Pop Culture and Course Content:

Redefining Genre Value in First-Year Composition

by

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ABSTRACT

Despite its rich history in the English classroom, popular culture still does not have a strong foothold in first-year composition (FYC). Some stakeholders view popular culture as a "low-brow" topic of study (Bradbury, 2011), while others believe popular culture distracts students from learning about composition (Adler-Kassner, 2012). However, many instructors argue that popular culture can cultivate student interest in writing and be used to teach core concepts in composition (Alexander, 2009; Friedman, 2013; Williams, 2014). This dissertation focuses on students' perceptions of valuable writing—particularly with regards to popular culture—and contributes to conversations about what constitutes "valuable" course content. The dissertation study, which was conducted in two sections of an FYC course during the Spring 2016 semester, uses three genre domains as a foundation: academic genres, workplace genres, and pop-culture genres. The first part of the study gauges students' prior genre knowledge and their beliefs about the value of academic, workplace, and pop-culture genres through pre- and post-surveys. The second part of the study includes analysis of students' remix projects to determine if and how students can meet FYC learning outcomes by working within each domain.

Through this study, as well as through frameworks in culturally sustaining pedagogy, writing studies, and genre studies, this dissertation aims to assist in the reconciliation of opposing views surrounding the content of FYC while filling in research gaps on the knowledge, interests, and perceptions of value students bring into the writing classroom. Ultimately, this dissertation explores how pop-culture composition can

facilitate student learning just as well as academic and workplace composition, thereby

challenging course content that has traditionally been privileged in FYC.

DEDICATION

To June Cummins-Lewis.

To SB.

And, to myself.

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The completion of this dissertation would not have been possible without the help of several people. I would like to extend my sincerest thanks to my committee: to Dr. Boyd, my committee chair, for her kindness and counsel since my very first year in the program; to Dr. Saidy for the learning opportunities in her teaching-centered courses; and to Dr. Roen for his attention to detail and willingness to assist me in this significant project. The support of this committee is truly appreciated.

I am also deeply indebted to my mentor, colleague, and friend Nicole Michals. Because our interactions in person are always filled to the brim with sarcasm, allow me to write here what I want to say in earnest: *thank you for everything*.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

I would like to begin this piece as Faye Halpern begins hers in a recent issue of

College Composition and Communication: with a story about how I failed to do my job.

By the end of 2012, I had just finished my very first semester of first-year composition

(FYC) as a teaching associate. I was planning for the next semester, incredibly excited to

develop the text list and curriculum—I was, *of course*, now a seasoned veteran in

teaching—and I wanted to avoid what I considered to be dry texts, like those I was

expected to use in the previous semester. In my search to make FYC more interesting, I

turned to popular culture. It seemed an obvious decision: have students write about topics

that they would likely engage with on a regular basis anyway, with the added benefit of

me teaching and reading about topics I also enjoyed. Several of my students later told me

that they had even bragged to their friends about how "cool" our FYC course was

because we were reading comics and young adult books. (I must admit, I can't help but

think of my professorial parallel to Regina George's mother in the movie *Mean Girls*, in

which she winks and boasts, "I'm not a regular mom. I'm a *cool* mom." But, perhaps my

love of popular culture is needlessly spilling into this anecdote.)

I realize now that, to some extent, my love of popular culture—and my

background in literature—was infiltrating the course and drowning out composition. To

clarify, I still did address writing: I reviewed elements like analysis, structure, rhetorical

strategies, editing and revision, and I always met with my students for one-on-one

conferences to give them personalized feedback on their writing. Yet in the process, my

course took a literary slant, and our class discussions were not always centered on

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composition. There were times when we would talk about things like plot, about character development and symbolism. As proud as I was of myself for using popular culture to get students interested in FYC, it is this distraction from writing that I consider the failure.

My experience with this pop-culture FYC course is indicative of the larger debate about what the focus of FYC should be. Although popular culture has been present in the English classroom for many decades, it still does not have a firm place in the composition classroom. Part of the ambivalence—or perhaps the polarization of views—toward popular culture comes from its roots in the everyday experience. As Clark (1996) explains, popular culture is "a process of making meaning in a discourse community" grounded in the "core of common knowledge, commodity, experience, and reference from the everyday lives of…a broad and diverse population" (p. 226) and includes subjects like movies, music, television shows, comic books, video games, and advertisements. Some FYC instructors celebrate such commonality in popular culture and integrate their curricula with pop-culture texts to garner student interest in the course. The need for elevating student interest in FYC runs deep for many compositionists like Friedman (2013), who asserts that FYC "may be one of the few times in the course of a goal-focused, pre-professional college career when students can explore something that interests them for its own sake" (p. 79). And, besides student choice and interest, popular culture is quite accessible for some students:

> For example, the emphasis on plot and the resolution of narrative conflicts on much of film and television—and this includes reality and news programs—are more familiar and easier to interpret for students, compared with the less familiar

texts that might emphasize argument…[highlighting] the discursive and rhetorical

knowledge students bring from popular culture. (Williams, 2014, p. 112)

Moreover, proponents suggest that students will feel more comfortable experimenting

with different styles and modes of writing because they are often familiar with the texts

and topics found in popular culture. Thus, popular culture can contribute to a low-risk

environment for students and can serve as a bridge to understanding rhetorical and

writing concepts.

On the other hand, popular culture faces opposition from scholars that typically

manifests from two prevalent misconceptions. First, critics often dismiss popular culture

as a trivial and "low-brow" focus of study that perpetuates a "rhetoric of ignorance and

anti-intellectualism" (Bradbury, 2011) because it is so easily accessible and consumable

by the masses. In such a framing, popular culture is not worthy of study at the

postsecondary level, or, if it is studied, it is only to be questioned or challenged. Second,

and as a derivative of the first misconception, many writing instructors and scholars

assume that popular culture has little to no benefit in composition and cannot be used as a

point of inquiry for helping students develop their writing skills. As such, popular culture

is deemed "a silly or even dangerous influence that is either ignored when it comes to

thinking about pedagogy, or even critiqued as antithetical to the goals of a college writing

course" (Williams, 2014, p. 112).

The notion of popular culture being "antithetical to the goals of a college writing

course," however, becomes questionable upon reviewing the learning outcomes of FYC.

The "WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition (3.0)" (2014), developed by

the Council of Writing Program Administrators, provides FYC instructors with a

foundation on which to build their courses. The Statement acknowledges "that the process of learning to write in any medium is complex" and offers an explanation of writing as "both individual and social and demands continued practice and informed guidance." The outcomes themselves reflect this notion, with the Statement honing in on four main goals for FYC: (1) Rhetorical Knowledge, (2) Critical Thinking, Reading, and Composing, (3) Processes, and (4) Knowledge of Conventions. Interestingly, the Statement does not specify what content should be included—it only suggests that students should be aware of "a variety of texts for different situations," thereby leaving the door open for both writing studies and theme-based courses. In other words, "there is no 'must' content; the only thing(s) that really matters is what students are *doing* – i.e., reading, thinking, responding, writing…when these things are primary, and whatever other content remains secondary, we have a writing course" (Donnelly, 2014, as cited in Yancey et al., 2014, p. 3).

A History of Popular Culture in the English Classroom

The emphasis on the *what*—the consistent focus on reading, thinking, responding, and writing—is a necessary emphasis for all FYC courses, but the question of "*how?*" must be answered. That is, *how* can popular culture be integrated into the writing classroom while keeping the emphasis on writing? Much of the recent scholarship focuses on how students can use popular culture in literature courses rather than in composition courses. Moreover, scholarship that specifically addresses the intersection of FYC and popular culture is challenged by writing studies scholars who argue that popular culture texts distract students from actually learning about writing—especially for transfer—and instead merely teaches students to write about popular culture.

As early as the 1940s, popular culture has appeared in classrooms throughout America, especially in English courses. In his 1944 article "Why 100,000,000 Americans Read Comics" from *The American Scholar*, William Moulton Marston—a scholar, psychologist, and the creator of Wonder Woman—tells of superheroes in the classroom, with the comic book industry of the 1940s working toward producing comics that could be entertaining *and* educational:

> We have inaugurated the policy of introducing into continuities a certain percentage of words which are above the average child-reader level, with the result that children soon determine the meanings and add these new words to their vocabularies. Excerpts from Superman have been used successfully in teaching English in the public schools, notably in a junior high school at Lynn, Massachusetts, where a special Superman workbook was compiled by a progressive young English teacher. (p. 42)

Marston's impactful scholarly essay is one of the first of its kind, both celebrating and defending the then-recent boom of the comic book industry and explaining why such a boom had occurred. The comic book industry experienced incredible success during World War II, and Marston uses this link between industry success and the war to support his argument about the legitimacy of popular and mainstream texts as educational tools (both academically and morally), claiming that comics act as an antigen to the effects of the excessive violence children witnessed during wartime. For example, comics taught young readers to embrace righteousness, to love rather than kill enemies (as repeatedly demonstrated by Superman and Wonder Woman), and to aspire to a level of greatness reflected by the heroes themselves. Moreover, in keeping with the feminist push during

World War II—the "We Can Do It!" mentality espoused by Rosie the Riveter—Marston asserts that Wonder Woman in particular teaches young girls to be proud of their femininity and reveals to young boys that the oft-feminized qualities of love and compassion are, in truth, noble qualities to possess (p. 42).

Despite Marston's report of the effectiveness of comic books as educational tools, the inclusion of popular culture in the classroom was met with resistance. Marston himself acknowledges resistance to comic books from scholars who adamantly believed comics "are not literature—[they say] adventure strips lack artistic form, mental substance, and emotional appeal to any of the most moronic of minds" (p. 36). A decade after Marston's article, in 1954, psychiatrist Fredric Wertham published *Seduction of the Innocent*, building on the critique of popular culture—especially crime and horror comics—by asserting that such texts were corrupting the minds of the American youth and robbing children of "proper" academic education. With the rise of violence in America in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Wertham considered the booming comic book industry to be the source of the increased violence among juveniles. According to Wertham, stories and images found in comic books caused psychological damage to children, prompting them to become murderers, sexual deviants, and drug users. Wertham thus counters all of the assertions made by Marston a decade prior: comic books were in fact educational, but not in the way Marston assumed. Instead, says Wertham, comic books teach children immoral behavior and, when incorporated into the classroom, present misinformation about history and tarnish the great literary texts usually taught. He cites, for instance, a *Superboy* comic in which Superboy becomes part of America's history by helping George Washington cross the Delaware River (p. 17) and

references a comic version of *Macbeth* in which the genius of Shakespeare is overshadowed by gory illustrations (p. 68). Thus, for Wertham, using these pop-culture texts as teaching material would severely hinder the development of young minds into scholars and well-adjusted adults.

By the 1960s, a little over a decade after Wertham's reactionary text, there was an increased push for popular culture to find a place in the composition classroom as instructors became more and more aware of its cultural and educational significance. Altschuler (1968) echoes Marston's sentiments about mainstream texts being valuable in the English classroom, and she extends the discussion to include films as well. More importantly, Altschuler makes a distinction between traditionally educational films (like documentaries) and story-driven films, favoring the latter for use in an English class: "Most existing works ["educational" films] are pompous and irrelevant. The film should not be *about* literature. Rather, it should be treated *as* literature of value for its own sake" (p. 341). She goes on to explain that such a distinction carries a great deal of weight in English courses by removing stale, uninspired, and simplistic views of history and the arts.

Altschuler's affordance of academic capital to popular culture over what she considers to be boring "educational" texts students often study is further bolstered by Smelstor and Carol Weiher (1976). Just as Altschuler builds on Marston's praise of popular culture, Smelstor and Weiher do so with Altschuler by looking at multiple genres and mediums, including advertisements, television, film, newspapers, and magazines. They even explain how each type of text can be used—the structure of mystery movies, for example, can enable students to discuss strategies of organization (p. 43). Perhaps

most significantly, Smelstor and Weiher make one of the older arguments for popular culture as an instructional tool: its accessibility and broadness. Their article supports the idea of transfer between the composition classroom and outside contexts—an important claim when arguing for the value of having popular culture in the classroom.

Although scholars like Altschuler, Smelstor, and Weiher offer overviews of the different types of pop-culture texts that can be used in English courses, their arguments are limited in two ways. First, their research is cursory. While they identify certain genres that teachers can draw upon, they do not offer specific examples of related lesson plans for texts they reference. Secondly—and through no fault of their own—their suggested texts for analysis would now be deemed outdated. Smelstor and Weiher recommend analyzing print newspapers, and Altschuler provides a list of several films that could be analyzed, yet both the print newspapers and the recommended films are, by now, either difficult to locate or do not resonate with FYC students today. Even so, they still offer principles that can be useful in framing our current thinking about popular culture.

It would help us, then, to turn our attention to more modern-day utilizations of popular culture in English classrooms to obtain a better understanding of not only what *specific* texts we could use, but also *how* these texts can be used to teach English. Two promising starting points come from Morrell and Duncan-Andrade (2002) and Trier (2006). Morrell and Duncan-Andrade deal primarily with music, while Trier embraces music, films, and print texts. Morrell and Duncan-Andrade, for instance, discuss an assignment sequence meant to teach students about argumentation and textual analysis by pairing a canonical poem with a hip-hop song, including combinations like "Kubla Khan" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and "If I Ruled the World" by Nas. The pairing of what

Morrell and Duncan-Andrade deem "canonical" texts and more mainstream texts continues with Trier, who encourages students to make connections of their own between school and popular media, including links between works like the *Odyssey* and the film *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

While the works of Morrell, Duncan-Andrade, and Trier establish the feasibility and effectiveness of incorporating popular media into their lesson plans, their methods of doing so are primarily fixated on the literary element of English courses at the high school level rather than on rhetoric and composition at the college level. This distinction in use is necessary since many colleges and universities clearly demarcate a difference in subject matter between literature and composition. Evans (2004) is particularly sensitive to the distinction as well and explores specific lesson plans between popular culture and canonical literature. However, Evans notes the impact of popular culture specifically on critical thinking and writing: "Students can readily practice critical-thinking skills—supporting assertions with specific evidence" and "students also successfully develop their writing skills through topics related to and models from popular culture" (p. 37), underscoring the benefit of more emphasis on composition through a pop culture lens.

Along with scholarship that links popular culture to literature, there is another—if not *the* most common criticism—of popular culture in FYC: popular culture can shift focus from learning about writing to merely writing *about* popular culture. Hughes' (2009) monster-themed FYC course gives a good contextualization of the debate about what the focus of FYC classes should be. To be sure, Hughes and his students engage with popular culture, but there does not appear to be much emphasis on composition itself. Rather, Hughes' writing course "capitalizes on monsters not only in cultural and

literary readings, but also as explorations of the self, social fears, and a multiplicity of other issues" (p. 98). He breaks down each unit and paper—five total—and how students learn to write through the lens of monster studies. The first paper asks students to reflect on the social and cultural inundation of monsters today, and the second paper "involves an analysis of a particular monster pertinent to a culture other than the student's own" (p. 99). The third and fourth papers take a social turn, with students exploring how certain groups in American society—and how they themselves—are "othered" just like monsters. The final paper then asks students to answer the question "What can monsters tell us about ourselves and society?" (p. 101).

Hughes' description almost seems as if students are in more of a literature course than a composition course, leading to two large concerns: students are not learning about writing as much as they should be, and in the instances students *are* learning about writing, they are working with it in a very specific context (about monsters, in Hughes' case) that wouldn't help them beyond FYC. With this kind of problematic curriculum in mind, some instructors to what Adler-Kassner (2012) deems the "No Vampires Policy":

> Writing classes, especially first year classes, must absolutely and always be grounded in Writing Studies, must always be about the study of writing. They should not, as I heard recently and anecdotally, engage students in writing about vampires—nor about political issues, nor about recent controversies, nor about other things that are not about *writing*. (p. 132)

Thus, as Adler-Kassner puts it, FYC should actively eschew theme-based courses and any curricular content not grounded in the study of writing, leaving popular culture with little to no room in this model. Here, popular culture is an ineffective tool for teaching

students—especially those in FYC courses—about the core concepts of writing and how to transfer those concepts to new contexts.

Studying Popular Culture in the FYC Classroom

It is within this debate about what constitutes "valuable" content in composition courses that I ground my teacher research and dissertation study in an attempt to provide a greater understanding of students' relationship with pop-culture texts in FYC. To this end, I draw on three areas of composition studies and pedagogy. First, I pull from culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP), a concept that—although primarily used in the secondary school setting—has important implications for composition studies. As Gay (2010) argues, CSP "is *validating and affirming* because it acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages" of different groups and "it builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences" (p. 31). If our goal as FYC instructors is to teach students not just about style, but how to write in a multitude of contexts as well, we cannot escape—nor should we want to escape—our students' nonacademic lives, cultures, interests and experiences. These are, after all, the very contexts our students occupy and write in. If our goal as instructors is to frame education as a vehicle for change, small acts like choosing content that resonates with our students can be validating and affirming, giving our students a chance to see (not just hear about in passing) images and discourses being presented about themselves and their communities. Popular culture can do just that as an object of analysis and critique, and thus CSP serves as a strong entry point for popular culture in FYC.

Second, I draw on writing studies to complicate popular culture's role in the instruction of writing beyond ideas of increasing student interest. Writing-about-writing

classroom models, like that of Downs and Wardle (2007) "shifts the central goal from teaching 'academic writing' to *teaching realistic and useful conceptions of writing*" (p. 557), but such a model problematically decontextualizes some forms of writing by privileging academic and workplace writing. However, applying threshold concepts of writing studies to the deconstruction and reconstruction of pop-culture texts in FYC can better solidify not only how popular culture can stay centered on composition, but how it can prepare students for future writing contexts.

Third, after reviewing CSP and writing studies models that contribute to how popular culture can be effectively integrated into FYC, I turn toward genre studies—with an emphasis in antecedent genre knowledge and remixing—for the foundation of class projects for students in an FYC course that integrates popular culture. A study on antecedent genre knowledge done by Reiff and Bawarshi (2011) shows that "when asked…what high school writing experiences they thought would help them succeed in FYC…students mentioned most often their experiences with writing about different genres" (p. 322), indicating awareness among students when it comes to how valuable their antecedent genre knowledge of various styles of writing is.

The study presented in this dissertation builds off of Reiff and Bawarshi's study. While the two scholars explore FYC students' antecedent genre knowledge in general, I have reframed their research questions to highlight pop-culture genre knowledge and perceptions of value in FYC. The overarching questions informing this project are:

1. What value, if any, do students ascribe to popular culture when it is incorporated in the FYC classroom?

2. Does the integration of popular culture in the FYC classroom lead to students learning about composition, and if so, how?

To give a more comprehensive look into the types of composing students do in FYC, the study categorizes student work into three domains: academic, workplace, and pop-culture. Academic writing—which includes genres like the research paper, the argumentative essay, and the rhetorical analysis—can be considered the traditional domain of writing in FYC, but with greater calls for students to be workforce-ready upon graduation over the past two decades (see Chapter 2), workplace writing could arguably also take up the "traditional writing" label (though not to the same degree as academic writing). Given the resistance to popular culture, though, it would not be outside the realm of possibility to view pop-culture-based composition as nontraditional in FYC—after all, popular culture's value is questioned more than, say, the value of learning to write a cover letter in the classroom.

More recent valuations of popular culture in relation to the academic and workplace domains are explored further in the literature review presented in Chapter 2. This chapter begins with scholarship detailing the current academic climate that pushes for greater emphasis on writing studies at the expense of popular culture. These arguments for writing studies—and against popular culture—are then challenged by literature from scholars of CSP who call for more consideration of students' non-academic identities, interests, and funds of knowledge within the teaching of writing. To bridge these two camps, Chapter 2 concludes with research on genre studies to promote the learning of writing while composing multimodal and non-traditional texts.

Chapter 3 uses the scholarship on genre in Chapter 2 as a launching point for the first part of the study. Based on a genre analysis project that students completed in two sections of an FYC course, Chapter 3 includes information about the student population and students' perceptions of value in the three domains of writing used throughout the study. Specifically, the chapter includes a writing experience questionnaire as well as surveys meant to gauge students' valuation of academic, workplace, and pop-culture genres both before and after their completion of the genre analysis project. The student responses within the pre- and post-surveys are then categorized according to themes to determine what students value about each of the three domains of writing.

