? Extreme close-up?
- What angle is best for what I want to portray? High? Eye-level? Low? Birds-eye?
- What other visual techniques will help me express meaning? Gaze? Facial expressions? Shading? Sharp or blurred lines? White space? A detailed or more empty background?

You are only expected to submit 1 sketch or drawing, but you may submit more if you wish, or play with visual techniques to fit a sequence of images on the page. You can choose either a 4.25” x 5.5” paper (portrait orientation) or 8.5” x 11” paper (landscape orientation).

## PROGRESS ACTIVITY #2 – Connection Collection Cards

Even though the word portion of the story centers on new characters in a new time period, you will notice how the author drops little (and sometimes big) hints at connections between the two stories. For this activity, you are going to create collector’s cards for each connection that you find. You will do this on the card-sized cardstock paper that is stacked in the room.

Each card will have:

- A title at the top (this can pretty much name the connection)
- An image in the upper half that represents the connection in some way
- A concise (short but well-written) explanation of the connection
- A border that is either red, yellow, or green. You decide the color based on how common or rare you think the connection is. Red = rare, yellow = uncommon, and green = common. In other words, if you think the connection is obvious and everyone will see it, border the card in green. If you think you found something that others might have missed, something “deep,” border the card in red. If you think the connection is somewhere between, border the card in yellow.

You may use any style of artwork for these cards, including the use of color, but you may also use pencil if you like using Selznick’s style. The expectation is that you create

6 connection cards, with each additional connection card earning you 2 points of extra credit.

### PROGRESS ACTIVITY #3 – Reaction Vid

When you finish the story, including the image sequence at the close of the book, video yourself as you talk through your reactions to the story. Talk about the good, the bad, and the ugly. What surprised you? Confused you? Entertained you? Disappointed you? Think about the author’s phrase: You either see it or you don’t. Did you “see it?” You can show images from the book on the screen as you talk or do a selfie-style recording of yourself talking. Please share your reaction/thoughts in approximately 3 minutes of video (7 minutes maximum!). This can be on your device, or you can use the class iPad. The file needs to be shared with [Mr. Bergeron’s email]

APPENDIX M  
VISUAL STORYTELLING TASK

## “Writing” a Visual Narrative

In this unit, we have studied how stories can be told using visuals, with or without words, and through a variety of visual techniques.

For this final project, you will create your own story using visuals, with or without words, and through a variety of visual techniques!

- You can use one of the stories we studied as a model for how to tell your story, or you can branch off into a different style of visual artwork.
- You will be given several weeks of time in Language Lab as well as time in English class to complete your story.
- Because of the time remaining in the school year, this will be a short story, but you are still expected to put appropriate thought into the setting, character(s), plot, and meaning you want to convey in your story.
- Like any good story, you should consider spending time on brainstorming, drafting, and revising your work. I can't force you to do this (I mean, I could make it worth points I guess), but I anticipate that you are mature enough to realize the benefits.
- If you wish to use materials other than those available at school (we have crayons, colored pencils, and markers), you will need to bring those from home. These can be stored in Mr. Bergeron's room.
- Length - This will depend on your story, the style of visuals you choose to work with, and your abilities as an artist. Although you will not be graded on your artistic ability, you are expected to work hard and do your best. Think about balance: You may have fewer but nicer visuals, or you may have many but less polished visuals. This is your choice. Do what you need to tell your story.

Hopefully, you will find the rest of this handout helpful as a reminder of visual elements and styles that we have studied and what direction you may want to take. You are also encouraged to use your notes from the videos you watched in Language Lab this quarter to help you with the skills needed to create visuals.



## STORIES AS MODELS

*The Marvels*: This story uses images in a large section, followed by a word section, and finished with another image section. The images were pencil drawings, and used cinematic visual elements to help convey meaning.

“The Red Tree,” “The Lost Thing,” “The Rabbits,” and *Cicada* use a mix of images and words. These stories use a variety of visual elements, including color, to tell their stories.

*Bluebird* and *The Arrival* both rely entirely on images to tell their stories.

*Countdown* and *Revolution* use historical quotes and images to give information about the time period of their stories.

*Thornhill* and *Wonderstruck* both go back and forth using images to tell one story and words to tell another throughout the books. *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, on the other hand, uses both words and images throughout the book for the same story.

*Making Up Megaboy* uses images on each page, often as background, with words within or on top of these images.

In *Amiri & Odette*, the illustrator paints on slabs of asphalt because the story is about living “on the streets.” She also glues items onto her paintings that she found on the basketball courts from the neighborhoods in the book.

In *The Singing Bones*, the artist uses sculpture and other materials to capture the Grimm brothers’ fairy tales.

In *Giant Squid*, the author includes a fold-out page to show the full length of the squid’s body.

In *Chalk*, the author merges realistic and unrealistic imagery to tell the story.

*The Incredible Book Eating Boy* plays around with backgrounds and even changing the shape of the book’s pages.

Also consider popular styles such as graphic novels, manga, and comic books. For those wishing to venture into moving visuals, consider flipbooks, stop animation, claymation, cartoon animation, digital animation, and film.

## VISUAL ELEMENTS TO CONSIDER USING

Line - How thick or thin? Straight or curved? How will lines direct viewers’ eyes on the page?

Shape - Soft or sharp? Blurred or well-defined? Realistic or basic or abstract?

Modality - How realistic do I want the images to be?

Size, Scale - How big or small on the page? What is included on the page to show the scale of things?

Saliency - What do I want to “stand out” most on a page? What do I want eyes to be drawn to?

Position - What is the best place to position an image on the page? Are people/objects close or far to viewers?

Shot distance - What is the best distance of people/things? Long? Medium? Close-up? Extreme close-up?

Shot angle - What is the best angle to portray people/things? High? Eye-level? Low? Bird’s eye?

Interpersonal distance - How close or far apart are people/things? How does distance convey meaning?

Gaze - Who or what are characters looking at? How does their gaze convey meaning?

Zoom - Can I show more meaning by moving in closer or farther away from one page to the next?

Color - What feelings do my colors evoke? Do I use colors purposefully?

Hue, Shade - How does a different hue or shade of color change the image? What works best?

Light, Dark, Shadow - How can I use light and dark to convey meaning? What can shadow(s) add?

Perspective - How are my viewers seeing the story?

Framing - Are there borders? Do images “go off the page?” Is there use of space to separate images?

Borders, Panels - Do I need to use several images or scenes on a page? How will I separate them (or not)?

Gutter - What part of the image is going to be pinched in the gutter (spine) of the book?

Typography - What font(s) do I want for words? In what size(s)? Color(s)? Where on the page?