Digital Video Composing

Multimodal Teaching & Assessment

Edited by
David L. Bruce
Sunshine R. Sullivan

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University at Buffalo, USA

And

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Newberg-Dundee Public Schools, USA

emerald
PUBLISHING

United Kingdom – North America – Japan
India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited
Emerald Publishing, Floor 5, Northspring, 21-23 Wellington Street, Leeds LS1 4DL

First edition 2026

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Cover photo: iStock and ElenaLux

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-80592-410-4 (Print hardback)
ISBN: 978-1-80592-412-8 (Print paperback)
ISBN: 978-1-80592-409-8 and 978-1-80592-411-1 (Ebooks)

Typeset by TNQ Tech
Cover design by TNQ Tech

For our partners at home who regularly provide nourishment and encouragement to our collaborative inquiries.

David
For Deborah-my first and best reader.

Sunshine
For Aaron-my favorite. Walking beside you in this place brings me hope.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank

The graduate assistants who have since graduated but not before bringing such great help and insight into our work. Special thanks to Dr Chris Jarmark, Dr Chaz Gonzalez, Dr Nichole Heather Tonya Barrett, and Dr Christine Chang.

Our Writing With Video (WWV) crew in the Southern Tier of New York. For the outstanding work you have done and continue to do every day, you all deserve a STAFFy!

Cattaraugus-Allegany Board of Cooperative Educational Services (CA-BOCES): Special thanks to Tim Clarke and Alexandra Freer for enthusiastically supporting the teachers' professional development during our work with WWV.

The English Education and Literacy faculty at the University at Buffalo who exemplify great practice with multimodality and DV in their teacher education courses: Suzanne Miller, Mary McVee, Lynn Shanahan, and Ryan Rish.

Our undergraduate and graduate teacher education students at University at Buffalo and Houghton University who continue to inspire us to ask questions, disrupt the commonplace, and remain curious.

The English Language Arts Language Educators (ELATE) Research Initiative Grant and for the UB Civic Engagement Research Fellowship that helped get our Writing With Video project off the ground.

Our colleagues in the Digital Literacies in Teacher Education (D-LITE) commission in the National Council of Teachers of English.

David's students over 11 years at Solon High School (Ohio) for learning alongside me what it means to read and write video.

Special thanks to Qianqian (Maggie) Ma for all of the assistance with editorial work.

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AN INTRODUCTION TO DIGITAL VIDEO

A BRIEF HISTORY OF DIGITAL VIDEO IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

Video as a compositional tool emerged primarily from educational TV and film production. These programs took place in studios, typically with large cameras mounted on rolling tripods and editing occurring in cramped bays filled with racks of expensive equipment. Use of graphics and other video special effects required additional tools. Videos not recorded in real time (i.e., in studio settings) required multiple steps to edit a single clip. The gear was costly and the learning curve required to become proficient with the instruments was steep. If schools had the money to purchase such supplies—and most did not—these programs were relegated to specialized electives or dedicated vocational programs. One criticism of this sort of video production was what Masterman (1985) termed, "the technicist trap" where the students completed a "series of purely technical operations" (p. 26). While there was value in learning how to operate the equipment, the critique of such programs centered around the students' unquestioned replication of dominant culture.

The studio model of video production was disrupted in the mid 1990s through the early 2000s when access to affordable options for equipment changed with the introduction of the first prosumer digital video editors. The switch was akin to when word processors were introduced in the 1980s, allowing composers to save, copy, paste, format, and edit. Much as typewriters required users to create a permanent document *as* they typed it, pre-digital editing equipment created a linear video document as it was created. Small errors could be corrected but major changes required a complete "rewrite." Thus, when users were introduced to and were able to access computer based, digital programs to create their videos, the same major

features of word processors—save, cut/copy/paste, text/font editing, formatting—became available for video users.

Over the next decade, digital video (DV) morphed through a hybrid of older technology—VHS or Hi-8 cameras and video cassettes—to digital cameras, the early versions still storing the footage on magnetic tape-based cassettes. As technology continued to develop, digital cameras became smaller, storing footage on internal drives rather than on tapes. Devices such as the Flip Video allowed users to record and store their footage on a device the size of a chunky candy bar and connect to computers via USB ports rather than extensive cables.