The second part of the study in Chapter 4 gives more of a qualitative look into student perceptions of value. As part of their FYC course, students created a multimodal text of their choice and then remixed it to fit a new context. Students also wrote a reflection of their original and remixed pieces to explain their rhetorical choices. Four students' remix projects—one from each domain, and one that is cross-domain—and their reflections are analyzed in this chapter in terms of genre conventions and students' rhetorical awareness. Each example of student work is reviewed against the five major threshold concepts outlined by Adler-Kassner and Wardle (2015) to establish how the use of pop-culture themes compares to academic and workplace writing in meeting the learning outcomes of FYC.

The final chapter includes an end-of-the-semester project reflection in which students discuss which of the course projects—the writing-studies projects or the nontraditional projects—were most valuable to them. The responses are categorized and

analyzed according to theme to create a greater picture of the types of values students

saw in the projects. The themes and survey responses are then linked back to the previous

findings in Chapters 3 and 4 to push for broader consideration of student values in FYC.

Thus, through the wide range of collected data, as well as the frameworks in CSP,

writing studies, and genre studies, it is the goal of this project to assist in the

reconciliation of opposing views surrounding FYC content. Ultimately, it is my hope for

all stakeholders in FYC to achieve greater curricular and disciplinary balance between

students' interests and prior knowledge in popular culture with the academic- and

professional-minded approach to teaching for transfer and about writing.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Typically framed as a general education requirement, FYC is often viewed as a class in service to others—as a class that exists to help students succeed in other courses or in the workforce—instead of assisting students in learning about writing as a discipline on its own (Harrington et al., 2001). Education reports reinforce this outlook on programmatic and curricular outcomes through their narratives as well. For example, the Spellings Commission Report in 2006 expresses the sentiment that "the purpose of postsecondary education…was to prepare students for participation in the 21st century economy by equipping them with the skills and knowledge to become economically competitive agents" (Adler-Kassner, 2012, p. 119). Notions of accountability—in writing practice and assessment in particular—also demonstrate the sway external stakeholders have on the development and success of a student population, as evidenced in the *Ready or Not* report by the American Diploma Project:

> Secondary and postsecondary educators alike should be accountable to those who understand what is required for success in the twenty-first-century economy. Teachers, these documents say, don't possess this knowledge. Instead, it is located among employers and experts—government officials, educational administrators. (Adler-Kassner & Harrington, 2010, p. 85)

Reconciling the expectations of both internal and external stakeholders—of the professors themselves and of employers, administrators, and policymakers—is a challenging feat. It is no wonder that FYC instructors regularly find themselves pulled in multiple directions. In the span of one or two semesters, they are expected to do much:

they must teach students the writing skills needed in the workforce, but they must also instruct students on the conventions of writing within academia in preparation for other classes. They must teach students the minute details of punctuation and syntax, and other lower-order concepts, but they must also expose students to the larger contextual and political nature of writing and its implications for critiquing, challenging, and changing the social institutions that impact their lives.

With political and institutional expectations shaping what is taught in FYC, there is a great risk of doing a disservice to the students themselves by ignoring and de-valuing their own cultural wealth, funds of knowledge, and experiences they bring to the classroom. Many scholars have highlighted how embracing students' outside knowledge can enrich the classroom experience for students of all levels—inversely, devaluation of such cultural background and funds of knowledge can hinder learning. In their study of Mexican elementary school students, Moll et al. (1992) note that "establishing these 'strategic connections' that take the form of joint household research between classroom teachers and university based researchers" (p. 132) results in a plethora of types of knowledge that the students could apply to class lessons about science and math. Concerning student funds of knowledge working in a college-level composition course, Alexander (2009) provides a case study of two gamers to reveal how computer and video gaming can lead to the development of different types of literacies and skills relevant to the composition classroom. Students (a) develop transliteracies by "knowing how to make connections across different writing environments"; (b) improve collaborative writing through pieces "composed 'in conversation' with others' thinking, writing, and ideas" by composing game scenarios in team; and (c) become cognizant of multicultural

literacies by "taking into consideration others' views, assumptions, and values" in new gaming communities (p. 55). In another example of funds of knowledge appearing in the composition classrooms, research on remixing indicates that knowledge of specific fan communities enables students to develop their remix literacy and rhetorical awareness. As illustrated by Stedman (2012), fans of the television show *Lost* and the video game *Chrono Trigger* are able to compose their own fan videos and music that "skillfully negotiated rhetorical concerns in at least three ways" (p. 113)—genre, audience, and purpose—for their respective fan communities.

The research by scholars such as Alexander (2009) and Stedman (2012) point to the ways in which popular culture can permeate the FYC curriculum in a productive manner, supporting the learning of composition while giving students a familiar and interesting lens to work with. Yet even with scholarship on the importance of acknowledging students' intersecting identities, interests, and cultures in the classroom, popular culture—which is often linked to youth culture—has a shaky foothold in FYC and faces two prevalent critiques. First, popular culture is often dismissed as a trivial focus of study regulated to "low-brow" interests (Bradbury, 2011). Second, and as a derivative of the first misconception, there is the assumption that popular culture has little to no benefit in composition and cannot be used as a point of inquiry for helping students develop their writing skills (Adler-Kassner, 2012). As such, popular culture is deemed "a silly or even dangerous influence that is either ignored when it comes to thinking about pedagogy, or even critiqued as antithetical to the goals of a college writing course" (Williams, 2014, p. 112). These assumptions that popular culture is inherently for the unintellectual and not helpful within the FYC classroom reveals an unfair and dismissive

attitude toward many of our students' interests and, indeed, toward our students themselves.

This chapter examines the contentious space popular culture occupies in FYC in three ways. First, this chapter reviews how writing studies (WS) resists popular culture's place in FYC by instead exclusively promoting emphasis on writing practices. Second, this chapter presents literature housed in culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) and critical media literacy (CML), which challenge assumptions WS instructors and external stakeholders make about what is "valuable" in the classroom. Third, this chapter explores how a mixed CSP and WS model could potentially function in FYC to reconcile what students value with what instructors and external stakeholders value. The integration of both CSP and WS into FYC in this chapter will also serve as a launching point for the research and analyses presented in Chapters 3 and 4.

Limiting Attitudes about "Valuable" Writing in FYC

Even with so much concern surrounding the success and economic viability of college students, what is taught in the FYC classroom may not always line up with stakeholders' expectations. Moreover, there is no guarantee that the writing assignments in FYC line up with writing in the academy, even though FYC is often framed as a general writing skills course that can help students compose for other classes. While students in FYC may *learn* about writing, they may not *transfer* that knowledge into new contexts. The distinction between learning and transfer is an important one: learning "has been defined simply as the durability of knowledge—that is, information stored in memory," while transfer "involves the application of knowledge acquired in one situation or context to a different situation or context" (Nelms & Dively, 2007, p. 215). Cited

widely as a launching point for conversations about transfer, Perkins and Salomon's

(1989) research into the contextual parameters for cognitive skills gives compositionists a

framework for understanding the transference of writing knowledge through two

mechanisms: low-road transfer and high-road transfer. Low road transfer "depends on

extensive and varied practice of a skill to near automaticity," while high-road transfer

"depends on learners' deliberate mindful abstraction of a principle" (Perkins & Salomon,

1989, p. 22). In the FYC classroom, low-road transfer appears when students

automatically start all of their papers with a hook, regardless of the specific genre of the

paper (research paper or narrative, for instance), because they have been constantly asked

by their English teachers throughout their schooling to begin their papers in such a

fashion. For an example of high-road transfer, a student might draw on their experience

with structuring research papers in FYC when writing a similar paper for another class a

year or two later—although how often transfer (whether high-road or low-road) occurs

for students is problematic if there is a disconnect between what is learned in FYC and

what is needed beyond it.

  Wardle (2009) targets the problem of disconnection in the FYC classroom and

uses it as a launching point for writing studies:

> The gist of the critiques against FYC as a general writing skills course is this: the
>
> goal of teaching students to write across the university in other academic courses
>
> assumes that students in FYC can be taught ways of writing (genre and genre
>
> knowledge) that they can then transfer to the writing they do in other courses
>
> across the university. This goal and its underlying assumption, however, are
>
> complicated by the fact that the activity system of FYC is radically different from

other academic activity systems in its use of writings as the object of primary attention rather than as a tool for acting on other objects of attention. Because of this difference in primary focus, the rhetorical situations of FYC courses around the country do not mirror the multiple, diverse, and complex rhetorical situations across the university in even the most basic ways. Transfer to such varied situations is not easily accomplished. (p. 766)

Looked at another way, the rhetorical situations students face in FYC are typically imagined or constructed. Consider the standard research or argumentative papers students are so often asked to write: the default statement (a mantra, really, at this point), is something along the lines of "write this paper as if you were writing to an educated audience who is unfamiliar with the topic." On the surface, this guideline could be helpful for students determining what type of content to include or tone to use. They would not, for instance, need to define certain terms if their "audience" is reasonably educated on the subject, and they probably would need to write more formally than not in their writing. Regardless, the problem still persists that this audience is not a real one— that ultimately students are writing a paper intended solely for the instructor (a *specific* instructor at that, whose writing style and preferences will not always line up with another writing instructors' preferences), removing the nuances of writing in a specific genre to an audience outside of the course. Indeed, with these types of assignments, students are grappling with what Wardle (2009) deems "mutt genres": "mimic genres [like argument papers, evaluations, and rhetorical analyses] that mediate activities in other activity systems, but within the FYC system their purposes and audiences are vague

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or even contradictory" (p. 774), potentially stymying transfer due to the inauthenticity of the projects.

To combat mutt genres and the underlying assumption that writing is a fixed tool that can be mastered in the span of one or two semesters, Downs and Wardle (2007) promote a WS course to replace FYC. A writing studies course, they say, "shifts the central goal from teaching 'academic writing' to *teaching realistic and useful conceptions of writing*" (p. 557). While they acknowledge that a WS class may not necessarily improve student writing, Downs and Wardle argue that students who write about their own writing develop increased confidence and self-awareness of the rhetorical choices they make. In addition, assert the two, WS can help students reflect on how writing functions in different situations. Assignments include students reading research on writing, composing "writing auto-ethnographies," and conducting their own research on writing-related issues of interest and relevance to them. Part of Downs and Wardle's grounding principles for a WS curriculum is their belief that WS situates the instructor as the expert:

> It follows that the more an instructor can say about a writing's content, the more she can say about the writing itself; this is another way of saying that writing instructors should be expert readers. When the course content is writing studies, writing instructors are concretely enabled to fill the expert reader role. This change directly contravenes the typical assumption that first-year writing can be about anything, that somehow the content is irrelevant to an instructor's ability to respond to the writing. (p. 559)

It is rather concerning that Downs and Wardle entrench instructors in a self-imposed limited role when it comes to expertise. They problematically imply that instructors cannot effectively teach and respond to student writing if the content is not about writing, in turn implying that writing instructors cannot comment on anything not in their field. Taken a step further, limiting students to writing about writing instead of encouraging them to write on different topics still decontextualizes writing—a direct contradiction to Downs and Wardle's statement that "writing is…content- and context-contingent and irreducibly complex" (p. 558). And, just as troubling, is that non-academic and non-professional writing is not afforded any academic capital in Downs' curriculum, echoing the sentiments present in Adler-Kassner's (2012) "No Vampires" policy: sample research questions for students to address in Downs' course are "What kinds of writing will a social work major encounter in his career?" and "Is writing taught in medical school? Should it be, and if so, how?" (p. 562).[1] Focus on academic and professional writing at this level does not leave much consideration about what knowledge students transfer *into* FYC. As the next sections discuss, students have rich funds of knowledge in nontraditional areas—like popular culture—that can be used to both expand definitions of "valuable" writing and create a forum for their interests and experiences to be utilized in new contexts, all while learning about writing and how to write.

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[1] A sub-point here is that workplace writing is typically limited to more traditional professions. Downs mentions writing in medical school and as a social worker, and it's not uncommon for universities to have writing courses geared for students in majors like business and engineering. Writing, of course, functions in multiple areas (as corroborated by the WPA Outcomes Statement), and if we are to keep the "work-only" mentality, at the very least we can broaden our consideration for other fields that require writing.

Expanding Notions of Value in FYC through Popular Culture

No doubt, an FYC course that pulls students away from composition is a problem. The critiques of non-relevant writing assignments in FYC found in Wardle and Downs (2007), Wardle (2009), and Adler-Kassner (2012) speak to a larger movement of writing scholars and instructors who wish to keep FYC grounded in writing. However, this focus would move the curriculum away from the political, cultural, and social issues present in and explored through writing—and, by extension, such a shift in focus would remove content grounded in popular culture in favor of a narrower curriculum.

Still, what about the drawbacks to this seemingly narrower class model when thinking of the purpose of writing and school in general? On the surface level, including popular culture in the classroom can garner more student interest in first-year composition, and the importance of this should be acknowledged since FYC is often framed as a required course that students have to wade through rather than a course that can be both beneficial and interesting. In response to Adler-Kassner's (2012) "No Vampires" policy, Friedman (2013) states that "especially in challenging times, when students are pressured to take a pragmatic, career-oriented approach to college, it's important for them to be able to choose content…it may be one of the few times…when students can explore something that interests them for its own sake" (p. 79). Friedman deems the students' exploration of their interests in FYC as "intellectual play"—the idea that students can experience breadth on a topic of their own liking while learning about composition in a manner that stimulates interest and inquiry organically instead of through pressure to be "work-ready."

Still, a pop-culture FYC curriculum needs more than relevance and student interest to be effective—and it can, to be sure. Berlin (1998) supports social-epistemic rhetoric for being "a political act involving a dialectical interaction engaging the material, the social, and the individual writer, with language as the agency of mediation" (p. 488). The teaching of writing, explains Berlin, is not free from ideology, yet this need not be a cause for concern: it can transform the writing classroom into a liberatory site that challenges imbalanced systematic power structures *á la* Freire's (1968) banking concept of education. Berlin's breakdown of Ira Shor's view of "popular forms of entertainment—which prevents critical reflection" highlights the importance of using the classroom as a space to "enable students to '*extraordinarily reexperience the* ordinary,' as they critically examine their quotidian experience" (p. 491). Thus, if writing in the classroom is to transfer to different contexts, and if writing is a means of social, political, and hegemonic critique, to remove any content not explicitly about writing—to adopt the "No Vampires" policy and eschew popular culture—would appear to be counterproductive for those who believe in a social-epistemic class model.

Berlin's favor of social-epistemic rhetoric lines up well with what Ladson-Billings (1995) deems a "culturally relevant pedagogy." She offers a succinct description of instructors' jobs by emphasizing the larger goal of the schooling experience for students: "Not only must teachers encourage academic success and cultural competence, they must also help students to recognize, understand, and critique current social inequities" (p. 476). Yet the cultural relevance is still not enough for some who argue we can push beyond relevance and instead aim for sustainment in the classroom. As Paris (2012) states in response to Ladson-Billings:

I offer the term *culturally sustaining pedagogy* as an alternative…that supports

the value of our multiethnic and multilingual present and future. The term

culturally sustaining requires that our pedagogies be more than responsive of or

relevant to the cultural experiences and practices of young people—it requires

that they support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic

competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to

dominant cultural competence. (p. 95)

Culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP), then, is a way of maximizing student learning, of

opening space for students' cultures—including popular culture—in the curriculum in a

way to nurture the students' multiple and intersecting identities *deliberately*. As Gay

(2010) explains, CSP "is *validating and affirming* because it acknowledges the legitimacy

of the cultural heritages" of different groups and "it builds bridges of meaningfulness

between home and school experiences" (p. 31).

And, of course, intersectionality between identities (like those of the

student/gamer/compositionists in Alexander's 2009 study) and between locations (like

the home life influence on classroom lesson plans in Moll et al.'s 1992 study) is key in

avoiding essentializing students. If our goal as FYC instructors is to teach students not

just about style, but how to write in a multitude of contexts as well, we cannot escape—

nor should we want to escape—our students' nonacademic lives, cultures, interests and

experiences. Paris and Alim (2014) point out that culture need not be inherently linked to

race (which happens often), but should rather be viewed as something "dynamic, shifting,

and encompassing both past-oriented heritage dimensions and present-oriented

community dimensions" (p. 90). Therefore, they say, instructors should be open to

cultural elements in addition to race and use CSP as means to "interrogate and critique the simultaneously progressive and oppressive currents" that "reify existing hegemonic discourses about, as examples, gender, race, sexuality, and citizenship" (p. 93) in pop-culture genres like hip-hop music. These are, after all, the very contexts our students occupy and write in. If our goal as instructors is to frame education as a vehicle for change, small acts like choosing content that resonates with our students can be validating and affirming, giving our students a chance to see and show (not just hear about in passing) images and discourses being presented about themselves and their communities. Popular culture can do just that as an object of analysis and critique.

If CSP is expected to interrogate and critique hegemonic discourses in popular culture, then critical media literacy (CML) becomes necessary. Garcia et al. (2013) give an overview of critical media literacy and how it is helpful for students to understand rhetorical elements and necessary for them to examine and question the pop-culture texts—and the underlying power structures implicit in those texts—they encounter. They define CML as "a progressive educational response that expands the notion of literacy to include different forms of mass communication, popular culture, and new technologies" (p. 111) that pushes students "to explore difficult-to-see ideologies and connections between power and information" in line with CSP and similar democratic pedagogies.

CML is a prime example of popular culture put into work in an FYC course, as emphasis must be placed on writing and production in order for students to productively move toward critical media literacy. In referencing a constructivist approach to CML, Gainer (2007) writes, "consumers of popular culture negotiate meaning as agents in the construction of their own knowledge. In other words, they can be influenced by the texts

while at the same time resisting the dominant messages" (p. 109). Therefore, "in the process of creation, powerful opportunities arise" that require students to "construct 'counternarratives' that 'disrupt traditional messages embedded in mainstream text'" (Gainer, 2007, p. 109). CML can be of further benefit when recalling the WPA Learning Outcomes statement on knowledge of conventions:

> By taking control of production of media texts, a productive stance within critical media literacy allows educators to distribute the means and creativity for controlling and producing content beyond a traditional information elite. Particularly, in an increasingly complex digital ecology, the ability to write not simply via print-based text but via multimodal and programmable mediums are an integral part of challenging power structures that manifest through media distribution. (Garcia et al., 2013, p. 113)

Williams (2014) draws attention to how pop-culture genres could be used in a way similar to Garcia et al. (2013) and Gainer's (2007) statements about production, claiming that the genres and conventions taught in school are often limited to academia and therefore not nearly as applicable to students' nonacademic lives (or the "real world," as it is so often called). However, through CML, FYC students can start modifying their schema of "genre" and better set themselves up for transfer of conventions through what Williams deems "non-popular-culture multimodal work": "Such an approach…helps us focus on how to help students work with the complex, intertextual knowledge they have of their antecedent genres and how those can help them understand how to recognize and work within new rhetorical expectations" (p. 113). The different rhetorical expectations informed by genre conventions grounded in popular culture creates an entry point to a

space in the FYC classroom that connects the values of CSP and CML with the learning outcomes desired by WS models.

Antecedent Genre Knowledge of Popular Culture in FYC

The study of genres in FYC can be incredibly helpful for students in FYC in branching out and learning to value different types of writing. Students can approach certain rhetorical situations with some confidence as they draw on appropriate conventions, and genre "as an orientation and a tool for getting at resources and mediating new contexts or domains—makes it particularly useful for studying the transfer of writing knowledge and abilities across contexts" (Reiff & Bawarshi, 2012, p. 315). At times, though, writing in a specific genre may be stifling for students, especially if the instructor does not acknowledge the malleability and different types of genres. The conventions of a specific genre can differ depending on the audience or purpose (e.g., a writer may not need a sign-off in a business email if he or she is writing to a close colleague, whereas he or she may need a sign-off if addressing a supervisor at work), and the conventions of one genre may not always be relevant to another, similar genre. Devitt (1993) calls for a reevaluation of our understanding of genre by shifting our focus more toward the origins of genres rather than their formal features, explaining that "Traditional genre study has meant study of the textual features that mark a genre: the meter, the layout, the organization, [and] the level of diction" (p. 575). These are features typically harped on in composition, which "has delineated its five-paragraph theme, the inverted-triangle introductory paragraph" (p. 575) and so on. However, by moving away from just these textual markers of genre, instructors can become more cognizant of how the social context surrounding both the audience and the writer can shape genre conventions.

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Learning genre conventions can have important ramifications for us as composition scholars and instructors when it comes to "reveal[ing] a great deal about the communities which construct and use the genres" (Devitt, 1993, p. 581), and writing instructors should turn their attention toward these communities. One need not look far to see just how often and in what types of communities students write. The genres in academia—such as the research paper, the rhetorical analysis, and the summary—are to be expected, as are the genres used in the workplace, like emails and reports. However, there are non-academic and non-professional writings to factor in as well. Students text and instant message their friends and family. They have social media profiles, with each network having its own style and conventions. They may write reviews for restaurants or movies. They could write for personal reasons, whether in a private journal or for a song they are composing with their band. They may role-play online in a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG), or they may write fanfiction based on their favorite television show, book, or video game.

With each of these genres—and countless others—students compose with the surrounding rhetorical situation in mind. They know that a tweet must be 140 characters or that their creative piece on their favorite television character must keep the same characteristics expected of the show's audience. They realize that a Yelp review's content should contain descriptions of the restaurant being reviewed, including a breakdown of points like service and quality of the food. Whether they are poignantly aware that they know or not, students understand certain conventions and they adjust their writing accordingly. Moreover, Reiff and Bawarshi's (2011) study on antecedent genre knowledge shows that "when asked…what high school writing experiences they thought

would help them succeed in FYC…students mentioned most often their experiences with writing about different genres" (p. 322), indicating a level of metacognition among students when it comes to how valuable their antecedent genre knowledge of various styles of writing is.

Wells' (2011) high school class serves as a good example of students' genre knowledge of popular culture transferring over to more traditionally academic genres. Wells emphasizes writing studies by using activities and assignments that help her students learn about writing in different contexts. For example, she starts "to introduce the elements that make up a rhetorical situation: purpose, audience, genre, stance, and design/media" (p. 59)—or "PAGSD" for short—to her students so they can think about writing as a rhetorical act that is dependent on the current situation. The PAGSD approach works for her students as they are able to apply PAGSD outside of the classroom to examples of popular culture:

> [Wells' student Charlotte said] 'I am able to see it [PAGSD] in everyday life.' Her friend Adrianna agreed, 'When I am watching a movie trailer and I see the guy taking his shirt off, then I know it is being directed at the teenage girls. I think about the PAGSD stuff all the time now.' (p. 59)

Because Wells' students are comfortable looking at the rhetorical situation around both academic and pop-culture works, they also become comfortable with transferring their writing knowledge into new contexts. Wells supports such transfer by consistently and explicitly identifying moments for rhetorical knowledge (PAGSD in this case) to apply to different situations. She has students chart and analyze the rhetorical moves in written texts from different professions and disciplines at the college level, and the

explicitness of her approach enables her students to reflect on and develop their own styles of writing in multiple ways while applying their knowledge of PAGSD to both popular culture and their academic and professional futures. The students' final project is a research project on a literacy issue or question of their choice, and while Wells outlines traditional rhetorical moves of a research project (research question, review of literature, description of study design, and collection and analysis of data), she gives students free choice in the overall genre, design, and media of their project, thereby enabling them to draw on what they have learned thus far and produce new genres.

There can certainly be frustration when students try to apply their knowledge of one genre to the other if the two genres function in completely different spheres. After all, having students learn the conventions of, say, movie reviews may not necessarily line up with the genre of the cover letter. Ideally, students would still be able to understand the conventions of both genres because of their overall understanding of the difference in rhetorical situations, but the leap from one genre to the next is not always a smooth one, assuming the leap occurs at all. A better example of transfer between genres would include overlap in some capacity, like pop-culture genres that students are familiar with and multimodal texts students compose in their FYC class. According to the "WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition (3.0)" (2014), students should "gain experience reading and composing in several genres to understand how genre conventions shape and are shaped by readers' and writers' practices and purposes." Having students compose a digital or visual text (a commercial or trailer, perhaps) enables students to draw on their own knowledge of and familiarity with those genres.

For instance, Williams (2014) explores how students' antecedent genre knowledge of popular culture paves the way for rhetorically effective multimodal composition:

> The interviews with students illustrate that, when faced with composing for a text that will be seen on a screen, the students turned to their familiarity with popular culture genres of film, television, and video games to help them make sense of the rhetorical, narrative, and stylistic demands of the new assignment. (p. 111)

Interestingly, for Williams' class, "the level of experience the students had with multimodal composing did not make a difference in terms of how they turned to popular culture genres for their multimodal projects" (p. 115). Because popular culture is so pervasive—there can hardly be any doubt that students have *some* experience with things like advertisements, television shows, and movies—the composing of multimodal texts grounded in popular culture still has an air of familiarity for many students. This, coupled with popular culture being a more comfortable or approachable topic for students, allows for more opportunities for transfer (and transfer *beyond* the academic setting, not just *across* it) while giving students the chance to put into practice their prior knowledge in FYC.

Valuing Composition and Popular Culture in the Classroom

As discussed in this chapter and in many texts, the teaching of writing has a noticeable set of (oftentimes conflicting) considerations that can manifest in multiple ways. Whether it is the teacher not making explicit connections between context and content, the course material not being conducive to writing across contexts, or a host of other factors, transfer may not occur immediately, if at all. Still, the goal of teaching for transfer itself is a noble one. For composition, teaching for transfer not only gives our

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discipline a stronger identity than that of the "fix-it" crash course, it also strives to give

our students a better understanding of their own writing practices and how they can shape

their writing for a multitude of other situations. Yet even with support from Downs,

Wardle, and Adler-Kassner for WS composition courses, instructors and students are

faced with another limitation: writing-about-writing models still perpetuate a narrow

view of composition by foregrounding academic and professional writing over other

kinds of writing.

DePalma and Ringer's (2011) conceptualization of "adaptive transfer" is a helpful

starting point in reconciling the different views of what stakeholders consider valuable.

After reviewing the discussions of transfer in multiple disciplines, DePalma and Ringer

explain that "*Adaptive transfer* is the conscious or intuitive process of applying or

reshaping learned writing knowledge in new and potentially unfamiliar writing

situations" (p. 141) and is dynamic, idiosyncratic, cross-contextual, rhetorical,

multilingual, and transformative. A key component of adaptive transfer is that it

"highlights the way individuals perceive parallels across contexts," thereby

"highlight[ing] the agency of the individuals" (p. 141). I would like to suggest adding

another component to their framework: adaptive transfer is *context-rich* and considers the

specific contexts individual writers compose in beyond more formal settings, whether it

is for or about television, video games, music, or any other pop-culture genre.

Although there are so many stakeholders involved in the valuation of course

content, it is imperative that students themselves are stakeholders as well. Keeping in

mind CSP and CML, popular culture in FYC courses can be incredibly effective in

helping students develop writing competencies and identify critical points of inquiry

beyond the classroom. Students learn about and compose works within different genres and rhetorical situations, and they see that their interests can be topics of inquiry treated with the same respect as more traditional academic subjects. And, once students see that they are given the same level of consideration as other stakeholders, they can play a more active role in the discussions about what is valuable in the classroom. After all, popular culture should not be used for its own sake, a box to check to show we are merely *responding* to our students. We as instructors—just like our students—should demonstrate and demand "genuine caring and concern" by "demanding high levels of performance" (Gay, 2010, p. 249). This emphasis on caring about students' perceptions of value and their active role in composition is the driving force behind the study presented in Chapters 3 and 4.

CHAPTER 3

Part 1 of Study

When looking at what constitutes "valuable" writing in the classroom, a major

determiner is often how closely that writing or knowledge lines up with future writing

contexts—in other words, value is determined by how much of a need or likelihood there

is for students to transfer what they've learned into new situations. And, as several

writing studies and transfer scholars indicate, active self-reflection is key for transfer.

According to Perkins and Salomon (1989), the need for metacognition, the "active

monitoring of one's learning experiences" (p. 63)—as well as students' motivation to

learn—is essential for transfer to occur. The expectancy-value theory of motivation

applies in these circumstances, as it "links students' motivation, performance,

persistence, and choice-making to the *value* students place upon a particular task or

learning situation in educational environments" (Driscoll & Wells, 2012). The greater the

perceived value of a particular task (or class), the greater the motivation and persistence

the student demonstrates, and the greater the chance for transfer. Conversely, if students

do not perceive their FYC course as having value, the chance for transfer can decrease.

Indeed, there has been a great deal of research on what students transfer *from*

FYC into the workplace or other disciplines (Nelms & Dively, 2007; Wardle, 2007;

Yancey et al., 2014), but not nearly as much focus on what students transfer *into* FYC.

Reiff and Bawarshi (2011) describe this gap in research as the impetus for their cross-

institutional study on students' prior genre knowledge. Working off of a list of forty

genres (with the option for students to include more), their consideration for both

students' antecedent genre familiarity and different types of genre admirably re-frames

the conversation on transfer by broadening the spectrum of valuable writing and knowledge.

The study presented in this chapter uses Reiff and Bawarshi's research as a launching point to further widen that spectrum of valuable writing in FYC in two ways. First, this study includes more examples of pop-culture, whereas Reiff and Bawarshi give equal consideration to multiple categories of writing and genres. Second, while the two scholars look at the antecedent genre knowledge students transfer into FYC, this study extends both backward and forward. Students were asked to identify the genres they were familiar with prior to FYC and reflect on how their coursework on and knowledge of genre (and, particularly pop-culture genres) can impact them in future writing contexts. Therefore, the study integrates both metacognitive theory and expectancy-value theory to identify shifts students experience in valuing popular culture in the writing classroom. Specifically, the research questions being addressed are:

- What prior genre knowledge (within academic, workplace, and pop-culture domains) do students bring into FYC?

- What value, if any, do students ascribe to different genres and genre domains in FYC, particularly to genres based in popular culture?

Because the nature of transfer—and by extension, the nature of this study—is grounded in self-reflection, constructivism theory was essential for this project. Creswell (2014) describes constructivism as the idea that "individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. These meanings are varied and multiple…and the goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views" (p. 37). To study such varied understandings, qualitative research is ideal, as "qualitative researchers

seek to understand the context or setting of the participants" and "tend to use open-ended questions so that participants can share their views" (Creswell, 2014, p. 37). There were still quantitative elements in this study—namely, demographic information and Likert responses—but the majority of the data was qualitative in nature, as students reflected on their values and practices related to writing. In a sense, instead of being considered as mixed-methods, this study is perhaps more accurately viewed as "qualitative with numbers": grounded in students' reflections and responses, and supplemented by numerical overviews. Data collected for the study included:

- A writing experience questionnaire gauging students' experience with composition and writing in specific genres (Appendix A);

- A pre- and post-survey gauging students' perceptions of valuable writing, given at the beginning and end of Project 2 (Appendix B);

- Copies of student writing throughout the course, including pre-writing, drafts, and final papers; and

- Students' evaluation of course projects.

This chapter focuses on the writing experience questionnaire, the genre selections for Project 2 (Appendix C), and the pre- and post-surveys given before and after Project 2. In preparation for the next chapter—which reviews students' remixed works of popular culture (Project 3), as well as analyzes their evaluations of course projects—this chapter is primarily concerned with what values students carried into the classroom prior to explicitly studying genre.

Study Background

The southwest community college site for this study breaks first-year composition into a two-course sequence: ENG 101 and ENG 102. Both courses emphasize rhetoric and composition, with ENG 101 focusing on expository writing and ENG 102 focusing on persuasive writing. Even with this distinction, the FYC concepts are consistently reinforced as students proceed through the sequence—students can be introduced to persuasive writing in ENG 101 or reinforce their understanding of expository writing in ENG 102. This study took place during the Spring 2016 semester in two sections of ENG 102. Altogether, 34 students participated in the study—fifteen students in the first section of ENG 102 (henceforth "ENG 102-1") and nineteen students in the second section of ENG 102 (henceforth "ENG 102-2").

The course itself drew heavily from both writing studies and popular culture. Project 1 was entirely grounded in writing studies, and it asked students to reflect on their language and writing practices. The goal for starting the semester with this type of project was to acclimate students to the reflective components of the other projects through a relatively low-stakes assignment (a personal narrative). Project 2 then required students to turn their attention outward to writing practices in three domains. Students selected one academic genre, one workplace genre, and one pop-culture genre and then found two examples for each that they analyzed to determine the genre conventions. They then reflected on when, how, and/or why they would use those genres. As such, students learned more about the differences in genres, as well as the malleability of genre conventions. They then began working on Project 3, the remixing project. Students selected a genre, created a piece that functioned within that genre, and then remixed it for

a new audience. As a sample, the class worked collectively on remixing an Instagram profile of a controversial celebrity into a dating profile that would be more suited for a female audience. Through this project, students further developed their understanding of how conventions and audiences intersect, all while composing for transfer and with an eye toward multimodality. While the remixing project opened the door for visual elements of composition, Project 4 was purely visual. Students were given four scenarios in which some sort of visual or flier was necessary, and they then created visuals for those scenarios. In essence, this final project reinforced concepts of composition from earlier in the semester: rhetorical strategies, conventions, multimodality, and audience awareness.

Although all four projects offered insights into students' writing practices and adaptability, this study focuses primarily on Projects 2 and 3. Students' selections and analysis of genres for Project 2 show just how varied their consideration of specific genres were, serving to provide a more complete picture of students' perceptions of value in composition. Project 3 served as a helpful indicator of how students enacted their beliefs about interesting or valuable genres since they could select the genre(s) to work with for their remix.

All of the aforementioned data was collected only from students who signed the consent forms, and all data was submitted and stored on Canvas, the learning management system students within the Maricopa County Community College District use for their classes. All students—regardless of whether they agreed to participate in the study—received the same instruction throughout the semester. Students' names appeared on their surveys so that their pre- and post-survey answers could be compared and

elaborated on with their final papers, as this comparison is a significant part of the study.

However, students' real names are not used in this chapter.

<div align="center">**Data Analysis**</div>

Writing Experience Questionnaire

To better understand the background of the students participating in the study,

students were given a writing experience questionnaire. The first part of the questionnaire

asked students to rate (a) their level of interest in composition; (b) their primary purpose

for composing; (c) their primary purpose for reading; and (d) the extent ENG 101

prepared them for ENG 102.

Table 1
Writing Experience Questionnaire (Part A)

Q1: What is your level of interest in writing?

Not Interested 1	Moderately Disinterested 3	Neutral 12	Moderately Interested 13	Very Interested 5

Q2: Which of the following do you do the most writing for?

School 27	Work 2	Personal 5

Q3: Which of the following do you do the most reading for?

School 20	Work 0	Personal 14

Q4: How well do you think ENG 101 prepared you for the writing you will be doing in other contexts (in school, for work, for personal purposes, etc.)?

Not at All Prepared 1	Not Really Prepared 1	Neutral 5	Moderately Prepared 18	Greatly Prepared 9

The second half of the writing experience questionnaire asked students to identify

the different genres in which they have written. Students were given a list of genres that

they could select from, and they could also add genres to the list that were not already present. The list for this study draws heavily from Reiff and Bawarshi's aforementioned genre list, but some genres from Reiff and Bawarshi's list were consolidated into one for the writing experience questionnaire. For instance, Reiff and Bawarshi presented the argumentative essay and the position paper as two separate genres, yet enough overlap exists between the two types of writing (they could arguably even be considered the same) that they were factored as just one genre. Due to such consolidations, the list for this study includes 36 genres as opposed to the 40 genres in Reiff and Bawarshi's list.

The genres on the list fall into at least one of the three domains identified for this study: academic, workplace, and pop-culture. For instance, the research paper genre aligns closely with the academic domain, while the résumé is housed in the workplace domain. However, many of the genres on the list have overlapping domains—a lab report is often used in biology and chemistry classes (academic writing), but it is also a staple of researchers in those fields (workplace writing). Reviews for movies could be done for pleasure (pop-culture writing), but if the writer is a movie critic, then the review is a necessary part of his or her job (workplace writing). Students in both sections of ENG 102 indicated that they were familiar with writing multiple genres (Table 2).

Table 2
Writing Experience Questionnaire (Part B)

Number of Genres Selected	Students – ENG 102-1 (15 Total)	Students – ENG 102-2 (19 Total)
30+	2 (13.3%)	4 (21.0%)
25-29	6 (40.0%)	6 (31.6%)
20-24	5 (33.3%)	5 (26.3%)
15-19	2 (13.3%)	3 (15.7%)
>15	0 (0.0%)	1 (5.2%)

From this portion of the writing experience questionnaire, Question 2 provides

salient information about what genres students have written in and what genres students

value. When asked about their primary purpose for writing, 79.4% of students responded

that school was the driving factor. Moreover, 77.7% of students indicated they knew

more than half of the genres on the questionnaire list (Table 2). It could be inferred that

previous classes have contributed significantly to students' familiarity with so many of

the genres on the questionnaire list. However, while a majority of students are familiar

with a majority of the genres on the questionnaire list, a breakdown of which genres

students were most familiar with complicates the idea that classroom writing is directly

proportional to breadth of genre familiarity (Table 3).

Table 3
Rates of Writing Familiarity in Genres

Type of Genre	Students – ENG 102-1 (15 Total)	Students – ENG 102-2 (19 Total)
Argumentative paper	15 (100%)	16 (84.2%)
Book Report	14 (93.3%)	16 (84.2%)
Blog	2 (13.3%)	11 (57.9%)
Pop-Culture Reviews	2 (13.3%)	4 (21.2%)
Song Lyrics	9 (60.0%)	11 (57.9%)

Students overall indicated greater levels of familiarity with genres that fell more

into the academic domain than the pop-culture domain. For example, over 80% of the

students in both sections of ENG 102 reported having written argumentative papers and

book reports, yet no more than 22% of students reported writing reviews for pop-culture

works (movies, video games, etc.). It should be noted that the questionnaire asked

students to select genres they have written in, not just genres they are familiar with—it

could hardly be argued that students are not familiar with multiple pop-culture genres in

general. Thus, it appears that the students' time in the classroom has been primarily spent on academic writing, thereby indicating a disconnect between the varied prior genre knowledge students possess and what they practice in the composition classroom.

Project 2 (Genre Analysis Essay)

For Project 2, students selected an academic genre, a workplace genre, and a pop-culture genre to analyze. Across all student papers, there were eight academic genres, seven workplace genres, and nine pop-culture genres analyzed (Table 4).

Table 4
Selected Genres for Project 2 (31 total genres)

Academic	Workplace	Pop-Culture
Research Paper (19)	Résumé/CV (17)	Blog (10)
Scholarly Article (6)	Cover Letter (6)	Movie Review (7)
Abstract (1)	Business Email (3)	Yelp Review (5)
Book Report (1)	Journalistic Articles	Forum (2)
Compare-and-Contrast Essay (1)	(2)	Song (2)
Five-Paragraph Essay (1)	Complaint Letter (1)	Twitter (2)
PowerPoint (1)	Law Briefings (1)	Advice Column (1)
Rhetorical Analysis (1)	Military Forms (1)	Science Fiction (1)
		YouTube comment (1)
Total Genres	8	7	9

Across the three domains, the distribution of selections was more balanced among pop-culture genres than academic and workplace genres. For the academic and the workplace domains, there was a primary genre that most students chose to analyze, with a secondary genre that was selected by the second-largest group of students. For instance, 61.3% of student elected to analyze the research paper, with scholarly articles being the second most common selection at 19.4%. For workplace writing, 54.8% of students analyzed résumés, and 19.4% of students analyzed cover letters. Thus, for both domains, two genres made up at least 74% of students' analyses. In contrast, the pop-culture genres saw more variation in student selection. There was not a single genre that took up most of the

responses, with the most commonly selected genre (blogs) constituting 32.2% of students' pop-culture genre analysis. The second most commonly selected genre, movie reviews, was selected by 22.6% of students, followed by Yelp reviews making up 16.1% of responses.

Pre- and Post-Surveys

To get a better sense of what genres students felt they understood and valued, a pre- and post-survey was administered during Project 2. The survey was made up of eight statements, with the Statements 1-5 focusing on how confident students felt in their understanding of genres and Statements 6-8 gauging levels of perceived value:

1. I am able to identify multiple genres/types of writing.

2. I am able to identify the purposes of specific genres.

3. I am able to identify the demographics of audiences for specific genres (age, gender, race, personal beliefs, expectations, etc.).

4. I know the writing conventions of multiple genres.

5. If I see an example of a text from a specific genre, I can figure out what the writing conventions of the genre are.

6. I think being able to write in multiple genres will be helpful for my academic career.

7. I think being able to write in multiple genres will be helpful for my professional career.

8. I believe that learning about non-academic and non-professional writing genres (like pop-culture genres) can still help me understand and develop my writing skills for other contexts.

For each statement, students used a Likert scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being "Strongly Disagree" and 5 being "Strongly Agree." The survey also included blank space for students to elaborate on their Likert answers The first survey was administered before Project 2 started, when students had not received any formal instruction on genre in ENG 102.