Computer editing changed as well. While commercially available editing systems were available, editing programs became accessible on desktop computer operating systems. Apple's computers used iMovie and Window's computers used Movie Maker. Both had their benefits and limitations but each allowed the users to edit on a computer desktop, a revolution that moved editing from expert, highly priced tech suites to the desktop and even laptop. Stafford (1995) said that these nonlinear editors took "editing out of the specialist edit suite" and gave students more ownership of the editing process (p. 42). In parallel technology development, as storage and processing power developed, cell phones moved from being able to take pictures to taking video. Eventually, by the mid 2010s, the cell phone had replaced dedicated DV cameras as a means for gathering footage, even allowing users to edit videos as well.

In concert with tech advances that were occurring, platforms for viewing and sharing videos exploded. Most notably, YouTube allowed users to post and share their videos for audiences previously not possible through traditional, analog means. Thus, users were able to record, view, edit, and post their videos to staggering numbers of audience members. It was possible for someone to compose a video that could be seen by millions of viewers. Thus, in the space of a few decades, video moved from dedicated and expensive studio-based equipment to personal and portable devices like tablets and cell phones. While more accessible and affordable than studio equipment, costs for the personal devices could still be a deterrent from being able to use equitably in school settings.

DIGITAL VIDEO IN THE CONTEXT OF EDUCATIONAL MEDIA

Education has had a complicated history with technology integration, specifically wrestling with the promise of the medium and the reality of enacting it within classroom practice. As early as the 1910s, the *English Journal* published a piece calling for the inclusion of the innovation of moving pictures to assist in teaching composition (Gerrish, 1915). McCorkle and Palmeri (2021) detailed how media have been taught over the past century,

including how teachers in the 1930s discussed students using 16 mm cameras to create their own films. In addition to film (Costanzo, 1992; Monaco, 1981), teachers and researchers have advocated for the use of radio (Cushman, 1973), TV (Foster, 1979), and videogames (Gee, 2003) in classroom and educational purposes.

While these media provided tantalizing new potentials for student learning and engagement, barriers and limitations hindered their use in the classroom. Cuban (1986) documented how media technology had been appropriated in educational settings, highlighting the possibilities each new advance in tech offered teaching and learning. The promise of technology's educational capabilities was often bogged down in the various combinations of cost, lagging teacher education and professional development, and top-down curricular mandates. Despite the learning potential of composing with film and video, the largest issue has been—not surprisingly—the lack of equity of access to equipment.

Adding to the significant access obstacles are faulty *assumptions* many people have about video. Since videos are ubiquitous and our culture is saturated with and in video, assumptions are often made that everyone knows how to read and compose them. Costanzo (1992) wrote that films

> *seem* so easy to produce (just point the camera and shoot) and to interpret (just sit back and watch) that we tend to think of them as natural phenomena. We forget that at the heart of film there is a language–actually several languages–*that must be learned.* (p. 25, emphasis added)

In a similar manner, Lei (2009) found that those students who grew up with digital literacies had plenty of experience with navigating social media sites but had limited experience with creating materials with tools like DV. Thus, it is not enough for students to have experience viewing videos; to create their own productions, students need help learning the compositional grammar and form of video (Bruce, 2009a, 2012). Moreover, teachers need practical experiences and reflective curricular practices for meaningful classroom integration (Bruce & Chiu, 2015; Bruce & Sullivan, 2018; Miller, 2007).

While technology has been integrated within educational spaces to improve student learning, history teaches that equitable access is still an issue, students need explicit instruction, and that teachers need pragmatic experiences and frameworks for pedagogy and curricular integration.

DIGITAL VIDEO AS AN EDUCATIONAL TOOL

As DV has entered accepted classroom practices over the past two decades, some focal educational research and practice trends have emerged. These include examinations of student engagement, collaborative involvement,

uses across a range of educational ages and sites, foci on a variety of academic skills, expanded potential audiences for student work, the use of multiple forms and genres, and practice of critical analysis on social and cultural inequities.

One of the most frequent topics to arise when researching ways students participate with video is the element of *engagement*. Time and again, findings indicate that students were engaged in creating videos (McKenney & Voogt, 2011; Miller, 2010, 2013). Niemi and Multisilta (2015) wrote that engagement has "motivational qualities, including positive emotional experiences, such as fun, student aspiration and inspiration, enthusiasm and commitment or the ability to devote persistent work to a learning task" (p. 453). Several studies found that engagement was high, not only with academically motivated students, but especially among those students who tend to be reluctant learners (Brass, 2008; Bruce, 2008) or students whose first language was a language other than English (Goulah, 2007; Hughes & Robertson, 2010).

Unlike print—the dominant form of composition taking place in most classrooms—which has a long history of being used as an individual writing tool, the use of DV tends to foster collaborative efforts (Halverson & Gibbons, 2009; Jocius, 2013; Öztürk & Tunç, 2017). These partnerships have been found across sites and cultures (Anderson et al., 2018). Often, small working groups were needed to complete the project, especially if the assignment required multiple creator roles. For example, when students were tasked with providing an interpretation of a literary passage, such projects necessitated students in front of and behind the camera (Cercone, 2012; Gibbons-Pyles, 2015; Miller, 2013; Ranker, 2018) thus favoring a teamwork approach over individualized work.

The prevalence of DV across grade levels and educational sites is highlighted across the literature. Studies have been done with elementary school (Pearson, 2005; Price-Dennis, 2016), middle school (Ehret & Hollett, 2014; Ranker, 2008), high school (Bruce, 2019; Doerr-Stevens, 2015; Miller et al., 2013), and college classrooms (Baepler & Reynolds, 2014; Dubisar & Palmeri, 2010). Moreover, DV has been used in after-school and summer programs as well as teacher education programs (Bruce, 2010; Grabill & Hicks, 2005) and teacher professional development (Dreon et al., 2011; Sullivan & Clarke, 2017). Taken together, the various sites suggest that DV can be and has been used in a variety of educational settings and with a wide age range of participants.

There are a number of different skills that researchers have documented while using DV in learning contexts. In addition to production and technology skills (Cercone, 2012; Doerr-Stevens, 2016) other studies have found DV used for academic arguments (Jocius, 2013; Smith et al., 2016), rhetorical strategies (Dubisar & Palmeri, 2010; McKenney & Voogt, 2011), writing skills (Figg & McCartney, 2010; Price-Dennis, 2016), second language acquisition (Goulah, 2007; Hafner, 2015), and reading (Gunter & Kenny, 2008;

Jocius, 2013). In addition to academic performances, DV has been used to teach interpersonal skills (Hakkarainen, 2009; Niemi & Multisilta, 2015), career exploration (Staley, 2017), social capital (Doerr-Stevens, 2016; Hull & Katz, 2006) and cultural competencies (Grant & Bolin, 2016).

Another finding from the literature is that the audiences for DV have extended past traditional classroom walls. For example, a number of studies show how the audience has expanded past the instructor only approach and included the whole class as an audience (Grabill & Hicks, 2005; Miller, 2013). Beyond the classroom, audiences for DV projects have included parents and caregivers (Henderson et al., 2010; Kortegast & Davis, 2017), program culminating projects (Chandler-Olcott, 2015), film festivals (Anderson et al., 2018; Heaney, 2018a), and web-based postings (Gunter & Kenny, 2008; Halverson, 2010). Through these different venues, the use of DV has expanded the traditional boundaries of teacher-only assessment and feedback to include audiences far outside of classroom boundaries.

DV has been used with a variety of projects, including numerous genre-based activities. The most prominent usage of DV in the literature is digital storytelling (Dreon et al., 2011; Hull & Katz, 2006). Other classroom uses of DV include academic arguments (Hundley & Holbrook, 2013), history videos (Miller, 2013), literary analysis (Bruce et al., 2021; Miller et al., 2013), music videos (Bruce, 2009b; Friesem, 2014), instructional videos (Engin, 2014; McKenney & Voogt, 2011), literacy narratives (DePalma & Alexander, 2015; Hughes & Robertson, 2010), documentaries (Doerr-Stevens, 2015; Gibbons-Pyles, 2016), vocabulary (Ventura, 2018), commercials (Goulah, 2007; Miller, 2013), video poetry (Bruce, 2015; Sorensen, 2018), and book trailers (Miller, 2013).

Unlike the technical focus and cultural replications of early video productions (Masterman, 1980), the literature provides examples of students who are no longer copying dominant culture and instead are using DV to critique societal assumptions. These include projects that explore counter-stories to dominant narratives (Morrell et al., 2013), social injustice (Gachago et al., 2014; Hughes & Robertson, 2010), colonization (Hampton & DeMartini, 2017), race (Matias & Grosland, 2016), gender (Price-Dennis, 2016); and rurality (Bruce et al., 2019; Gibbons-Pyles, 2016).