After completing the survey and beginning the unit, students received their first lesson on genre—a lesson that covered the purpose, audience, and conventions (textual, visual, and audial) surrounding different genres. The discussion began with students identifying genres—most of them selected music, movie, and book genres—and then in groups informally deciphering the elements of those genres. As the unit progressed, students were given examples of genres (two Yelp reviews and two CVs) and asked to compare and contrast the elements of those examples. In one case for the Yelp reviews, students determined that the inclusion of photos (of the food or the restaurant) was a convention, but not every review needed to include photos, especially if the review was of a location that already had a large number of photos already on their Yelp page. For CVs, students determined that while section headers were typically required, the order of those sections depended on the context and the audience's expectations—a CV for a university professor in a STEM field would have likely presented the Research section earlier on, while a CV for an adjunct professor at a community college might have the

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Teaching Experience section on the first page. Through these comparisons, students explored how genre conventions can be malleable depending on context.

Students continued similar analysis of genre in Project 2, in which they selected their own genres from the academic, workplace, and pop-culture domains to review. After submitting Project 2, students completed the post-survey, and answers saw an overall increase[2] on the Likert scale (Appendix D). For example, regarding Statement 1, there was a 0.733 increase in ENG 102-1 and a 0.786 increase in ENG 102-2. For Statement 4, there was a greater gap in the upticks between the two sections: ENG 102-1 had a 2.0 increase between the pre- and post-surveys, while ENG 102-2 had a 0.8929 increase. While some students experienced a decrease in their Likert numbers—four students in ENG 102-1 and five students for ENG 102-2—most of these students only had a decrease for one of the eight statements.

The responses for Statements 6-8 are of particular note as they reveal the changes (if any) students underwent in their perceptions of value regarding the three domains, especially the pop-culture domain (Table 7).

Table 7
Average Responses for Pre- and Post-Survey Likert Scale

Statement	ENG 102-1 Pre-Survey	ENG 102-1 Post-Survey	ENG 102-2 Pre-Survey	ENG 102-2 Post-Survey
6	4.60	4.93	4.58	4.71
7	4.13	4.67	4.21	4.71
8	4.60	4.73	4.47	4.71

[2] Due to issues extraneous circumstances, five students in ENG 102-2 were unable to submit a post-survey. These students' pre-survey responses were therefore not factored into the calculations of net change in pre- and post-survey responses.

Both sections of ENG 102 responded that while learning about multiple genres would be more helpful for school than for work, it would still be beneficial overall to understand different genres in general. Regarding Statement 8, both sections of ENG 102 placed value on non-academic and non-professional writing genres for developing their writing skills for other contexts, with this belief strengthening in the post-survey. For all three statements listed in Table 6, the post-survey shows that students' beliefs in the value of academic, workplace, and pop-culture genres were strengthened after the unit on genre (Project 2).

Although there was an increase in the level of agreement students had with Statements 6-8, the *types* of value (their reasoning for finding value) varied across each of the three domains. When students expanded on their Likert responses in the pre- and post-surveys, their responses revealed several themes that shaped how they valued different genres.

Value Themes in Learning about Genres for an Academic Setting.

One of the most prevalent themes in students' open-ended responses for Statement 6 on the pre- and post-surveys was *writing for broad future academic contexts*. Multiple students wrote about the unpredictability of their coursework in general and drawing from genre knowledge to navigate unfamiliar situations, evidencing metacognition with attention to forward-transfer:

- "Academic writing will still play a role in my life for a while, and you never know exactly what kind of writing will be required of you going into a new class" (ENG 102-1).

- "I believe in order to be successful, you need to be well-rounded. Although I may not use all these genres in my academic career for long periods of time, I do believe it is beneficial to be introduced to them because I may need them later on" (ENG 102-1).

- "Being able to write in multiple genres is very helpful because it will expand my writing, and it will make it easier for me to write papers that will need a type of genre based on the prompt" (ENG 102-2).

- "Yes, being able to write in multiple genres would be helpful for my academic career, because if I can write in multiple genres regarding the academic writing, it could be easy for me to complete most of my academic writings" (ENG 102-2).

Rather than considering their current standing in ENG 102—which explicitly asked students to analyze and write in multiple genres—students noted that being cognizant of various genres would line them up for greater success in other classes. These other classes would not necessarily be English classes, as only two of the students used the "English" descriptor. In regards to the expectancy-value theory, students here anticipate coming across multiple genres in a variety of classes. As such, they express motivation to immerse themselves in different academic genres to improve the opportunity for transfer.

The theme of writing for future academic contexts was also very much linked with *writing for the teacher*. While students indicated that knowing how to write in different genres would help them reach different audiences, the only time the audience was specified was when students were considering what their teachers would want them to write:

- "Teachers require various genres to be written each semester. Therefore, it is valuable to be well-rounded and know how to be able to write in multiple genres" (ENG 102-1).

- "Each teacher has their own preference on writing…so I think being able to write for any of those genres will help" (ENG 102-1).

- "Academic essays give a sense of what kind of student you are to your instructor. It's a way to showcase how cultured you are, your writing influence, or simply how much you care about what you are doing. Writing in multiple genres in an academic context will definitely play in your favor" (ENG 102-2).

- "I know professors do get tired of reading such similar things, and it will make my writing different" (ENG 102-2).

In these four excerpts, we can see another theme regarding writing for the teacher. The first two excerpts view genre as a means to appeasing or satisfying the instructor—another student in ENG 102-2 even writes that multiple genres "would help me get better grades, I would think." But in the third and fourth excerpts above, the teacher's desires are connected to the student's own ethos as a writer. In the third excerpt, the respondent implicitly links academic genres with one's own worth as a student—to be well-versed in genre is to be "cultured" and demonstrate thoughtfulness. The fourth adds the notion that a student should be thoughtful enough to write in a fashion that wouldn't bore the teacher—not because the student's grade will be at risk (as is implied in the first and second excerpts), but because it will be the mark of a good writer overall.

Value Themes in Learning about Genres for a Professional Setting.

A common thread between the responses for Statement 6 and for Statement 7 was the idea of broadness. In Statement 6, students acknowledged the vast possibilities of putting knowledge into practice in the classroom—having diverse courses with diverse instructors would likely result in students having to consistently adjust and readjust their writing, and being aware of the different genres and conventions would aid in the endeavor. For Statement 7, though, the broadness is not attributed to different contexts— rather, broadness is linked to skillset. Students framed genre knowledge as another tool that could help propel them forward as an employee, not unlike being bilingual or having certain certifications. That is, genre knowledge would contribute to *general workplace qualifications*:

- "Your career is not set, so there could be a time when you think you will only need to write [one way], but your boss is looking for [something else]" (ENG 102-1).
- I'm sure it will be helpful in the aspect of working because you will be skilled, and experience is the key" (ENG 102-1).
- "I have not decided what I want to do in life yet. I know that being able to have a variety with writing will always be a good skill to have for most careers" (ENG 102-2).
- "Diversity in writing can always be helpful, being a jack-of-all-trades" (ENG 102-2).

Echoing the sentiments of external stakeholders in higher education who are preoccupied with the readiness of college graduates for entering the workforce (see Chapter 2),

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students are attentive to the importance of having marketable skills. The marketability of diverse writing skills is even more important for the students who, like those listed above, do not have a specific job or field in sight just yet—genre knowledge in this case can prepare students for unforeseen workplace duties.

For the students who did focus on specific jobs, there was a split in themes. The majority of students who specified their intended majors were open to learning about various genres. Several students planned to enter fields that require substantial amounts of writing or fields grounded in education, and, unsurprisingly, they considered genre knowledge important for their work. These responses contributed to the theme of *career-essential transfer*:

- "I hope to have a career which involves writing, such as a professor or a journalist, so all writing skills will be helpful to my career" (ENG 102-1).
- "As an aspiring teacher, learning to write in multiple genres will greatly benefit my professional career" (ENG 102-1).
- "Some professions like journalism, authors, screen-play writers may need to know how to write in multiple genres" (ENG 102-2).

In contrast to students planning to enter writing-intensive professions, other students explained that the nature of their future profession contributed to *minimal opportunity for transfer*:

- "I am going to be an accountant and won't have much use for multiple genre writing in that career field" (ENG 102-1).

- "I guess. I don't think it is a bad thing to know how to write in multiple genres, but I am becoming a neonatal nurse, so I don't know how many papers on analyzing a book I will have to write" (ENG 102-2).

- "I will not need to write a poem in my professional career" (ENG 102-2).

In the above responses and those similar, students who did not believe that knowledge of different genres would be helpful for their careers identified genres that clearly did not align with their intended fields. In the case of the third excerpt above, there is no doubt that neonatal nurses would not be responsible for writing literary analyses, and, as the student in the fourth excerpt (a business major) believes, writing poetry is likely not a common occurrence in business management. But the majority of students who were in or entering non-writing-intensive fields still found *balanced opportunity for transfer*:

- "I do not think I will ever write a literary analysis in my career, but I expect to write emails, reports, and write-ups" (ENG 102-1).

- "At least where I work, there are really only [a few] genres of writing I use. Professional (to my higher ups—emails), or casual, quick notes (to my coworkers—communication). You don't need to know how to write fiction, for example, in the workplace" (ENG 102-1).

- "Since I am going into nursing, being able to write research and lab reports will help me out. Also, I would have to write patient notes in the future, and knowing other writing styles other than a five-paragraph essay would help me out" (ENG 102-2).

- "This is important to know for my professional career, once I get my degree in marketing, in order for me to understand the different audiences and writings for

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things such as research and knowing what appeals to these audiences" (ENG 102-2).

Students identifying a balanced opportunity for transfer fit between the *career-essential transfer* theme and the *minimal opportunities for transfer* theme. They acknowledged that while familiarity with various genres would be helpful, they would not be pulling from their entire fund of genre knowledge within their career. As a result, the students in this category appear to possess a greater degree of metacognition than their counterparts in the *minimal opportunities for transfer* camp—they understand the contextual constraints around genre and neither force transfer nor altogether abandon the possibility of transfer and relevancy in different types of writing.

Value Themes in Learning about Pop-Culture Genres.

When gauging the value popular culture can have on learning about composition and improving writing skills, students who followed up their Likert response in their post-survey for Statement 8 with an explanation almost entirely praised popular culture. Students included the idea of *greater interest* in their responses:

- "Yes, it would be helpful in understanding and developing my writing skills. Reading things like pop-culture genres would be more interesting than articles or essays written for educational journals" (ENG 102-1).
- "I believe this is true because [popular culture] will help me get out of my comfort zone with writing and allow for me to step out of the common writing that we usually do for all English classes" (ENG 102-1).
- "[Popular culture] is also way less boring than learning about research papers and all that kind of stuff" (ENG 102-2).

- "I am much more interested in pop-culture genres anyway, and it is important to stay in the know" (ENG 102-2).

The students listed here who deemed popular culture interesting noted that the traditional academic genres were not as effective in piquing their interest in the subject. When linked with the expectancy-value theory of motivation, the disinterest toward academic genres creates a problem: "learners must be *willing* to engage in mindful abstraction to generalize from past learning to new learning situations" (Driscoll & Wells, 2012). With popular culture creating greater interest than academic writing for these students, there is a greater likelihood of engagement with and transfer of rhetorical and composition concepts.

Part of the interest in popular culture in the classroom has to do with *relatability*—the material, said students, would connect to elements of their life outside of class:

- "I strongly agree with this statement because I feel that things are easier to learn if you can relate them to something you know about already and will result in a better understanding of the subject. It has already helped me remember things related to this class because of the relation to popular culture" (ENG 102-1).

- "I strongly agree that learning about non-academic and non-professional writing genres will help me develop my own writing skills because on a daily basis I will use more informal writings than academic writing" (ENG 102-1).

- "I believe [popular culture] can still help and develop writing skills because all the writing we are going to do in our lives are not going to involve academics" (ENG 102-2).

- "Yes, because we use social media on a daily basis, so it still has an effect and will help you with your writing skills" (ENG 102-2).

In these responses, students demonstrate awareness in their composing skills and the contexts in which they do (or will) write. The willingness to engage with the material stems from the material's relatability, likely creating more opportunities for the mindful abstraction Driscoll and Wells discuss. Moreover, the transfer that can occur is not just forward transfer (transferring knowledge into future contexts), but lateral transfer as well (across current contexts).

But greater interest and relatability were not superficial ideas—students did not just report that popular culture would be "more fun" than traditional academic genres. Instead, they believed that pop-culture genres would have multiple benefits as they learned about composition. Students asserted that integrating popular culture in the writing classroom would promote *creativity*:

- "Yes, because I believe pop-culture genres allow me to express my creativity when writing" (ENG 102-1).

- "This type of writing can inspire creativity and interest in writing that may not be so apparent in other forms of writing" (ENG 102-1).

- "Things like reviews and song lyrics can be helpful to writing because it forces people to think differently and organize their ideas in a different way" (ENG 102-2).

- "There are so many blogs out there and they're all written in many different ways…it shows me that even though in class we're all writing about the same thing, our essays will all be different" (ENG 102-2).

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The rigidity in conventions of many academic and workplace genres can lead to a tedious learning environment for FYC students, and the tedium is exacerbated due to FYC's common designation as a "required" course that students have to wade through. The pop-culture domain does indeed have its own set of conventions, but because it is a more malleable domain, the creativity that manifests in student work provides a unique outlet for students to experiment with their work with relatively little risk.

Along with being able to express their ideas in a creative fashion, students stated that popular culture would benefit them because they would be *learning about the diversity of composition* as a whole:

- "I have now found myself dissecting a movie review or blog and figuring out what route they [the authors] are going in the writing" (ENG 102-1).

- "Comprehension in pop-culture genres…will round out my entire understanding of conventions and further my insight when writing so I could possibly combine genres in the future" (ENG 102-1).

- "[Popular culture] can expand your knowledge in the different writing styles. The different writing styles could come up, and knowing how to understand them can be beneficial" (ENG 102-2).

- "I think learning about non-academic and non-professional writing genres can still help me understand and develop my writing skills because it teaches how to write in a more natural way" (ENG 102-2).

- "I do believe [popular culture] will help me because it shows the difference between the genres, and all the genres don't have the same language of writing. It

will help me separate the language used in the various types of genres" (ENG 102-2).

This set of responses identifies several features of learning about the diversity of composition through popular culture. The students believe they can learn more about multimodal texts (first and second responses) and about textual features within different genres (fourth and fifth responses). There is also the belief that popular culture provides an avenue for production (second and fourth responses). In learning of modality, textuality, and production, students gain a well-developed understanding of composition.

Several students linked learning about composition to *timeliness*—popular culture could offer students a more comprehensive overview of writing in a constantly-changing context:

- "It's important to be up to date with modern genres as well in order to be successful" (ENG 102-1).
- "Yes, I think as time goes on, it will help me understand the new ways in which people are writing, but also it is never a bad thing to know more than you expected" (ENG 102-1).
- "This is a growing 'field,' and I believe it is important to at least understand the convention and social impact of these genres" (ENG 102-1).
- "YES! The world around us is so involved with pop-culture that it would be lame not to. It allows students to realize that social media and pop-culture isn't insignificant, and there are different styles when writing that way" (ENG 102-2).

Even with these listed benefits, there were two students who still did not consider popular culture to have much value. One student in ENG 102-1 wrote "I do not believe this aspect is too important in learning and developing my writing skills" because "learning about professional writing is more important." Another student in ENG 102-2 shared a similar sentiment, arguing that popular culture could "help by expanding your mindset," but "it really wouldn't matter if you are mainly writing in academic and professional" contexts. Overall, however, the vast majority of students who provided an elaboration to their Likert response for the surveys reported holding some form of value for popular culture.

Findings and Implications

The data presented within this chapter gives greater insight to what students value in the composition classroom. Assuming instructors are not taking the deficit approach when teaching students, it should come as no surprise that students already have rich funds of knowledge when it comes to composition. If there are doubts, the writing experience questionnaire makes it evident that students are, in fact, familiar with writing in many forms and in many settings (Table 2). But, the levels of familiarity (Table 3) and the reports of how often students are writing (Table 1) are quite telling—students are writing predominantly for school and, as such, are writing predominantly within the academic domain. If one of the goals of composition is to prepare students for future writing contexts, the current set-up which privileges academic writing is problematic. While it could prepare students for writing in other classes, it does not take much account of other forms of and settings for composition. This, in turn, could lead to two major issues: students are implicitly taught that academic writing is the only type of valuable

writing, and students are not given the practice necessary to engage with writing they will undoubtedly do once they are done with their courses.

The genres that students selected for analysis in Project 2 overall were diverse. There were seven to nine different genres per domain (academic, workplace, and pop-culture), but the distributions point toward less diversity in the academic and workplace camps. Students almost seemed to have a "default" for genres to analyze, as over two-thirds of students chose either the research paper or scholarly article for their academic genre and a cover letter or résumé/CV for their workplace genre. However, there was greater diversity in the number of students picking a certain pop-culture genre, with no similar "default" choice taking the majority (Table 4). A possible explanation for such a shift in choices between the three domains could be that students took advantage of what they may perceive as "less restrictive" conditions and branched out into different styles of writing they consistently engaged with outside of school.

Indeed, students shed light on the restrictiveness of academic genres in their pre- and post-survey responses. For Statement 6 ("I think being able to write in multiple genres will be helpful for my academic career"), students did acknowledge that knowledge of different genres would prepare them for *writing in broad academic contexts*, but in many cases, success in these different classes was limited to *writing for the teacher*. The students believed that they would be in a better place to 1) meet the expectations of the teacher and thus receive a favorable grade, 2) demonstrate to the teacher that they are strong writers and students because they clearly put effort into their work, or 3) try a different approach in their writing to keep the teacher interested in the paper.

Writing in a professional setting was not viewed to be as restrictive as the academic setting in students' responses. For Statement 7 ("I think being able to write in multiple genres will be helpful for my professional career"), students had more varied response. Some reported that knowledge of multiple genres contributed to *general workplace qualifications*, valuable in making them more marketable in general. Those who had a specific career path in mind either labeled genre knowledge as *career-essential* (if they were going into a writing-intensive field) or as something that would result in *minimal opportunity for transfer*. There were also students who found *balanced opportunities for transfer*—which is, one might argue, one of the more helpful and realistic outlooks, depending on the profession. These students realized that while they may not need a vast understanding of genres to be successful at work and accomplish their duties, they would still benefit from understanding the features and conventions of certain genres related to their career.

In contrast to responses on academic and workplace genres, Statement 8 received responses almost entirely in favor of composition grounded in popular culture. As many scholars have argued already, popular culture elicits *greater interest* among students (Friedman, 2013; Gainer, 2007; Williams, 2014), and the data supported this notion—students favored popular culture for being more exciting to learn about in contrast to more traditional academic genres, like research papers or scholarly articles. The interest was also linked to *relatability*, with students asserting that popular culture was more relevant to them in their day-to-day lives. As one student noted in the previous section, this relatability made it easier to remember concepts from class since she could connect course content to her life outside of the classroom. Along with the interest in and

relatability of popular culture, students expressed valuing non-academic and non-workplace writings as a way to round out their knowledge of *the diversity of composition*, especially considering the constantly changing, evolving, and burgeoning varieties of writing that reflect the *timeliness* of popular culture. One student's declaration that popular culture "allows students to realize that social media and pop-culture isn't insignificant, and there are different styles when writing" sheds light on and critiques the imbalanced perceptions of values in composition.

The findings here still give some credence to taking certain approaches or steps in FYC classes. First, instructors can resist privileging academic- and workplace-oriented writing in their courses, namely by balancing their curricula to be more inclusive of different styles of writing. Fishman and Reiff (2008) set a helpful example in their own FYC course design that other instructors can emulate:

> Thinking especially about our desire to increase students' awareness of how writing can be used in different ways for different purposes, we also chose to integrate an expanded range of texts, including multi-media and digital texts, more strongly into our courses. As we began program-wide curriculum revision, we revised our outcomes to emphasize the ways in which emerging multimedia, multimodal, and multi-disciplinary FYC curricula inform the acquisition and transferability of academic literacy learning, a move necessitated by the changing nature of writing in the academy. (p. 7)

A shift in how we present composition to our students—from an approach that favors one domain over the other to a more inclusive overview and representation of writing—would

be beneficial in several ways. First, instructors would expose students to topics that are relatable and relevant outside of the academy, potentially sparking further interest in composition—even if students will be going into other fields, the interest itself would play a factor in learning more about composition and therefore preparing students for future writing contexts. Students could also feel reaffirmation that their outside interests and funds of knowledge are valuable, instead of placing those interests as secondary to more "serious" forms of composition. And, instructors could demonstrate their own familiarity with new and exciting genres in which students likely already engage in, thereby creating a bridge between the two parties and more effectively facilitating learning about composition. Or, to the same end, instructors can shed the expert role in composition that Downs and Wardle (2007) defend and instead create a democratic classroom environment in which students can take on the mantle of "expert," as the World of Warcraft players in Alexander's (2009) study did in a composition course, or as Williams' (2014) students and the fans in Stedman's (2012) study did.

Second, instructors could make clear the value of different types of writing. Having different types of texts and assignments in the curriculum does not guarantee that their value will be apparent—explicitly addressing issues of value is necessary. Particularly when non-academic and non-workplace genres are considered of lesser importance, clearly outlining the audience, purpose, and conventions of pop-culture texts can facilitate rhetorical transfer and cross-contextual transfer within and beyond the classroom (DePalma & Ringer, 2011, p. 141). Like Project 2 for ENG 102-1 and ENG 102-2 discussed in this chapter, instructors could promote student analysis of different

kinds of composition and encourage students to reflect on how they might use these genres themselves beyond FYC (instead of just for the sake of FYC).

Third, both instructors and students could consider past, present, and future writing contexts and connect them to the content in FYC. Instead of dismissing students' prior knowledge, asking "students to practice skills in various contexts and encourage[ing] them to understand how skills can be generalized" (Driscoll, 2011) would broaden the appreciation and knowledge both students and instructors have of writing, thereby creating more opportunities for learning about composition in its different contexts and manifestations. Moreover, students would actively be working against the "mutt genres" so thoroughly criticized by scholars like Wardle (2009) who challenge decontextualized assignments with no concrete audience or purpose besides fulfilling the requirements set by the instructor. The remix projects discussed in Chapter 4 offers examples of such projects with a pop-culture lens.

Given their responses in their surveys, it is rather safe to assume that students are open to popular culture having a more prominent place in the classroom and that this openness spans beyond superficial interest. As one student in the ENG 102-2 section so eloquently put it:

> I think in some cases, the use of pop-culture could even be more effective than your usual, run-of-the mill instruction. For some people who don't relate easily to the strictly academic approach to teaching, this could be a more relatable way to forge new connections to assist in the learning process. Learning with non-professional/non-academic writing can help by showing students that writing

doesn't only take place in the classroom and how prevalent writing is in an

everyday setting. These writings can help people develop personal opinions, help

by gaining knowledge of a various amount of subjects, and help expand one's

ability to write.

Such outcomes would be welcome by any FYC instructor—and opening up our course

content and our own perceptions to popular culture seems like a reasonable trade.

CHAPTER 4

Part 2 of Study

Colleges and universities offer numerous sections of FYC—anywhere from the double- to triple-digits per campus—resulting in a great deal of variation in learning outcomes, texts, values, and concepts. Chapter 3's breakdown of the values students attribute to different writing domains highlights just how much (and how different) perceptions of value can be across the spectrum of genres and modalities. Deciding the content of an FYC curriculum can be troublesome to begin with, but the issue is compounded with colleges and universities across the nation taking their own curricular approaches to the teaching of composition.

As a means of offering some cohesion and consistency with regards to learning outcomes, the "WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition (3.0)" (2014) developed by the Council of Writing Program Administrators provides FYC instructors with a core foundation on which to build their courses. The Statement acknowledges "that the process of learning to write in any medium is complex" and offers an explanation of writing as "both individual and social and demands continued practice and informed guidance." The outcomes themselves reflect this notion, with the Statement honing in on four main goals for FYC: (1) Rhetorical Knowledge; (2) Critical Thinking, Reading, and Composing; (3) Processes; and (4) Knowledge of Conventions. Interestingly, the Statement does not specify what content should be included—it only suggests that students should be aware of "a variety of texts for different situations," thereby leaving the door open for both writing studies and theme-based courses.

Even with the four main goals of the Statement, it is important to recognize that one of the functions of first-year composition (FYC) is similar to function of other general education courses: the class is not necessarily meant to begin students' induction into a specific field, but rather to help students develop working knowledge of the course material that could then be applied to different contexts. We work with our students in our FYC courses to build on their knowledge of audience, purpose, genre, process, and rhetorical strategies with the understanding that most of them will not become writing scholars and with the hope that they will instead be able to apply this knowledge to other situations that require them to write, be it a research paper for a psychology class or a cover letter to a potential employer—just as the WPA Outcomes Statement acknowledges the need for students to learn about different genre conventions.

Learning of the intricacies of composition and genre necessitates working beyond traditional academic essays, yet FYC students could, problematically, satisfy all four outcomes listed in the WPA Outcomes Statement without ever moving past a small cluster of academic genres. Give students a rhetorical analysis of a text, a research paper, and a paper in which they analyze the conventions of a few genres, and a case can be made that students have successfully attained competency in composition since the outcomes have been met. However, a more nuanced model of composition in the classroom is one that integrates threshold concepts as cornerstones. In the recently published collection *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts in Writing Studies* (2015), threshold concepts are defined as "concepts critical for continued learning and participation in an area or within a community of practice" (Adler-Kassner and Wardle, p. 2) and present five major concepts for composition: (1) writing is a social and

rhetorical activity; (2) writing speaks to situations through recognizable forms; (3) writing enacts and creates identities and ideologies; (4) all writers have more to learn; and (5) writing is also always a cognitive activity. Yancey (2015a) deems these concepts an "articulation of shared beliefs providing multiple ways of helping us name what we know and how we can use what we know in the service of writing" (p. xix). However, the sheer number of threshold concepts—the five major concepts are each separated into several sub-concepts—is overwhelming for some writing scholars and instructors:

> It sounds a lot like talking about writing, perhaps at the expense of doing writing, and makes me wonder if Wardle and others are making matters overly complicated. It seems to me that the threshold concepts for college writing are the never-go-out-of-style basics of audience, purpose, and the writing process. (Fallon, 2014, p. 367)

The aforementioned "basics" of college writing are widely accepted as the fundamental concepts for a rhetoric-based composition course, but Adler-Kassner and Wardle's nuanced breakdown of threshold concepts provides instructors with more latitude in incorporating different types of writing into their curriculum. As an example, when expanding on the second threshold concept that writing speaks to situations through recognizable forms, Ball and Charlton (2015) declare that all writing is multimodal. They also challenge two misconceptions about multimodal texts. First, they explain that equating multimodality with digital technologies is not an accurate representation of multimodal texts (p. 43). Some texts are produced digitally but not distributed through digital technologies, while other texts are neither digitally produced nor digitally

distributed. Second, and of special note, is Ball and Charlton's challenge to the misconception that monomodal texts even exist:

> Monomodality, then, is used (incorrectly) to signify a lack of multiple media or
> modes when really what a user might mean is that a structure like a five-
> paragraph essay *privileges* the linguistic mode over the spatial or visual modes.
> Thus, writing as a knowledge-making activity…isn't limited to understanding
> writing as a single mode of communication but as a multimodal,
> performative…activity that takes place within any number of genres. (p. 43)

In bringing up the privileging of certain modes over others—in the case of FYC, the almost-excessive privileging of the linguistic mode over the spatial and visual modes— Ball and Charlton reinforce the need for composition courses to expand notions of value with regards to "texts" and to give students a more prominent role as a composer of different genres.

Ball and Charlton's opposition to monomodality and embracing of multimodality in all of its forms intersects nicely with remixing, which Stedman (2012) categorizes as "an overarching term that includes any act of composition that involves the deliberate manipulation of previous passages, clips, or samples throughout a majority of the work" (p. 108). Most of us are familiar with remixing in songs—singers sometimes draw on elements of older songs (lyrics, beats, music videos) and incorporate those elements into their own music. Movies can also be remixed with new iterations of stories or characters if the movies are for different audiences with respect to age or nationality. But remixes need not appear solely in the popular culture domain—students can remix personal

statement letters for applications to different schools, while those on the job hunt might remix their résumé into a cover letter. These examples demonstrate the assertion made by Roozan (2015a) that "rather than existing as autonomous documents, texts always refer to other texts and rely heavily on those texts to make meaning…texts are profoundly intertextual in that they draw meaning from a network of other texts" (p. 44). And, in the case of modality, it's not just the textual features that are remixed—visual and audial elements are also open for remixing.

To better understand how threshold concepts and learning outcomes manifest in remixes, and therefore if there is any value to be placed in remixing within the FYC classroom, this chapter offers a deeper look into four examples of remix projects from the two sections of ENG 102 in the study introduced in Chapter 3. While Chapter 3 of this dissertation looks at what values students ascribe to different texts, this chapter examines how valuable those types of texts are in actually promoting student learning of rhetoric and composition. Building on the singular focus on popular culture remixes in Stedman's 2012 study, the student examples presented in this chapter have been selected from multiple domains to provide a more complex understanding of the malleability of remixing. After providing an overview of the course project (Project 3) and student work, the individual projects will be analyzed to determine if and how they demonstrate the student's understanding and execution of composition. The threshold concepts from *Naming What We Know* will be used as the lens for this analysis and will be followed by a discussion of how remixes (including those grounded in popular culture) enable students to engage with the threshold concepts in meaningful ways.

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Overview and Examples of Project 3 (Remixing) in ENG 102

Project 3 (Appendix A) in the ENG 102 project sequence was meant to give students the opportunity to work with a variety of genres and modalities. The project was broken down into two parts: Part A was the creative section in which students composed an original piece and then remixed it for a new context, and Part B was the reflective section in which students discussed which rhetorical choices they made in Part A and why those choices were made. Students were free to choose the types of texts they created for Part A—they could pull from the academic, workplace, or popular culture domains, and their remixes could cut across domains if they so desired. The one major consideration students had when deciding on what to do for Part A was time: students were encouraged to select genres and modalities that would yield a finished project by the due date. This limitation prevented students from composing larger multimodal texts, like a mini-movie or a comic book.

The four projects analyzed in this chapter were chosen according to domain and relative level of success. The first project was housed in the academic domain, the second in the workplace domain, the third in the popular culture domain, and the fourth shifting from a workplace setting to a popular culture one. All four of these projects also received a passing grade and therefore demonstrate elements of successful remixes. Having a range of successful remix projects allows for observations to be made about any discrepancies between domains, like if a certain domain was not as conducive for students to effectively draw on or transfer rhetorical knowledge. As each example shows,

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however, the different remixes still provided a valuable learning opportunity for the students.

Example 1: Academic Remix

For her project, Margaret, a student in ENG 102-1, chose the academic domain as the foundation for her remixes. Having recently completed a project on marine life for another class, Margaret wished to build off of her original PowerPoint presentation on bottlenose dolphins. Her presentation includes stylistic elements typically found in student-made PowerPoint presentations. Each slide of her presentation contains a short title (Fun Facts, Behavior, Communication, Diet/Hunting, Reproduction, Life Span, and Conservation Laws) behind a blue wavy background to contribute to an aquatic theme, as well as a single image relating to the title. For example, the slide on bottlenose dolphins' diet and hunting patterns has an image of a dolphin eating a fish, while the slide on reproduction habits includes an image of a baby dolphin swimming alongside its mother.

In addition to the single images, Margaret includes four to six bullet points (also in a blue font) to convey the relevant details about dolphins. She realizes, though, that in the case of a school PowerPoint presentation, less is more:

Typically, PowerPoints are presented to groups of people that are not always interested in the topic so a different type of format is necessary. There are a multitude of slides that primarily uses bullet points to separate ideas within each one. Bullet points eliminate the need for paragraphs and let the audience stay

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focused on the more important information and avoid loss of interest from

cumbersome chunks of information. (Part B of Margaret's Project 3)

Indeed, Margaret's use of bullet points in her PowerPoint presentation are written to

avoid "cumbersome chunks of information" that could potentially overwhelm the reader.

Margaret manages this in two ways: simple sentences and sentence fragments. With

bullet points that are comprised of simple sentences, Margaret keeps the subject-verb-

object format and writes sentences like "Female dolphins are called cows" and "Dolphins

do not chew their food." Other bullet points drop the subject altogether—her

Diet/Hunting slide, for instance, include lines like "Uses echolocation to find prey" and

"Are active predators." The only slide that has more complex sentences is the

Conservation Laws slide toward the end of the presentation. On this slide, Margaret uses

bullet points to list three quotes pertaining to protective legislation. These quotes serve as

brief overviews of what could be complex laws and regulations, thereby helping

Margaret keep her presentation accessible for an audience of her classmates and

instructor. Her final slide, the References slide, wraps all of her bullet points together

with source information so the audience may look up and verify the points Margaret

brought up, whether those points are general descriptions or specific quotes.

For her remix, Margaret transformed her PowerPoint presentation into a one-page

informational article for a wider audience interested in dolphins in general, such as

visitors at an aquarium. Moving from a multi-slide presentation to a single page prompted

Margaret to condense certain elements while retaining a similar theme. Like her

presentation, Margaret's article keeps a nautical feel, this time with a single background

image of a simple underwater scene and one small image of a pod of dolphins. The article itself covers communication habits (and as such is titled "Dolphin Vocal Communication"), and the content is separated into paragraphs on the topic spanning two columns. Unlike her PowerPoint, Margaret follows article conventions by removing all sentence fragments in favor of complete sentences. Each paragraph contains three to four sentences of description conveyed in an easily accessible fashion, such as this paragraph:

> These whistles may also be used to communicate emotional distress by creating louder noises that can be heard over a longer distance. This is beneficial when a dolphin strays too far from its pod, and they will whistle for each other until reunited. Mother dolphins also use this to keep track of their calves. (Part A of Margaret's Project 3)

Along with complete sentences, Margaret directly embeds quotations from the outside sources she included in her presentation into her article. The quotations are cited according to the APA citation style because the topic (marine biology) is housed in the sciences. Still, the piece overall is neither extremely academic nor informal. As Margaret explains,

> The content consists of basic knowledge about communication between dolphins. The use of quotes is an effective tool for this article to add a sense of validity. That is an important factor for an article that is intended to be more formal than not. Without being too lengthy or boring for the reader, this piece covers a fair amount of information even with its short nature. (Part B of Margaret's Project 3)

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As indicated by her reflection in Part B of Project 3, Margaret's original and remixed pieces are driven primarily by consideration of her audience. Knowing that the audience will be learning about sea life, Margaret designs a nautically-themed presentation and article with appropriate visuals. She also demonstrates her awareness of a wider audience reading her work (as opposed to a purely academic audience) and adjusts the content accordingly—rather than being long, convoluted, and jargon-heavy, her sentences and points are easy to read and understand.

Example 2: Workplace Remix

Robert, a particularly successful ENGL 102-2 student looking to further strengthen his marketability as a job applicant, selected the résumé as his genre of choice for Project 3. For his original creation, Robert opted to make a traditional résumé—one that is visually, structurally, and content-wise more conservative in nature and quite common in the professional setting. At the top of his résumé is his name in larger font, and his contact information is listed right below on a single line, with his address, email, and phone number separated by vertical lines. The body of his résumé is split into two sections: on the left are the section headers of his résumé, and on the right are the relevant details. The section headers—Objective, Skills & Abilities, Experience, Education, and References—along with his name are in a soft green font. In contrast, the relevant details to the right of the section headers are all in black, with important titles and names in bold. He also lists the locations and dates of his jobs and schooling in chronological order and uses bullet points to concisely present relevant details.

The stylistic elements of Robert's résumé are minimalistic in nature, and he acknowledges the importance of this approach in his breakdown of his project:

> The structure [of traditional résumés] tends to be very concrete, with bullet points demonstrating the duties at your previous workplace. If a résumé is cluttered and unorganized it will usually not make the cut to the final few that are left to review. With such strict parameters, it can sometimes be difficult to express your individuality you are trying to convey to your potential employer, which can be quite frustrating in certain job fields. For example, in my résumé, there is nothing but structured bullet points and a very negligible amount of color. (Part B of Robert's Project 3)

Robert's awareness of the potential lack of individuality in traditional résumés is evident in his own résumé too. All of his bullet points avoid personal pronouns and instead begin with verbs—rather than begin with an "I" statement ("I work with high-profile clients"), Robert drops the "I" altogether to have "Worked with high-profile clients." The only use of personal statements—perhaps Robert's subtle attempt at creating a slightly more unique résumé without potentially offending a potential employer's traditional sensibilities when it comes to these documents—is in the very first section: the Objective section. In this section, Robert writes,

> My objective is to grow within an establishment which provides the best and most unique customer service in the area. I thrive in a setting that instills the crucial value of blending fun and energy with professional stamina. With my knowledge and passion for this industry, I can bring a warm and upbeat personality to the

liveliness of your business. I look forward to being a member of your service

team. (Part A of Robert's Project 3)

Because Robert has been in customer service for several years (as indicated on his

résumé), this more personal approach can work to his advantage. Demonstrating his

enthusiasm for the social element of work—the "blending [of] fun and energy with

professional stamina"—can be a selling point for him in the customer service industry,

especially if the job requires employees to maintain a strong rapport with customers.

And, by mentioning his "warm and upbeat personality," Robert injects a personal touch

that could prompt his reader to delve further into his otherwise customary résumé.

Robert's remixed résumé Project 3 allows for a much more unique approach.

Having a background in graphic design from a technical college, Robert decided to

transform his traditional résumé into one geared toward the graphic design industry. The

shift in style is immediately noticeable, as Robert explains:

Rather than a crystalline structured collection of one's previous duties, a graphic

artist resorts to a different medium for their résumés. Instead of a black and white

sheet of paper with some writing, designers tend to use their artistic personalities

to their advantage…graphic designers use colors and visual aids to accompany the

information they are trying to present. (Part B of Robert's Project 3).

While Robert's original résumé has minimal color to highlight his name and section

headers, his remixed résumé presents the same shade of green as a much more dominant

accent color. Besides his name and section headers, there are green borders on the top

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and bottom of the document. Several other design elements make their way into the remix as well for the potential employer in the graphic design industry reading his résumé. For instance, rather than having his name and contact information listed on two lines, Robert separates these elements with overlapping circles that also contain small images to designate the type of information (like a small icon of a house in the circle that contains his address). Right next to his name and contact information, Robert provides a bar chart at the top of his résumé to outline his proficiency in relevant skills like customer service and Photoshop. And, although hardly—if ever—present in traditional résumés, the remixed résumé includes a section toward the bottom with links to Robert's social media profiles, highlighted by the logos of the social media sites being referenced. These links could prove very helpful for Robert in the graphic design industry, as the sites could be avenues through which Robert networks and showcases his portfolio.

Certain elements are still consistent between the two résumés, to be sure. Robert even acknowledges that "the content is usually the same [for graphic design résumés]: past work experience, current skills, and contact information" (Part B), and adds the same sections and bullet points from his original résumé. Some minor adjustments help make the content work better with the new layout and audience—Robert adds a few lines to separate the sections and presents his time at the technical college (where he studied graphic design) as the first item on his résumé under the Education header. He also changes the font from Times New Roman—a more "formal" font"—to a sans serif font that makes it easier for the reader to go through all of the bullet points that now occupy less space because of the newly added design elements.

Threads from Robert's traditional résumé are clearly woven into his remixed résumé. The color choice, the section headers, the content—all of these elements make their way from the first résumé to the second, with certain parts amplified to appeal to a new audience. Robert expressed that the most rhetorically effective approach might be somewhere in the middle, indicating a significant level of awareness when it comes to persuasive and multimodal composition: "the result of combining a well-structured résumé format with an artistic twist may be just enough to separate you from the rest without disqualifying yourself altogether" (Part B of Robert's Project 3).

Example 3: Popular Culture Remix

Moving away from the text-based genres and remixes presented for the academic and workplace examples for Project 3 is Marie's pop-culture project for ENG 102-1. Marie's interest in social media—namely, YouTube and Instagram—serve as the basis for her decision to film and remix workout videos. For her original piece, Marie directed a YouTube workout video titled "Legs and Glutes for Days!" for a male audience, and she reflected on how her intended viewers play a significant role in her rhetorical choices:

> [Through interviews with men] I've learned that men would rather see visual cues than reading to find out what to do especially with learning. Another reason YouTube videos are a huge hit with the gentlemen is that they are given the actual time and process within a workout to look at form and physique. With that being said the audience of my piece is primarily men looking to experience muscle gain or gain knowledge of exercise equipment etiquette. (Part B of Marie's Project 3).