Taken together, these varied applications of DV demonstrate that it is being used by educators across educational ages and settings for a wide variety of purposes, skills, tasks, and assessments.

A DIGITAL VIDEO PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Since the New London Group (1996) offered a framework for conceptualizing multiple literacies, the field has been wrestling with how to guide the research of and teaching with the many affordances of multimodal literacies. If anything, the research has indicated that there is no "one size fits

all" approach to teaching and learning with multimodality. In terms of DV, we need multiple ways of thinking about the planning, implementation, and assessment of DV for educational purposes. This book, then, seeks to explore various affordances of DV in a variety of settings. In doing so, we look at promises and potentials but also examine limitations and obstacles of the technology as well.

In the numerous teacher education courses and professional development that we have developed and led over the years, we have encountered two main barriers. The first deals with unfamiliarity with the equipment and process of composing DV. We found that teachers often had minimal, if any, experience—typically in discrete assignments—and that most teachers had not worked with this technology in their teacher education courses. Simply put, most educators are unfamiliar with the reading of and composing with DV.

The second barrier tends to be around implementation, particularly around teaching considerations of how DV can fit within a packed curriculum. To include something new, teachers must determine what to exclude. The latter is particularly problematic, especially when teachers are pressed to meet content standards, pupil performance objectives and district and state mandates. When teachers are faced with competing demands, there can be difficulty around conceptualizing how this potentially transformative technology can be integrated into meaningful class activities and assessments. In an effort to resist the dichotomies that emerge across the educational field when *new* approaches are introduced, we endeavor to support educators through this book with complimentary approaches to print and DV learning activities.

As we have worked with teacher education and extensive teacher professional development, we have taken an integrated approach in the use of DV. The first aspect is to provide models of various DV projects for possible classroom use. The literature is filled with examples, such as video poetry, video vocabulary, scene enactments, book trailers and the like. In our work, we have found that providing authentic DV classroom exemplars help teachers conceptualize ways in which DV could be used in their classrooms.

The second facet is to provide time, purpose, and place for teaching candidates and teachers to engage in the DV compositional process themselves. We have found this to be incredibly effective as most teachers with whom we have worked have not had specific time and space to create their own projects (Bruce & Chiu, 2015; Bruce & Sullivan, 2018). Finally, we offer consistent and ample time and expectations for reflection. This reflective space is focused on their own insights into their own DV composing experiences but also provides explicit reflection in curricular integration. We prompt teachers to consider what are ways in which these exercises and projects could be used in their classroom? Paired with what texts? In which units? How would the project be evaluated?

Rather than shoehorn a video project into an already stuffed curriculum, we ask our teachers to think about what assessment they often use in their classroom and to consider replacing it with a similar task, but instead using DV. For example, one teacher with whom we worked used a typical evaluation many English teachers employ to assess their students' understanding of a canonical text, namely writing a culminating essay analyzing a reading. For one of those unit-concluding assessments, he required his students to create a video interpreting a passage from the literature they were studying (Heaney, 2018b). He found that the collaborative project provided opportunities for participation and deep textual analysis, engaging both high and low achieving students.

It is in the spirit of our work with teacher education and teacher professional development that we offer the contents of this edited collection. Our call for manuscripts asked for educationally grounded examples of DV projects, exemplars containing rich descriptions of classroom enactments. Our authors responded to that call by providing illustrations regarding how DV is being used in transformative ways across a variety of educational settings.

We've organized the chapters into three sections, the first providing foundational aspects in the reading of and composing with video. The second examines portraits of practice, demonstrating uses of DV across educational settings, including in-school, out-of-school, and online learning environments. The third section addresses how DV is being used with teacher education and professional development as a means of promoting, mediating and assessing student learning. Together, these three sections represent different multimodal learning spaces, including urban, rural, and online settings. What follows is an overview of each section with highlights of each chapter.

SECTION 1: LEARNING ABOUT DV: FOUNDATIONAL ASPECTS

In this first section, our authors provide foundational aspects of reading video texts (i.e., reading visual and audio grammars in popular culture) as well as composing DV (i.e., project conceptualization, camera work, editing and publishing). While each chapter offers stand-alone key insights into learning about and with DV, reading the chapters as conversations with one another offers the reader a richer understanding of the foundational aspects presented in this section.