In working with the premise that a predominantly male audience would be mainly

concerned with proper exercise form and routine, Marie creates a stylistically simple and

straightforward video to not distract from what the viewers are expecting to see. The

workout video features a young man named Calvin completing three different leg

exercises (deadlifts, weighted squats, and leg presses) at a gym, with each exercise

consisting of three sets of six reps. Each exercise begins with the exercise name, number

of sets, and number of reps listed on the bottom corner of the screen so as to maximize

screen space for Calvin's demonstration of the exercise. The video then stays on Calvin

as he goes through each set, and the recommended weight for each set is listed at the

bottom. As Calvin moves on to the next set, the new weight is listed at the bottom, and

the camera moves to a new angle so the audience can see the proper form for the exercise

from multiple points of view. Throughout the eight-minute video, Calvin does not speak

to give instructions, nor does Marie overlay music over the video—anything that takes

attention away from Calvin's form and the exercises themselves is either minimized or

removed altogether.

Marie's remix moved the original workout video to a female audience on

Instagram, an image-based social media site with a massive number of "Fitspo"—or "fit

inspiration"—accounts. Unlike YouTube videos, Instagram videos are capped at thirty

seconds, so Marie had to condense the content significantly while appealing to a new

demographic. She used the time constraint as a way to capitalize on the interest of her

female audience, though: while the original video for men has Calvin going through

every single set and rep for an exercise, the remixed video shows each exercise for about

ten seconds for "women looking for a quick preview of workout routines" (Part B of

Marie's Project 3). Marie herself demonstrated the same three exercises from the original video in this remixed one, as "presenting a female…will give off a better replication of exercise [form]" (Part B of Marie's Project 3) for the female audience.

Despite the shift in audience, the remixed video has noticeably similar features as the original video. Marie maintained the simple theme for her captions by foregoing colors, outlines, or textboxes, which is especially important given the short length of the video. She also goes in the same order as Calvin when presenting the exercises, and she uses the same machines and environment. And, again, there is no background noise or music to distract from the exercise demonstrations. These constants in her videos are deliberate:

> Even though the audience is different and some content, the actual idea and the exercises generated in each video are still the same. So instead of just limiting to one sex or type of person, we were able to remix and expand the audience for all types. (Part B of Marie's Project 3)

In essence, then, Marie kept the spirit of the original video alive in the remixed video, with subtle changes being implemented to meet the constraints of the platforms (via video length) and presentation of information (via audience preference).

Example 4: Cross-Domain Remix

John begins his ENG 102-2 project with a traditional résumé—one that very much overlaps with the structure and style of Robert's template. As such, the standard elements of the traditional résumé are quite apparent in John's piece. John starts his résumé with

his name (although he begins with his last name first) and his contact information right below. On the left-hand side are John' section headers (Objective, Skills & Abilities, Experience, Education, Leadership, and References), all in a dark shade of blue. To the right of these headers are the relevant details pertaining to those sections presented in bullet points, with job titles, school names, and reference names in bolded letters.

In contrast to Robert's traditional résumé, John's piece has noticeable inconsistencies in his content and format. What could be minor issues in a different context—like a missed comma between his job title and company name, or excessive spacing between sections, or a typo that changes "transfer" to "trandfer," or even shifts between first-person statements ("I am dependable") to bullet points dropping the subject altogether ("Worked as an assistant")—can lead to a larger problem in the context of John's target audience. John states in his analysis of his project that "the audience would include educated professionals and potential employers" who would expect him to be "very formal and professional" (Part B of John's Project 3). The disconnect between audience expectations and the "lower-order" issues in Jonh's résumé has the potentially to reduce the rhetorical effectiveness of the résumé, but his remix offers a bit more leeway in these mechanical issues.

John takes a unique approach in his remix by keeping a workplace genre but reframing it for a non-workplace purpose—rather than writing a résumé for a job, John uses a résumé template to creatively break-up with a significant other. This new genre, the "break-up résumé," fuses the conventional structure of a résumé with casual, unpunctuated, ungrammatical, shorthand, and even profane language more evident in

popular culture and familiar to the intended audience, his teenaged ex-girlfriend Sabrina. John starts his break-up résumé like his traditional résumé, with a name and contact info. However, the name used is "John' Ex Sabrina," with Sabrina's contact info filled out in a way to immediately establish John's disdain for his audience: Sabrina's email is "youbrokemyheart@yahoo.com," and her phone number is "666-666-666 (because shes satan)" (Part A of John's Project 3). John also includes an Objective section right after to make clear "I am moving on, I already reactivated by tinder and I have like 50+ matches so I don't even need you" (Part A of John's Project 3). In a break from traditional résumés, John adds two pictures right below the Objective section: one image of him and "Sabrina" from their high school prom, and the same image right next to the first with a coffin Photoshopped over Sabrina to symbolize the death of the relationship.

The remaining sections of the break-up résumé line up with standard résumé headers. John writes,

> I then turned my work history into the history of our relationship. Starting with timeframes of our relationship from when we became friends, to when we dated, and ending with when we broke up. I turned my skills section into the reasons why I hate Sabrina, but I kept the references section. I just changed the professional references into references of people who didn't like Sabrina, and why they didn't like her. (Part B of John's Project 3)

For example, the "work history" section—now titled "From Friends to Break-Up"— includes date ranges for each significant stage of John and Sabrina's relationship. Under each date range are bullet points with more details of the relationship, analogous to the

bullet points in traditional résumés outlining responsibilities of the listed positions. From June 2014 to September 2014, John notes to Sabrina in his bullet point that "You were kind of a bitch, but I still liked you." From October 2014 to February 2016—when the two were in a relationship—John's bullet points include information on how the couple always posted Instagram photos of each other with romantic quotes. The break-up on March 21, 2016 includes two detailed bullet points:

- I went through your phone and saw you messaging "josh" when I brought it up to you, you acted like an even BIGGER BITCH and said we were done.

- You said he was better than me and that you were getting sick of me and its my fault that you were talking to other guys. (Part A of John's Project 3)

The remaining sections include similarly detailed bullet points. For the Reasons Why I Hate You section (standing in for the traditional Skills section), John includes statements like "You're very conceited and rude" and "You're a ho" (Part A of John's Project 3). John includes three people in his References section as well, as traditional résumés usually have two to three names:

- My mom - she knows how you are

- Your mom - because you're such a bitch that your own mother doesn't like you

- Every guy on tinder - because I bet you slept with them all (Part A of John's Project 3)

Reflecting on Part A of his project, John makes clear the parallelism that runs through the structures of his original and remixed résumés but also acknowledges the

drastic shift in tone between the two pieces. He understands that "the audience went from a potential employer to [his] ex-girlfriend," and as a result, he "changed the tone from professional to very unprofessional and petty" (Part B of John's Project 3). To be sure, the language John uses for his remix may not be appropriate for a diverse audience. However, considering who his specific audience is in the remixed résumé—and considering his attention to formal language in the traditional résumé—the shift in his two pieces indicates a level of understanding regarding audience impact on a text's composition.

Analysis

The original and remixed pieces in the four examples above illustrate the depth of students' rhetorical awareness, particularly when linked to the threshold concepts in Adler-Kassner and Wardle's *Naming What We Know*. To more accurately reflect how the students' multimodal projects evidenced an awareness of the threshold concepts, the concepts' descriptions have been slightly altered below, with "writing" changed to "composition."

Concept 1: Composing Is a Social and Rhetorical Activity

The common theme permeating all four students' rationale for their rhetorical decisions is awareness of the intended audience. As one of the cornerstones of the classic rhetorical triangle, the audience (the viewer, the listener, or the reader) is an ever-present consideration in composition. However, because the rhetor is not always present when the audience reads, hears, or sees the "text," there is a need "for writers to fictionalize their audiences" (Lunsford, 2015, p. 20) and use that fictionalization as the basis for

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certain rhetorical choices. And, as the result of the audience oftentimes being removed

from the rhetor when reviewing the text—the audience, for instance, could be reading a

speech written by the rhetor years after the fact instead of being present during the initial

delivery of the speech—the audience is in a unique position to (re)create the rhetor's

intended meaning. The rhetor thus composes through what Duffy (2015) considers

"ethical decision-making":

> What shall I say? To whom do I speak? What obligations follow from my words?
> What are the consequences? Whether or not the writer voices such questions, they
> are inherent in the act of communicating with another. (p. 32)

In each of their projects, the four students mentioned in the previous section indicate

awareness for the expectations or assumptions carried by their intended audience, but the

"fictionalized" descriptor used by Lunsford is not entirely fitting since it can create some

confusion regarding the existence of the audience. An audience could be imagined (or

"fictionalized"), but that does not mean the audience is ambiguous. Take, as an example,

a student writing a cover letter for a specific job as part of an assignment for class: that

student may not officially submit the cover letter, so he or she would "fictionalize" the

audience, but he or she would still have a very specific audience in mind (the company).

In other words, a fictionalized audience is not the same as a fictitious audience—the

former is a type of placeholder, while the latter is an ambiguous entity.

Each student has a fictionalized audience with realistic expectations in mind, and

as such makes rhetorical choices geared toward that group. Margaret understands that her

audience for her PowerPoint presentation might include people who are not inherently

interested in her topic. So, she utilizes bullet points with a simple sentence structure to avoid inundating the viewer with excessive information. When remixing her PowerPoint into an article, Margaret sees her audience shift—instead of being viewers who may not exactly be thrilled about sitting through an entire presentation, her imagined audience is now comprised of readers who are more open to taking in larger amounts of information. This, in turn, prompts Margaret to use more complex sentences to form complete paragraphs.

Robert and John both had very similar imagined audiences for their original résumés: a nameless employer of a business in a white-collar industry. Believing their potential boss to be more conservative in business practice, Robert and John follow traditional forms in their résumés. With little stylistic accents, their résumés are straightforward and easy to read (or even skim) while presenting relevant background information. But as soon as the perceived audience changes—as soon as Robert targets an employer in a more creative field and John elects to write to his ex-girlfriend with whom he is on bad terms—the traditional résumés change. For Robert, the content largely remains the same in his remix, as he still is pursuing a white-collar job, but the style shifts. He foregoes the original template for one with more color, shapes, and graphics. John takes the opposite approach with his remix—the structure is still the same, but the content is modified to attack his ex-girlfriend in a clear and concise fashion, from their rocky dating history to the "references" who would speak against Sabrina.

In contrast to the other three projects, Marie's project spans the widest audience, so it can be argued that she does the most "fictionalization" of her viewers. Her fictionalization, however, is not necessarily grounded in fantasy, as she bases her

interpretation of her audience on the trends noticeable in fitness videos geared toward men and women. In her original video targeting males, Marie underscores form and weight (as is the emphasize in bodybuilding videos for men) and has Calvin perform all exercises at various weights while rotating the camera to capture his form from multiple perspectives. But for female viewers, Marie envisions an audience that is less concerned with putting on muscle and more interested in general fitness (as is the case with the female Fitspo community). Her remixed video—while still showing the same exercises—removes weight and rep count in favor of a simple demonstration of how to use the machines properly.

Admittedly, the fictionalized audiences the students had in mind may not be entirely accurate—Margaret's PowerPoint viewers could very well be interested in dolphins while Marie's female viewers could be concerned with proper form and routine to build muscle, for instance—but the issue is not with whether the imagined audience for a FYC project is absolutely and entirely accurate. The four students all anticipated the expectations of an intended audience that, based on the context of the genre, would occupy the realm of possibility. All of their decisions as they composed functioned to reach their different intended audiences, resulting in their texts fulfilling both social and rhetorical expectations.

Concept 2: Composition Speaks to Situations through Recognizable Forms

Remixes by nature illustrate the second threshold concept that writing speaks to situations through recognizable forms, even if some remixes create a new, hybrid genre (as is the case with John's break-up résumé). The arguments made by Ball and Charlton

(2015) and Roozan (2015a), which were presented in the introductory section of this chapter, point to the mixing and melding of a variety of compositional elements, including text, sound, and visuals. Margaret, Robert, John, and Marie use and reuse these elements throughout their projects and adjust as necessary to stay within the conventions of the genres they worked with.

Because Margaret composes and remixes in an academic domain, her project is especially sensitive to what Lerner (2015) calls "enacting disciplinarity":

> The relationship between disciplinary knowledge making and the ways writing and other communicative practices create and communicate that knowledge are at the heart of what defines particular disciplines. As an example of the relationship between writing and disciplinarity, consider the use of citations. (p. 40)

Margaret's PowerPoint and informative article both function for what can essentially be considered a "student" audience—even if the viewer or reader is not actually a student, he or she is still taking on the role of a learner in an academic environment. A major part of composing for the academy is acknowledging via citations the ideas from other sources that have been implemented in one's work. As such, Margaret includes citations in her work and uses the APA style since her project is grounded in the sciences. But beyond that, Margaret also includes other elements that signal a recognizable form: her use of slides with short bullet points, images on a background design, and section titles and headers point toward a PowerPoint presentation, while her use of short paragraphs with minimal images follow the form of an article. Both her original and remixed pieces

thus maintain the appropriate format in both citations and format for an audience of learners.

While Margaret's presentation and article allows for some room for creativity in terms of the design and information presented, Robert and John's original résumés are much more rigid and show how "the textual structures [of certain genres] are akin to the fossil record left behind, evidence that writers have employed familiar discursive moves in accordance with reader expectations, institutional norms, market forces, and other social influences" (Hart-Davidson, 2015, p. 39). So "fossil-like" is the form of the résumé that Robert and John have nearly identical documents style-wise: the name and contact information at the top of the page, the section headers on the left, and relevant details on the right. This is not to suggest that all résumés look the same, but the distribution, spacing, and content of information are quite telling. Even when Robert and John write for less-conservative audiences in their remixes, the form of the résumé is so engrained in their schema of the genre that, once again, the major elements (aligned spacing, section headers, bullet points with details, etc.) are clearly visible.

Like the text-based résumés, videos that circulate social media all have their own forms and conventions, and Marie's videos are no different. Consider the Vine and Snapchat video formats: a Vine video lasts seven seconds and therefore often includes quick cuts if there are multiple shots, and a Snapchat video can have cartoon-like filters placed over the subject being filmed. Being that Marie's videos are meant for an audience on different social media platforms, she avoided some choices in favor of others. Instead of the quick cutaway scenes in Vines, Marie makes sure to keep the camera focused on one position for an extended period of time so viewers could see the proper form for

exercise. And unlike the playful and whimsical filters of Snapchat, Marie eschewed extra designs and effects so that those serious about exercising would not be turned off by frivolous stylistic elements. As such, Marie keeps recognizable forms for both videos, with each form's conventions dictated by the social media platform hosting her videos.

The remixes for Project 4—as well as remixes in general—are indicative of the importance of recognizable forms. Stedman (2012) explains that a text is not a remix "simply because it cites the words and ideas of a previous work" (p. 108), and the students to an extent realize this. Regardless of how close their original was to their remix genre-wise, each student worked with the conventions found in their genre of choice while simultaneously molding the content and style to fit the new rhetorical situation. Even in remixes that crossed domains—as was the case with John's break-up résumé— there is an underlying idea that remixes work on a "continuum, not a strict definition, with a fuzzy border" (Stedman, 2012, p. 108). Margaret, Robert, John, and Marie use their projects to move further along the continuum instead of barely crossing the threshold.

Concept 3: Composition Enacts and Creates Identities and Ideologies

The third threshold concept complements the first—because composition is a social and rhetorical activity, the rhetor assumes, creates, and enacts identities that function within the rhetorical system at hand:

> We claim, challenge, perhaps even contest and resist, our alignment with the beliefs, interests, and values of the communities with which we engage. The extent to which we align ourselves with a particular community, for example, can

be gauged by the extent to which are able and willing to use that community's

language, make its rhetorical moves, act with its privileged texts, and participate

in its writing processes and practices. (Roozan, 2015b, p. 51)

Roozan's claim about the overlap between a particular community and the rhetor's

engagement with that community underscores the many ways in which interactions with

genre conventions can impact the ethos of the rhetor. Should a rhetor decide to challenge

a particular community's beliefs, he or she might forego the textual conventions of that

community. The symbiotic relationship between the rhetor and the audience also mean

that audiences can create identities (whether for themselves or for the rhetor based on his

or her rhetorical choices). Thus, each party simultaneously assumes their own identity

while performing to the other's expectations.

Margaret's project demonstrates how these identities play out in a rhetorical

context in academia. As the presenter of a PowerPoint and an author of an informative

article, Margaret assumes—if temporarily—an expert role on marine biology. She

provides information on dolphins ranging from their diet to their mating habits, and she

uses both a visual-heavy medium and a text-heavy medium to convey her points. In turn,

her audience assumes the role of the student or learner. The shift in the dynamic—with

Margaret a teacher instead of a student—pushes her to compose her texts in a fashion that

would be appealing to her viewers and readers, whether through simple and

straightforward bullet points on her PowerPoint slides or APA citations throughout her

article. She says as much in her reflection that "cumbersome chunks of information" (Part

B of Margaret's Project 3) should be avoided to keep audience interest, even though she

is composing in an academic domain that could demand lengthy and information-dense

responses. Her project grounded in disciplinary writing therefore illuminates "how writing in new contexts is not only about learning abstract conventions [like APA citations] but also about learning how to *be* within a group with social conventions, norms, and expectations" (Estrem, 2015, p. 56).

Robert and John's original résumés also exemplify the writer assuming an identity they believe their audiences would expect. As is the case with résumés as a whole, the writer wishes to demonstrate that he or she is the best applicant for the job—that he or she possesses all of the qualities expected of employees in general. These qualities are reflected in Robert and John' résumés; formatting reveals attention to detail, the content itself demonstrates communication skills, and the résumés as a whole indicate professionalism and seriousness about the job. In Robert's case, adherence to the traditional résumé outline felt stifling in terms of expressing individuality, but he deemed the choice a necessity. In contrast, he notes that the visuals in the remixed résumé for a graphic design position give a greater sense of his individuality as an applicant, providing a sampling of his creativity and design acumen.

Of note is that the two pop-culture remixes emphasize the identity of the audience over the identities of students creating the pieces. For his break-up résumé, John makes clear that his audience—his ex-girlfriend Sabrina—has a despicable character that warrants his harsh tone. The instances of unsavory language, which include calling Sabrina a "bitch," a "ho," and "Satan," as well as his bullet points listing Sabrina's inappropriate relationships behind John' back, are used to create an identity for Sabrina that, in a sense, justifies John' decision to break up with her in an unconventionally forceful way. He also brings in other parties to shape Sabrina's identities—besides his

own experiences with Sabrina, John draws on the "expertise" of his mother, Sabrina's mother, and even random men on Tinder in a References section at the end of the résumé. Despite writing to a very specific audience, John is still, as Roozan (2015b) discusses, challenging the community with which he engaged.

The creation of identity is also strong with Marie's videos, but for a different reason than John's remix. Rather than form an identity for her audience, Marie composes her videos in a fashion that allows her viewers to imprint their own identities onto the people in the workout videos. Each video focuses on only one person—Calvin for the video for men and Marie for the video for women—and neither do anything in the video to establish a unique identity for themselves. They do not make eye contact with the camera, and they do not speak. If anything, they are a means to demonstrate proper form and equipment use while embodying a sort of blank slate. The viewers, potentially numbering in the thousands given the social media platforms hosting the videos, can thus insert themselves into the video by envisioning themselves as the person demonstrating the exercises. Such self-insertion is important—necessary, even—as the viewers will likely re-enact the very same movements on their own. Therefore, by minimizing the video performers' own identities (or, one could argue, creating a "blank-slate" identity for themselves), Marie's videos present new identities for the audience that "are conveyed, acquired, and made to seem 'natural,' without obvious alternatives or need of explanation" (Scott, 2015, p. 49) on Marie's part as the composer.

Concept 4: All Composers Have More to Learn

As evidenced by the years of required English courses throughout middle school, high school, and college, students always have more to learn about composition. This fourth threshold concept is therefore a bit more difficult to see embodied in a finished piece of student work, as learning spans before and after the work is submitted for assessment, yet it is an important concept nonetheless:

> This [threshold concept] enables us to recognize that it is impossible to make a valid judgment of a student writer's ability by examining a single sample of his or her writing, particularly a sample of writing that does not address a specific rhetorical situation…For the same reasons, one cannot assume that a student who has demonstrated the ability to write a literary critical analysis of *Romeo and Juliet* as a senior in high school will also be able to write a paper outlining issues currently being discussed in response to new developments in research on childhood diabetes for a college course. (Rose, 2015, p. 61)

In the case of FYC, instructors have a semester's worth of observations into how students learn. Students can learn more about genre conventions and effective rhetorical moves and practices during class, workshops, or student-teacher conferences, and they can also use the feedback they receive after turning their work in for a grade to revise, adjust, and hone their composing practices.