Jason Ranker explores "Multimodal and Semiotic Approaches to the Interpretation of Student-Produced Digital Videos" (Chapter 1) by focusing on the flow of the students' work. He emphasizes that the meaning of the video as they are creating it—in Britton's (1982) phrasing, "shaping at the point of utterance" (p. 141)—happens in unplanned and often

spontaneous ways. One method that researchers have often used is to examine composition by having students' intentionality reflect on the process and content of their video. Jason counters this approach, indicating that students were not often cognizant of the various meanings they create. Instead, he proposes a semiotic approach to analyze the videos by looking at the multimodal ensembles, particularly the role that the signifier plays in the representation of meaning. Jason demonstrates how he examined focal signifiers—building blocks of meaning or as he names it, "signals toward meaning"—in a student-created video. By taking such an approach that focuses on the spontaneous and often unplanned decisions that students make during the composition process, this interpretive lens allows us to explore our students' meanings without imposing our own biases and/or interpretations on our students' work.

In "Teaching with Streaming Media in Elementary School in the Age of Censorship Legislation," (Chapter 2), **Damiana Gibbons-Pyles** uses a framework of social semiotics to propose an approach we can choose to use as we face legislation seeking to restrict our teaching of and/or discussion of critical literacies (i.e., discussing issues of power, especially around critiques/examinations of race, sexuality, gender, etc.). As we are addressing the standards focused on characterization, setting, and comparisons, we can use what Damiana outlines in this chapter as a Teaching Guide for Streaming Media. With this guide, she scaffolds our work to support our classroom thinking and discussion about contexts and characters within and between various streaming shows that are aimed at school-aged children with four steps: (1) curation, (2) guided reflection, (3) critical examination, and (4) connection through writing and storyboarding. While she focuses on elementary education, Damiana's' Teaching Guide for Streaming Media can be woven across our diverse learning contexts with our own purposeful selection of our focal multimodal texts, supporting us as we join her and others in this subversive action we call teaching.

Ben McCorkle and **J Palmeri** share insights gained through their collaborative compositions of video scholarship in "Behind the Lens: Translating Scholarly Video Production into Pedagogy" (Chapter 3). In reflecting on their work teaching video with their own students—undergrads, typically—as well as the video work they did to accompany their multimodal book, *100 Years of New Media Pedagogy*, Ben and J reflect upon seven guiding principles they found working with video in both pedagogy and in their scholarship. In doing so, they examine rhetorical purposes and affordances of composing and teaching with various DV genres. Through articulating each of these guidelines, J and Ben provide examples from their own scholarly video work as well as the guidelines they use with their own classes. By focusing on larger composition frameworks (i.e., audience, task, available resources, genre, etc.) they provide us with reminders of the commonalities

and differences of composing in and with multiple media. Readers will appreciate the examples of assessment criteria that Ben and J use with their students as well as the genre-based conventions for various video-related texts, such as silent films, newsreels, highlight compilations, and digital stories. In doing so, they remind us of a variation of a National Writing Project adage: to be effective teachers of video, we also must compose video ourselves.

SECTION 2: LEARNING WITH DV: PORTRAITS OF PRACTICE

Our authors in this section provide us with portraits of practice that demonstrate uses of DV across educational settings, including in-school, out-of-school, and online learning environments. As you read these illustrative examples, we hope that you will notice how the educators and learners depicted in these chapters are using DV in a critically conscious manner. Instead of examples that simply replicate the dominant culture, our authors in this section share with us the power of extending our own teaching repertoires and leverage DV as a tool that can extend our own and our students' reading, writing, and communication skills. Throughout this section you will learn ways in which you can support your learners to use DV as part of their critical social practices to disrupt the commonplace, interrogate multiple viewpoints, focus on the sociopolitical, and take action to promote social justice (Lewison et al., 2008). We also hope that you notice that this is the largest of our three sections, providing clear examples, tools, and references for educators across multiple contexts to use DV in important and meaningful ways.

In the first chapter of this powerful section, **William O'Neil-White** shows us how one Black teenage girl used the genre of 'makeup tutorial' as she shared a variety of her personal narratives in "Abolitionist Creator: The Use of Tik-Tok to Tell Digital Counternarratives Around Black Wellness and Abolition in the Era of Black Lives Matter and Global Catastrophe" (Chapter 4). Following one student through a traditional ELA course and the school's first Black History course, William offered his students core texts that offered narratives centered around joy and hope rather than the traditional trauma-related narratives of Black experience and history. He shares how he was able to make time and space for his students to read and compose counterstories with their phone and social media platforms they used regularly. William illustrates how the student used the format to critique how white Tic-Toc influencers often co-opted social justice movements. Throughout this chapter we are invited to walk beside, learn from, and embrace the inspiration our students can offer us as life-long learners searching for joy and hope amidst our local and global challenges.

In "Conchcasting: Using Podcasting to Deepen the Connection to Literary Themes and Understanding in Literary Works" (Chapter 5), **Jordan Thoennes** explores the metaphor of the conch shell to allow for multiple voices and multiple perspectives. Centering around the use of podcasts to explore responses to literature, in this case, *Lord of the Flies*, he highlights the power of audience and collaborative project development. While holding the conch shell gave voice to a sole speaker for the characters in LOTF, Jordan posits that grasping the tools of podcasting provides opportunities for multiple voices and perspectives to be processed and heard. He applies a critical media literacy lens to his exploration and explication of class generated themes they developed while studying LOTF. He demonstrates how multimodal literacy assignments can be used as an integral part of the ELA curriculum classroom rather than a "technology event." Jordan also supports us as reflective educators and researchers with his survey questions, asking his students about their experiences and learning throughout the unit, providing us with a framework for how we might take this inquiry into our practice.

Richard Beach, **Blaine E. Smith**, **Daniela Torres Cirina**, and **Sanjukta Sarkar** illustrate how youth are using digital video compositions in ways that call attention to the climate change crisis in "Youth Framing of Climate Change Through Video Production" (Chapter 6). They analyze youth produced videos on popular streaming platforms for content and messaging. Their chapter provides glimpses of video productions centered on climate change and compares various rhetorical frames that composers used. Comparisons are unpacked between *local* versus *global* frames as well as *impacts* versus *solutions* versus *impacts & solutions* frames before delving into the specific focal topics. The analysis reveals that youth were most likely to use a *solutions* frame rather than others, suggesting a call to active hope for viewers, creators, and educators. The authors support educators as cultivators of hope in their classrooms with methods for guiding learners' use of framing to plan and produce videos that illustrate their intentional messages to the public.

Applying a critical media literacy lens, **Russell Mayo** offers "Documentary Rhetorics and Public Pedagogy: Teaching *An Inconvenient Truth*" (Chapter 7). In an effort to invite secondary and postsecondary learners into critical and civic learning, Russell shares examples of how he engages his learners in multimodal reading and composing while developing their awareness of rhetorical features of documentary media. Using *An Inconvenient Truth* as a model text, he provides examples of how educators can approach this work and recommends a variety of ways educators can support their learners to make connections across documentaries and personal experiences. Readers will be able to take his list of questions to consider when teaching for critical media literacy and rhetorical awareness with documentary

films straight into their planning and teaching practices. Throughout this chapter, Russell illustrates that when educators integrate critical media literacy and rhetorical awareness using climate change focused documentary films, we are engaging in the critical and civic teaching that our students and future require. He emphasizes, however, that these discussions are not enough and calls us to further action, engaging our learners in documentary and other ecomedia making projects, inviting them to join other voices in critical and civic engagement. Again, Russell equips readers with this part of the work needed with clear and actionable examples of how we can support our students in this work in our unique, but connected, learning contexts.

Providing us a glimpse inside his classroom, **Jason DeHart** illustrates how his high school students were "Reflecting and Composing with Video at Hand" (Chapter 8). Using filmed versions of canonical texts alongside the respective book to explore the story through the affordances of different media, Jason argues how anchor film texts pair with canonical standards (i.e., The Great Gatsby, Catcher in the Rye) as a means of comparative reading. In doing so, he shows us how the cinematic decisions portrayed in the films affected the ways in which the students interacted with the texts. In this chapter, he leverages the screen tendencies and capabilities of his students to complement their print reading engagement. He demonstrates his students' connections not only between print and video, but also the parallels between reading and composing. Rather than assign a traditional written assessment of the canonical readings, Jason supported his students to create a video in response to the text. He provides us the opportunity to see examples of engaging students with reading and composing in complementary ways, either through scene reenactments, remixes, or video poems. In doing so, readers are encouraged to realize that the film and video work are not meant to replace traditional print literacies, but rather extend our understanding of what it means to be literate in our day and age.