In the broadest sense, the students in this chapter have experienced and learned about different kinds of practice and efforts in their projects:

Practice can involve writing in different spaces, with different materials, and with different technologies…As digital technologies have become ubiquitous, writers have become more aware of all technologies…Likewise, writers necessarily also work in multiple modalities—whether the modality be on the page on the page through document design or on the networked screen bringing words, images, videos, and sound into a single text. (Yancey, 2015b, pp. 65-66)

Indeed, these practices overlap with the multimodalities espoused by Ball and Charlton (2015) and the four projects in this chapter. Whether the original or the remix, each piece composed by the students necessitated a level of familiarity with different modes, mediums, and forums. For example, Margaret's PowerPoint and Robert and John's résumé necessitated an awareness of both textual and special features, while Marie's videos linked the text, visuals, and sound. Learning about these elements spans before and after the creation of the "texts" as well—not only did Margaret, Robert, John, and Marie pull from their prior knowledge about the genres they worked with, they also have the instructor's comments on their work to shape how they approach those various types of composition in the future.

Part of this learning experience is linked to revision, which can even be presented as a "re-visioning" of an original piece of work into a remix. The re-visioning involves a negotiation of differences, and what Matsuda (2015) refers to a "negotiation of language differences" (p. 68) can be extrapolated to other differences pertaining to other rhetorical and contextual factors. Take as an example Robert's project: Robert understood the audience of his original résumé to be more traditional in nature, but he did not want to completely remove any indicators of individuality when using a standardized template.

As such, Robert negotiates some room in his résumé to appease his reader while injecting some creativity via minimal color (used on his name and on the résumé section headers). In the new context for his remixed résumé, Robert has much more maneuverability in his visual choices. Composing to a more artistic audience in the graphic design industry, Robert's negotiation of difference is no longer such a concern, rendering him able to be more open with his creativity and experimenting with new visual features.

Of course, each of the projects could be fine-tuned in some capacity. Margaret's PowerPoint and article, along with John's résumés, would benefit from some visual revisions (image and color choice, text placement, and so on), while Marie's videos could potentially incorporate some music to catch or retain viewer attention that might otherwise move on if the exercise routines themselves seemed monotonous. But to transform these opportunities for revision into learning experiences, students' experiences with different composing practices must be supplemented with assessment. To clarify, assessment need not be a final grade: "These assessment activities can be open, fluid, and tentative, as in feedback on an early draft that may include a few critical questions or a conversation in which the writer explains why they made a particular choice" (O'Neill, 2015, p. 67). In other words, although the students discussed in this chapter all received grades and feedback after submitting they work, the process leading up to the project submission was also filled with consistent assessment and reassessment. This included one-on-one conferences with the instructor and a reflective component (Part B of Project 3) that prompted students to choose, assess, and revise their rhetorical moves. Based on their experiences leading up to this project in class, as well as their reflections, the

students demonstrated through their work the constant pursuit of learning—and even re-learning—about the nuances of composition.

Concept 5: Composition Is (Also Always) a Cognitive Activity

Like the threshold concept before it, the fifth threshold concept can be difficult to see embodied in a student's final draft of a project. This is especially true if there are no assessments or reflective opportunities provided to the student so they can share their thought process while they composed their texts. The cognitive component of the students' thought process is not enough for FYC, though. Tinberg (2015) clarifies that cognition and metacognition when composing are two separate things:

> The objective is not just to have our students produce effective writing—that is, to respond in logical and thoughtful ways to the question posed. We also want our students to demonstrate consciousness of process that will enable them to reproduce success. Metacognition is not cognition. Performance, however thoughtful, is not the same as awareness of how that performance came to be. (p. 75)

The difference between cognition and metacognition can ultimately be viewed as the "what" and the "why." A student may know what the structure of a traditional résumé looks like—and they may duplicate that structure admirably when writing their own résumé—but that does not mean they fully understand why the conventions of that specific genre exist in the first place. In turn, the student may not be able to successfully adapt those elements within a new context.

Because Project 3 required an analytical reflection of the original and remixed pieces (Part B), both the cognitive and metacognitive processes students experienced are available in more explicit terms. In arguing for reflection being critical to a writer's development, Taczak (2015) writes that "this ability to theorize and question is especially important for writers engaging in new or especially challenging tasks because it helps writers relocate the knowledge and practices acquired from one writing site to another" (p. 78). By framing the reflection as a major part of the project itself, the students understood reflection as a deliberate activity—that the "what" and the "why" of their original and remixed pieces were to be closely studied rather than briefly reviewed in passing. Mindfully making rhetorical choices and being able to articulate the reasoning behind those choices facilitates transfer, and remixing by nature is grounded in the transference of ideas, content, and style across contexts.

The excerpts from students' Part B reflections presented in the previous section of this chapter underscore the "what" and the "why" surrounding the shifts from the original texts to the remixes. Note the cognition markers (underlined) mixed with the metacognitive markers (bolded):

- Typically, <u>PowerPoints are presented to groups of people that are not always interested in the topic so a different type of format is necessary. There are a multitude of slides that primarily uses bullet points to separate ideas within each one.</u> **Bullet points eliminate the need for paragraphs and let the audience stay focused on the more important information and avoid loss of interest from cumbersome chunks of information.** (Part B of Margaret's Project 3)

- The structure [of traditional résumés] tends to be very concrete, with bullet points demonstrating the duties at your previous employers'. **If a résumé is cluttered and unorganized it will usually not make the cut to the final few that are left to review.** (Part B of Robert's Project 3)

- **I've learned that men would rather see visual cues than reading to find out what to do especially with learning.** Another reason YouTube videos are a huge hit with the gentlemen is that they are given the actual time and process within a workout to look at form and physique. (Part B of Marie's Project 3)

- The tone I used was very formal and professional [since] **the audience would include educated professional and potential employers.** (Part B of John's Project 3)

Part of the reason why these projects were so successful is because of the intersection of the cognitive and metacognitive processes. With the students understanding why a certain rhetorical move is made or a genre convention is used, the transference and adaptation of those moves and conventions were (or perhaps even were not) effective in new contexts. With the situational awareness of composition, the students effectively relocated their knowledge into their remixes.

Remixing in the Composition Classroom

Before a successful remix project can even begin, the composer must possess a working knowledge of several things: of the audience, the modality, the purpose, the conventions, the surrounding context, and rhetorical strategies in general. And, this knowledge must be present for original pieces being remixed as well as the remix itself.

With our students being a part of discourse communities within and beyond the school setting, the opportunities for strengthening and expanding their funds of knowledge run deep. Using remixes as a pedagogical tool, therefore, has several important implications for instructors and students alike, and these implications tie back to the actualization of the five threshold concepts in writing studies, and by extension, a nuanced understanding of composition in an FYC course.

At the very least, remix projects address similar learning outcomes often present in more common projects found in the academic domain. Like research papers and rhetorical analyses, remixing asks students to produce work that is grounded in previous study of a given issue, topic, or text while demonstrating rhetorical savvy throughout the composing process. But, unlike these traditional projects, remixing offers more flexibility and opportunity to learn about different aspects of composition:

1. **Through remixing, students work with different—and real—audiences and contexts that highlight how composition is a social and rhetorical activity.** As opposed to "mutt genres" that do not serve any purpose beyond FYC and are often decontextualized pieces of work (Wardle, 2009), remixes ask students to transfer and apply their knowledge of rhetoric and composition into different contexts. The fictionalization of the audience that occurs as the student remixes is still more grounded in reality, whereas with an assignment like a rhetorical analysis—even one with the over-used preface of "Imagine you are writing to…"—is still ultimately only going to be read by the instructor. Put another way, there is a difference between imagining the characteristics of a real audience

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(fictionalization) and an entirely made-up (fictitious) audience altogether. Remixing minimizes the fictitious, nameless, and unknown audience in favor of negotiating social and rhetorical differences between the student and his or her tangible audiences.

2. **Remixing gives greater agency to the student.** With pieces like the rhetorical essay, the research paper, and the compare-and-contrast essay, and even with shorter pieces like the five-paragraph essay and the prospectus, students are often expected to write within rather rigid conventions. Many teachers, for example, tell students that within an essay, the thesis statement must be one sentence and must appear at the end of the introductory paragraph. In contrast, remixing promotes authorial choice—while the student still occupies a space punctuated by genre conventions, he or she can navigate these conventions and determine which ones to follow, to discard, or to adjust. There is a greater sense of ownership in remixing as a result, and this is compounded by the greater emphasis on process as well—instead of strict outlines provided by the instructor or present within the genre, students go through their own process of purposeful decisions and meaningful discovery.

3. **Remixing provides a space to experiment and practice with different types of writing.** Certainly, a significant portion of students' writing over the span of their college career will be academic in nature, so the decision to forefront academic writing in FYC is understandable. However, it will not be the only type of writing students will engage with throughout their life—students will not just be writing research papers and analyses, nor will they only be writing in a predominantly

text-based form. With remixing, students are exposed and even reminded of the different styles and modalities of composition. The text-centric approach of composition is no longer viable in a more predominant multimodal age, where visual and audial elements can also factor in creating a rhetorically effective piece. Moreover, bringing these varied types of compositions into the classroom leads to a space for instructors and peers to provide feedback and promote continuous learning beyond the essay.

4. **Remixing shifts what is often privileged in FYC to create a more realistic and balanced approach to the teaching of writing.** Encapsulating the previous three outcomes is the notion that remixing challenges the belief that only a select few types of composition are valuable and warrant studying in FYC. Looking at the four student projects discussed in this chapter, it's evident that composition outside of the academic domain (and even the closely-followed workplace domain) can still meet the expectations held for FYC and composition in general. By moving into other genres and modalities that often carry the "popular culture" descriptor with a negative connotation, students and teachers alike resist curricula that privilege academic writing over everything else. Students are also given the opportunity to transfer their own experiences and knowledge funds into the classroom by doing "the critical work of discovering the kinds of cultural, political, and economic assumptions contained within their own writing and within popular culture" (Villanueva, 2015, p. 58).

To clarify, these beneficial outcomes are not a call for entirely replacing traditional writing projects found in FYC with remix projects. Instead of *replacing*, remixing can

supplement the FYC curriculum. With pop-culture texts meeting similar learning outcomes as academic and workplace texts, the FYC classroom can become more open to different approaches in teaching and learning about composition.

Regardless of where it appears—whether in school, at work, or among the general population—a remix is inherently rhetorical in nature. To remix is to "negotiate meaning through networked systems of…appropriation and performance" (Stedman, 2012, p. 119), and in functioning within certain domains or genres, remixes push the composers to simultaneously create and recreate content and conventions. Explicitly integrating remixes into the composition classroom, and especially in FYC, opens the door for students to begin crossing thresholds.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

The preceding chapters explored the idea of "valuable" course content in some

capacity. Chapter 2 challenged the idea many stakeholders have that college-level courses

are valuable only if they prepare students for entry into the workforce—a sentiment

underlying the Spellings Commission Report and making rounds among policymakers,

administrators, and employers. Chapter 2 also pushed back against pure writing studies

models that tout writing about writing as more valuable than current FYC models that

explore topics like politics or popular culture. Chapter 3 moved away from the

workplace- and teacher-centric perspectives and instead explored what types of

composition students valued. Students reported valuing all three domains (academic,

workplace, and pop-culture) to some extent, but the pop-culture domain had the most

value themes present in student responses. In Chapter 4, student projects from each

domain (and one project that was cross-domain) were analyzed to determine if students

were meeting the learning outcomes of FYC via the threshold concepts of writing

studies—and if students working within a certain domain were more successful than their

counterparts.

The data from Chapters 3 and 4 indicate that students can "cross the threshold"

and effectively learn about composition when working within any of the three domains,

but that students perceive more value when working within the pop-culture domain.

Moreover, the "value themes" present in student responses on the pop-culture domain

were more varied. While value themes for composing within academic and workplace

domains tended to be about general success ("it will prepare me for future classes" or "it

will make me more marketable"), the themes for the pop-culture domain were more focused on how students can learn about composition specifically. In other words, using popular culture within FYC does not distract from composition—if anything, students can find more value in using popular culture to learn about composition than by using the more traditional academic genres.

This is not to suggest, however, that students wanted a purely pop-culture-based FYC class, nor that such a class would be the most effective route for teaching students about composition. This final chapter looks at what students valued in each of the course projects (if anything), and how CSP and WS factor into those perceptions of value and in the learning of composition. This chapter then concludes with the implications of the findings throughout this dissertation and how FYC content and perceptions of value can be rebalanced.

Course Project Reflection

As their final piece of writing in ENG 102, students were asked to reflect on which of the four course projects was most valuable to them and why. Students submitted these responses online on the last day of class, and they were free to select multiple projects (or none at all) when explaining their views of the course work. The Course Project Reflection prompt also made a distinction between the frameworks shaping the projects so students would be reminded of the purposes of the projects. The prompt was as follows:

This semester had four major projects:

1) Writing about Writing (reflecting on language and writing practices)

2) Genre Analysis (dissecting genre features/conventions of academic,

professional, and pop-culture writing)

3) Remixing (creating and re-creating a "text" for a different context)

4) Visual Composition (creating rhetorically effective images for specific

situations)

The first two projects were grounded in writing studies, which emphasizes

analyzing, reflecting on, and writing about writing. The third and fourth projects

are grounded more in producing or creating texts (rather than reflecting on them).

Discuss which of these projects you valued (or didn't) and explain why.

Sixteen students in ENG 102-1 and eighteen students in ENG 102-2 completed the

Course Project Reflection, and many of them described multiple course projects as

having value (Table 8).

Table 8
Course Projects Valued by Students

Type of Genre	Students – ENG 102-1 (16 total)	Students – ENG 102-2 (18 total)
Project 1	7 (43.8%)	10 (55.6%)
Project 2	11 (68.8%)	10 (55.6%)
Project 3	14 (87.5%)	13 (72.2%)
Project 4	10 (62.5%)	13 (72.2%)

For both sections of ENG 102, Project 1 received the lowest number of students stating it

was a valuable project—indeed, it was the only project to have fewer than half of the

class (in ENG 102-1) identify it as having value. On the other hand, Project 3 was the

most valued project in ENG 102-1 and tied with the Project 4 as the most valuable project

in ENG 102-2. Over half of the students in both sections of ENG 102 believed Project 2

was valuable as well, but given the distribution of responses, Projects 3 and 4 had a larger

impact overall with a total of fifty "votes," while the writing studies projects—Projects 1 and 2—had thirty-eight votes.

Similar to their reflections in Project 2, the Course Project Reflection yielded insight into the various values students held about the benefits (and potential drawbacks) of the different projects—and, by extension, the different frameworks shaping those projects. The value themes for the projects are discussed below.

Themes in Student Responses on Writing Studies Projects (Project 1 and Project 2)

The explanations students provided for why Projects 1 and 2 were valuable fall in line with the pedagogical reasoning behind writing studies in general; when writing becomes the object of study, students can *reflect on their writing practices* and *learn about different genres of writing*. One student in ENG 102-1 wrote:

> I valued both the writing about writing and genre analysis projects because they allowed me to examine myself as a writer. This class challenged me to reflect on my writing and adjust to new writing techniques, instead of what I would use during middle or high school.

A staple of the WS course model, writing reflections carries several benefits when done thoughtfully. Wardle (2009) expands on the benefits of this type of reflection, stating that it will contribute to mindfulness about writing practices, and, in turn, "teach general principles about writing—the very principles that novices need—but without framing them as decontextualized 'skills'" (p. 785). In the above excerpt, the student explicitly identifies new contexts to write in. She acknowledges that reflecting on her writing has helped her adapt her writing practices and knowledge for college, setting up the stage for effective transfer into the rest of the course and beyond it.

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Part of successful reflection and metacognition is the learning of writing—that is, to make abstractions of the general principles of writing, students must be exposed to different genres of writing in the first place. An ENG 102-2 student wrote: "I really value the first two grounded Writing Studies. Personally, it helps me learn what I might not know. It definitely made me realize there's more to analyzing than just words." Because genres function within larger communities—and because these communities have their own sets of values and identities—learning about a genre's purpose, conventions, audience, and consumption is imperative for entering the discourse community. This student's response exemplifies the notion that "in order to participate in these genres, writers must understand how writing . . . represents more than just 'words on a page'" (Adler-Kassner et al., 2012). The student outright states that there is more to "just words"—in acknowledging the larger features of the genre, the student is in place to make mindful abstractions and possibly write for transfer.

Reflecting on writing and learning about different genres could be the precursor for students to alter their writing style and composing practices in new contexts, whether for another class taken during the same semester or for a future writing situation. However, there were two other themes in student responses that point toward the potential issues with FYC projects grounded predominantly in writing studies. First, some students considered the projects *tedious*. Project 2, which draws heavily from the type of writing done in Downs' (2007) curriculum, received the following critiques:

- "The second writing assignment was incredibly boring and monotonous. I felt like I was boring myself and the reader within the first paragraph. Definitely my least favorite writing assignment prompt" (ENG 102-1).

- "The Genre Analysis assignment was okay. I had no problems with it, but I also didn't enjoy it. It felt tedious to me, I guess. It was busy work. I didn't really gain anything from it" (ENG 102-1).

- "The second project was the hardest one this semester. It did feel tedious at some points writing about all three genres" (ENG 102-2).

Following the expectancy-value theory presented in Chapter 3, students uninterested in the project could have lowered motivation and persistence in absorbing and transferring knowledge. With one student saying they were boring themselves and their reader during the project, and another student admitting they found nothing to gain from the writing studies project(s), some important considerations about the limitations of writing studies in general arise—especially since the learning outcomes from writing studies (namely, learning about writing and transferring writing knowledge) come into question.

Moreover, some students stated that Projects 1 and 2 were more like traditional academic papers that they have written in previous English classes. One student "preferred the reflective pieces to the creative ones because they required more analysis. Analysis is something I am more accustomed to" (ENG 102-1), while another student explained that "Being in an English class, I personally preferred doing the writing about writing and the genre analysis because they weren't a challenge" (ENG 102-2). The sense of familiarity could be helpful for students trying to navigate their projects for this (and other) composition courses. However, the responses above indicate that students favored Projects 1 and 2—which were designed to be similar to Downs' (2007) writing-about-writing curriculum—primarily because the projects were not challenging or pushing beyond what students have written before. Moving to more non-academic or non-

traditional projects—like those in the next section—is a possible way to address such redundancy and improve student engagement.

Themes in Student Responses on Non-Traditional Projects (Projects 3 and 4)

The responses geared toward Projects 3 and 4 moved away from what one might call "learning" themes (learning about writing practices through reflection and learning about genres through analysis) in favor of "doing" themes. That is, Projects 3 and 4 were described as valuable because they enabled students to put their knowledge into practice. One of the most prevalent ideas in the student responses was that Projects 3 and 4 promoted *creativity*. Comments included "On the third writing assignment, I thought it was a creative way to show how one idea could be translated into many different versions" (ENG 102-1), echoing Friedman's (2013) assertion that interacting with composition through popular culture offers students the opportunity to "explore something that interests them for its own sake—for reasons of intellectual curiosity, rather than because it is a step towards acquiring a necessary skill or credential" (p. 79). The student makes a nod to writing for transfer, so there is evidence of metacognition of his composing practices, yet while the learning is taking place, the student is also appreciating the freedom and agency he has in composing.

Such freedom and agency in composing can lead to greater engagement, as evidenced by another student's response: "I thought the visual aspects of the remixing and visual composition assignment gave me a chance to express my creative side and made me more engaged. There wasn't as much pressure to create something perfect" (ENG 102-2). Here, "the use of popular culture is perceived as a low-stakes activity. Students feel they have control over making meaning of popular culture" (Williams,

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2014, p. 115), thereby reducing anxiety over composing a text that aligns perfectly with the teacher's expectations. In giving students a low-stakes activity, the teacher fosters an environment in which students feel comfortable experimenting with and exploring different elements of composition—not only does this contribute to a more welcoming environment for students unfamiliar with or disinterested in writing, it also results in new and unique texts composed by students, not unlike John's break-up résumé in Chapter 4.

Unlike Project 2, which took on a more traditional essay format, the third and fourth projects' less-stringent structures were seen as valuable features. The ability to be creative also tied heavily with the idea of *production*—students were grateful to practice their unique composing skills instead of following formulaic project constraints. According to an ENG 102-2 student, "I enjoyed the remixing assignment the most because I got to…create my own thing…Nothing was super strict and we got to choose a lot of what we wanted to write rather than a specific topic." Referring to the teacher's choices for course content as potentially "super strict," this student acknowledges the freedom that comes with giving agency to the students—by having popular culture shape their projects, students can challenge the privileging of rigid academic projects.

Just as reflection is a key component of writing studies, production is a key component of critical media literacy. Garcia et al. (2013) argue that "by taking control of the production of media texts, a productive stance within critical media literacy allows educators to distribute the means and creativity for controlling and producing content beyond a traditional information elite" (p. 113). The "traditional information elite," which could refer to the instructors who value the informational academic genres like the research paper and the rhetorical analysis, is indeed challenged by students who prefer

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pop-culture-inspired production over academic reproduction, like the following ENG

102-1 student:

> Out of the texts, I more so valued the projects in which we were able to create
>
> rather than reflect. I only prefer this over the other because I enjoy the process of
>
> creating something that would bring entertainment to someone who needs a smile.
>
> Reflecting on writing, however helpful it may be to my education, is not as
>
> gratifying or fun as being able to make something of one's own and add a bit of
>
> their personality as well.

This student's response directly challenges the notion that academic and workplace

success is the be-all end-all of composition. Rather than take on the perceptions of value

touted by the "traditional information elite"—the employers, administrators, and

policymakers that make up a significant portion of FYC stakeholders—this student, who

produced a song for her remix project, understands that her own identity can reach a

diverse audience through composition and her rhetorical choices. In this sense, the

student's response intersects with a culturally sustaining pedagogy, which "seeks to

perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the

democratic project of schooling" instead of maintaining hegemonic ideas about what is

valuable in the classroom (Paris, 2012, p. 95).

Because Projects 3 and 4 were more creative than the first two projects, and

because they gave students the opportunity to create their own texts, students spoke

favorably of composing in different mediums. Thus, the *multimodality* of the remixing

and visual composition assignments appears as a prevalent idea in the Course Project

Reflection as well. Again, a link to culturally sustaining pedagogy appeared, as a student

wrote that "Remixing genres was by far my favorite since we used everyday material such as Instagram and YouTube videos that in reality were the same context just for difference audiences by recreating with visuals" (ENG 102-1). The student's positive response toward using "everyday material"—in this case, social media websites that play significant roles in students' non-academic lives and identities—reinforces the need for FYC instructors to acknowledge and make room for "pedagogies that are not filtered through a lens of contempt and pity (e.g., the 'achievement gap'), but, rather, are centered on contending in complex ways with the rich and innovative linguistic, literate, and cultural practice [of students]" (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 86).

Other student comments praising the emphasis on multimodality in Projects 3 and 4 included the comment "I really enjoyed the remixing assignment. The project forced me to learn to develop my writing abilities in different forms and contexts while getting the same message across" (ENG 102-1). In contrast to the responses for Projects 1 and 2, this type of comment points toward students stepping out of their comfort zone in a composition course by working with different elements—the textual, visual, and sometimes even audial elements—of a rhetorical piece simultaneously. Attention to the myriad of angles in tackling composition gives "composition specialists different ways to approach the complex acts of inventing, composing, and delivering" (Stedman, 2012, p. 109) instead of unnecessarily maintaining a curriculum that does not interest and does not prompt students in learning about different types of composition.

Overall, students appreciated broadening their understanding of and practice with multiple modes of composition. Project 3 saw students heavily incorporating visuals and audio features in their work, as only two students throughout both classes picked purely

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text-based mediums for their remixes. Meanwhile, for Project 4, all students worked with both visual- and text-based pieces as they created promotional images for four different scenarios. In contrast to Projects 1 and 2—projects that students expressed more concerns with—only one student believed that the pop-culture projects were uninteresting or unhelpful.

Embracing Student Values of Composition in FYC

If the students' reflections on the course projects are any indication, there should be more opportunities for FYC students to compose with multiple settings, genres, and modalities in mind. This is not to suggest that writing studies does not have its own merit—making writing the topic of study instead of the means through which students communicate ideas about other topics is a reasonable approach in FYC, and it does, ultimately, give students the opportunity to develop their metacognition by learning about writing practices.

However, a shift in how students are viewed must take place. Rather than viewing students as deficient, we need to acknowledge that students do carry prior knowledge into the classroom and can have an idea of what will be valuable for them—whether transfer-oriented or not. The study in Chapters 3 and 4 in this project gives us an idea of the direction in which we may wish to take the FYC curriculum. Based on the responses listed in Chapter 3, students do see value in writing within traditional academic contexts, but such writing was also connected with writing to please the teacher (and not, for instance, writing to learn more about a topic or to strengthen their writing in general). These responses implicitly demonstrate awareness of mutt genres, as students know that some writing projects will have no use beyond one or two specific classes for one or two

specific instructors. In contrast, students believed that composing within the workplace domain would offer greater opportunity for transfer of writing skills—students indicated that practicing these types of writing would not only help for general marketability, but for managing their intended jobs as well. A handful of students who intended to work in jobs that hardly have any writing, though, did state that learning about multiple genres would not be of particular use to them in their specific careers.

In contrast, the pop-culture genres had the most praise from students. A large selling point of popular culture was its ability to garner student interest in composition, and that interest was linked closely with relatability. Students stated that they could connect popular culture in the classroom to elements outside of their academic lives, and giving them the opportunity to treat popular culture as a valid avenue of study (in an FYC context) was reaffirming and validating. In turn, students reported learning about the diversity of composition as a whole, while the timeliness of popular culture could give them a more complete look into the ever-shifting contexts that shape writing.

With a project like remixing, students have the opportunity to engage in more deliberate and critical study of topics that interest and excite them while still learning about composition. As the sample remix projects in Chapter 4 demonstrate, students can move away from mutt genres and learn to compose for different (and more realistic) audiences and contexts that highlight how composition is a social and rhetorical activity. By selecting their original and remixed pieces, students also have a greater level of agency over their own writing, as they do not need to so rigidly follow constraints oftentimes present in pieces like the research paper and the compare-and-contrast essay.

Instead, students can experiment and practice with different types of writing and modalities.

Projects like the remix and nontraditional genres like those housed in the popular culture domain effectively shift what is often privileged in FYC to create a more realistic and balanced approach to the teaching of writing. The reflections on the course projects show that students appreciate moving away from rigid (and sometimes even formulaic) guidelines in their writing, and they also appreciate the opportunity to produce work that they can take ownership of. As instructors, we need to move away from the mutt genres—and even the genres that are grounded almost exclusively in composition classes—and instead embrace what our students value. This does not mean we start from scratch, nor does it mean that we completely remove projects, concepts, and texts that we've used in the past. Rather, we should reshape FYC and use our students as a guiding influence in the process. This reshaping, interestingly, is not especially necessary in the frameworks we've been given, whether through the WPA's Outcomes Statement or the threshold concepts present in writing studies. These metrics actually offer a great deal of room for non-academic (and even non-workplace) genres—it's our own biases against certain genres or domains that we must address.

Limitations

Of course, like all studies, there are several limitations to consider when moving forward with the presented data in Chapters 3 and 4, as well as in this chapter. Because I assumed the role of a teacher-researcher in this study, it is possible that my proximity with my students potentially colored my analysis of the collected data. Similarly, because my students included identifying information on their work, their responses could be

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colored by their sensitivity to this study and their standing in class, thus resulting in a desire to leave "favorable" responses. The approach to mitigating these potential issues is as follows:

- When searching for themes in student responses, all designations were grounded in direct quotes. In other words, rather than assigning a larger or figurative meaning to the students' responses, the focus was kept on the exact words students have written.

- Students received credit for their surveys and responses (which they would have had to complete as coursework even if they didn't participate in the study) prior to me reading their answers. As long as Canvas, the course management system, indicated that a student submitted the surveys and evaluation, that student received credit. Only after that did I review the students' responses.

Even with such approaches, one prominent limitation still remains: the study itself takes place in two classes over the course of one semester. Naturally, a longitudinal study with more classes and participants would yield a greater amount of data and a larger picture of what students value in composition genre-wise. Given the amount of data that was collected, though, FYC instructors can use this study as a launching point for several adjustments in classroom content and values in composition.

Moving Forward

As frustrating as it can be for instructors to meet the expectations of so many stakeholders in higher education, we cannot and should not forget that our students are also stakeholders in the FYC classroom. To eschew students' prior knowledge and

interests in composition is to willfully ignore the malleability of writing and its connection to students' nonacademic lives. As Gay (2010) states, "images [in mass media] are too easily accessible and their influence too powerful for teachers to ignore how ethnic [and other] groups and issues are presented in television programming, films, newspapers, magazines, and music videos" (p. 147). Even so, having popular culture in an FYC class is still met with resistance. Many community colleges have standardized writing textbooks that instructors are expected to follow, while some university composition programs discourage instructors from using work other than nonfiction as primary texts for analysis. Indeed, popular culture is often dismissed as something trivial, as something unworthy of study at the postsecondary level, and, if it is a topic of study, it is seen as a distraction from truly scholarly work with writing.

However, in keeping in mind culturally sustaining pedagogy and critical media literacy, popular culture in FYC courses can be incredibly effective in helping younger students develop both writing competencies and critical thinking skills that can transfer to situations beyond the classroom. Students learn of different genres and rhetorical situations, of creating and remixing texts, and of how their own interests can be topics of inquiry to be treated with the same respect and interest as more traditional academic subjects. Clark (1996) rightfully postulates that "by using material from popular culture, material with which students are familiar and comfortable, the teacher can engage the student more immediately and teach academic styles more easily" (p. 226).

I began this dissertation with an anecdote of my failure not to shun popular culture—not to say that it has no place in FYC—but to qualify its place in the classroom. I do not argue that pop culture can and should always be used, nor do I argue that pop

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culture is guaranteed to interest students and improve their writing. However, I certainly don't believe that simply dismissing pop culture (and, by extension, other theme-based courses) in favor of a purely writing-studies model is necessary for writing for transfer to occur, nor do I believe that writing studies' limitations are somehow less pressing than the limitations in courses that include popular culture. As Chapters 3 and 4 have shown, the nontraditional or popular culture approaches are just as—if not more—effective in the teaching of rhetoric and composition, especially when paired with the emphasis on mindful abstraction and metacognition found in writing studies.

Instead, I would like to call for further evaluation of how we may effectively use popular culture with transfer in mind within the context of FYC, all while making sure that composition is the primary focus. This is certainly possible. Having our own department for rhetoric and composition gives us more authority and assurance that pop culture and other theme-based courses will still be grounded in composition, and even if we do not reject the service metaphor—the notion that we, as a field, are meant to be in service of the writing needs of other fields by training students to write for other disciplines—we should at least open up the discussion to consider other contexts our students write in. As one student in ENG 102-2 stated in her Course Project Reflection: "The pop culture aspect of the projects helped me to understand why we write for what types of audiences, but it also kept class interesting, which is the best part." Interest and learning need not be mutually exclusive for the sake of appearing like a "proper" or "high-brow" discipline.

Opening up a conversation, instead of looking toward a singular authority to dictate what should be taught, enables us to work with different approaches that could

facilitate transfer. We just have to be willing to make that room for our students if we truly want them to not just learn how to write, but learn about composition in all of its manifestations.

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APPENDIX A

WRITING EXPERIENCE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is your level of interest in writing? Please circle the letter that best reflects your interest.
    a. Very interested
    b. Moderately interested
    c. Neutral
    d. Moderately disinterested
    e. Not interested at all

2. Which of the following do you do the most writing for?
    a. School
    b. Work
    c. Personal
    d. Other (please fill in the blank): _____

3. Which of the following do you do the most reading for?
    a. School
    b. Work
    c. Personal
    d. Other (please fill in the blank): _____

4. How well do you think ENG 101 prepared you for the writing you will be doing in other contexts (in school, at work, for personal purposes, etc.?)
    a. Greatly prepared me
    b. Moderately prepared me
    c. Neutral
    d. Did not really prepare me
    e. Did not prepare me at all

(PLEASE SEE NEXT PAGE)

Below is a list of writing genres from multiple categories (academic, professional, pop-culture, personal). Please mark all of the genres you have either written in or analyzed before.

Advertisements
Analytical essay
Argumentative/position essay
Book report
Blog
Business reviews
Compare and contrast paper
Creative fiction/nonfiction
Cover letter
Description
Discussion boards or forums online
Email
Evaluation paper
Five-paragraph essay
Freewriting
Journal/diary writing
Lab write-up/report
Letter of complaint
Letter to the editor
Letter of intent
Literary analysis
Online comments
Personal letter
Personal narrative
Poetry
Pop culture reviews (for movies, shows, video games, etc.)
Reading notes
Research paper
Resume/CV
School/work notes
Social networking profile
Song lyrics
Speech
Spoken word
Summary
Text/instant messaging

OTHER GENRES (PLEASE WRITE BELOW)

APPENDIX B

PRE- AND POST-SURVEY

Directions: Using the scale below, please rate your level of agreement (or disagreement) with the statements. For example, if you strongly agree with a statement, circle the "5" next to it. Please also provide a brief explanation (1-3 sentences) for your response under your rating for each statement. There are no right or wrong answers. Your answers will be kept confidential. Thank you for your cooperation.

1 = strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree

	Statement	Rating
1.	I am able to identify multiple genres/types of writing. 1 2 3 4 5	
2.	I am able to identify the purposes of specific genres. 1 2 3 4 5	
3.	I am able to identify the demographics of audiences for specific genres (age, gender, race, personal beliefs, expectations, etc.). 1 2 3 4 5	

4.	I know the writing conventions of multiple genres. 1 2 3 4 5
5.	If I see an example of a text from a specific genre, I can figure out what the writing conventions of the genre are. 1 2 3 4 5
6.	I think being able to write in multiple genres will be helpful for my academic career. 1 2 3 4 5
7.	I think being able to write in multiple genres will be helpful for my professional career. 1 2 3 4 5

8.	I believe that learning about non-academic and non-professional writing genres (like pop-culture genres) can still help me understand and develop my writing skills for other contexts. 1 2 3 4 5

APPENDIX C

PROJECT 2 PROMPT

The previous project asked you to explore your writing practices and habits. This project will have you consider how your own writing lines up with the conventions in written discourse in other contexts and disciplines.

Paper Requirements

For this project, you will:
1. Identify at least three genres of writing: one academic, one professional, one pop-culture-based.
2. Identify at least two written texts for each genre you have selected.
3. Analyze the rhetorical elements (genre conventions, structure, purpose, audience, strategies, etc.) in each of the texts you have selected and discuss how they compare with each other.
4. Reflect on how your writing style lines up (or does not) with the texts/genres you have selected.

Technical Requirements

- Essay length is to be 2.5-3 pages single-spaced and in 12pt. Times New Roman font.
- Include a Works Cited page at the end and list all sources you have found.

APPENDIX D

TABLE 5 AND TABLE 6

Table 5

Pre- and Post-Survey Responses (ENG 102-1)

Student	Question 1 Pre	Post	Change	Question 2 Pre	Post	Change	Question 3 Pre	Post	Change	Question 4 Pre	Post	Change	Question 5 Pre	Post	Change	Question 6 Pre	Post	Change	Question 7 Pre	Post	Change	Question 8 Pre	Post	Change
1	4	5	1	4	5	1	3	5	2	3	5	2	3	5	2	5	5	0	5	5	0	5	5	0
2	4	5	1	3	5	2	4	5	1	3	5	2	3	5	2	5	5	0	2	5	3	5	5	0
3	3	4	1	4	4	0	4	4	0	3	4	1	4	3	-1	4	5	1	4	5	1	5	5	0
4	5	5	0	4	5	1	5	5	0	3	5	2	1	5	4	4	5	1	5	5	0	5	5	0
5	4	5	1	3	5	2	3	4	1	3	5	2	3	5	2	4	5	1	4	5	1	5	5	0
6	5	5	0	4	5	1	3.5	5	1.5	3.5	5	1.5	3	5	2	4	5	1	3	5	2	4	4	0
7	4	5	1	4	5	1	3	4	1	3	4	1	3	4	1	4	5	1	3	5	2	4	5	1
8	3	5	2	4	5	1	3	4	1	3	4	1	4	4	0	4	5	1	3	5	2	4	5	1
9	4	4	0	3	3	0	2	3	1	2	3	1	3	4	1	4	4	0	5	5	0	5	5	0
10	4	5	1	4	5	1	4	4	0	4	5	1	4	4	0	4	4	0	2	4	-1	5	5	0
11	5	5	0	5	5	0	4	4	0	4	5	1	3	4	1	5	5	0	2	4	2	5	5	0
12	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	3	-1	5	3	-2	4	5	1	5	5	0	5	5	0
13	4	5	1	3	4	1	2	4	2	2	4	2	4	4	0	4	5	1	4	5	1	2	3	1
14	4	5	1	3	4	1	1	3	0	1	4	3	1	4	3	5	5	0	5	5	0	5	4	-1
15	4	5	1	4	5	1	4	5	1	4	5	1	4	4	0	5	5	0	5	5	0	5	5	0
Net Change			0.7333			0.8667			0.6			2			1.0667			0.3333			0.5333			0.1333

Table 6

Pre- and Post-Survey Responses (ENG 102-2)

Student	Question 1 Pre	Post	Change	Question 2 Pre	Post	Change	Question 3 Pre	Post	Change	Question 4 Pre	Post	Change	Question 5 Pre	Post	Change	Question 6 Pre	Post	Change	Question 7 Pre	Post	Change	Question 8 Pre	Post	Change
1	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	3	4	1	4	4	0	5	5	0	5	5	0	5	5	0
2	3	3	0	3	3	0	4	4	0	3	3	0	3	3	0	4	5	0	4	5	0	4	4	0
3	4	4	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	3	3	0	4	3	-1	5	5	0	5	5	0	5	5	0
4	4	5	1	2	5	3	3	5	2	4	5	1	4	5	1	5	5	0	4	5	1	4	5	1
5	3	4	1	2	5	3	3	5	2	2	4	2	3	4	1	5	4	-1	4	5	1	4	5	1
6	3	2	-1	5	4	-1	4	3	-1	4	4	0	2	4	2	5	5	0	5	4	-1	5	5	0
7	2	4	2	3	5	2	3	5	2	2	3	1	3	3	0	4	4	0	1	4	3	3	3	0
8	5	5	0	5	5	0	5	4	-1	3	4	1	4	5	1	4	5	1	4	5	1	5	5	0
9	4	5	1	5	5	0	3	4	1	3	4	1	3	5	2	5	5	0	5	5	0	5	5	0
10	3	5	2	4	5	1	4	4	0	4	4	0	3	4	1	4	5	0	5	5	0	5	5	0
11	4	4		5			2	5		2			1			4			5			5		
12	4	5	1	5	5	0	4	4	0	4	5	1	4	4	0	4	5	0	5	5	0	4	4	0
13	5	5	0	3	5	2	4	4	0	2	5	3	3	4	1	4	4	0	2	5	3	3	4	1
14	3	5		5						3			2						3			3		
15	4	3		3						2			2						3			3		
16	5	4		4						3			3						4			5		
17	4	5	1	5	5	0	4	4	0	5	5	0	3	5	2	5	5	0	4	4	0	4	5	1
18	2	4	2	3	4	1	2.5	3	0.5	3	3	0.5	3	4	1	4	4	0	4	4	0	5	5	0
19	4	5	1	4	4	0	5	5	0	4	5	1	4	3	-1	5	5	0	5	5	0	5	5	0
Net Change			0.7857			0.7143			0.5			0.8929			0.7143			0			0.5			0.2143

APPENDIX E

PROJECT 3 PROMPT

The first two projects for this course emphasized writing practices and how they manifest in different contexts. This third project will ask you to use what you have learned thus far regarding the rhetorical nature of writing to create and then remix (recreate) a text for a new context. You will also provide an analysis of how your text as been remixed in light of the different context.

Part A
This section will be comprised of BOTH of your creative pieces (the original and the remix). Both pieces must have clear messages that are presented through appropriate rhetorical strategies. The messages may differ from one another, but they must still be on the same topic. Both pieces must also clearly be shaped by different contexts. For example, each piece might have a different audience, so the content of each piece might be different.

Part B
This will be a one-page, single-spaced rhetorical analysis of your creative pieces. You will introduce and describe your pieces and explain how the messages and the strategies presented in both versions of your creative piece are shaped by different contexts. Also discuss the overall effectiveness of each piece with regards to the contexts. (How do your pieces successfully work in the given contexts?)

Technical Requirements
   1) Your creative pieces must be the standard length for the genre you select.
   2) Your creative pieces may have both textual and visual elements.
   3) Your analysis must be multiple paragraphs, one page, single-spaced.