Nichole Barrett encourages educators and learners to "Dream Big!" (Chapter 9), exploring play and trauma-informed digital video composition with rural youth suffering from poverty-related trauma. Creating a month-long summer program titled *Dream Big!*, Nichole works with others to make a place where staff, trained in trauma-informed care as well as DV related pedagogies, support participants to work both independently and in teams to compose a variety of DV projects. She situates this work across the various intersections of poverty, trauma, and rurality. Nichole highlights the literacies, social interactions, and multimodal activities that were part of this extended summer program across 3 years. These projects and the collaborative problem solving that was required in the planning, filming, and editing processes provided opportunities for the youth to see and believe that they were part of something big. The time, space, routines,

and evolving expectations of *Dream Big!* provided a place where participants could further develop their literacy and regulation strategies while building connections with others. Readers are able to digest specific project guidelines and mediating tools that were used across these learning experiences and apply them to their teaching contexts. Nichole's illustrations of how DV pedagogies allow for authentic group experiences in which participants can learn to connect, share, and rely on each other, provide windows into ways we can incorporate these connections in our everyday practice.

In "DV, Content Creation, and the Challenge of Teaching English in the 21st Century" (Chapter 10), **James E. Cercone** & **Milly S. Clark** highlight the vital stance of a life-long learner to sustain our practices and ability to connect and empower our students' literacies as important in the learning that takes place in the classroom for both student and teacher learning. James punctuates this as a reality in K-12 schools as well as in higher education when he describes part of his journey, "I can honestly say this is the point where my career as an English teacher took root. Under the tutelage of these two students, I learned how to digitally edit and mix audio and voice using software they suggested." As Milly and James describe the inquiry-based, student-centered, collaborative, and dialogic learning spaces that support the important thinking and learning in which their students thrive, they thoughtfully highlight the challenges and benefits of such work. They share with us helpful questions that supported their students as individuals and groups to think deeper and use DV as part of the process to support that learning and growth, providing us with actions we can take into our diverse teaching contexts today.

SECTION 3: LEARNING AND ADAPTING THROUGH DV: TEACHER PREPARATION & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In this third and final section, our authors address how some teacher education programs are engaging teacher candidates using DV as a means of promoting, mediating and assessing student learning. This section explores cases of DV within professional development that instruct and empower educators to integrate multimodal literacies in their classroom spaces. In this section you will gain tips you can take directly into your learning context alongside questions to ponder that might spark your own inquiry alongside your students, as you walk beside them immersed in DV and multimodal reading and composing.

In "Teaching and Assessing Visual Storytelling Techniques for Multimodal Composing with a Digital Camera or Phone" (Chapter 11), **Ewa McGrail** and **Patrick McGrail** highlight similarities between how a

teacher educator (Ewa) and a digital communications educator (Patrick) approach teaching and immersing their students in the creation of and purposeful communication through photographic and video compositions. They provide examples of their students' previous understandings and development as communicators through images and videos. Ewa and Patrick share with readers the specific processes and mediating tools that they use to introduce new concepts, shift their students' abilities to attend to imagery, and guide their students' reflective processing of what they've learned and how they are using digital images and video intentionally. They conclude their chapter with a Top 10 Recommendations/Tips for readers eager to immerse their own learners in visual storytelling with their everyday digital tools.

Nicole Damico says "Let's Tok About It" (Chapter 12) while illuminating the importance of intentional and strategic uses of social media as a shared tool in communities of practice work. As a teacher educator, she introduced the #BookTok community of practice to support her Preservice Student Teachers (PSTs) in developing their own repertoire of book talks that they could use with their middle and secondary students. This exercise and space supported her PSTs to grow more confident in the role as "matchmaker" between learners and texts. While she illustrates confidence building on this platform, she emphasizes that the specific technology is a tool, not focal point, to do the work that matters most for educators: locating, joining, and contributing to a community of practice. Nicole suggests that we would better serve our teacher education students and their students by equipping them with tools to guide their understanding of responsible and thoughtful digital citizenship and DV composition and sharing. We invite you to find and play with these tools, explore their affordances, boundaries, and new ways they might be able to be used to connect our tendrils of ongoing learning across time and space.

In our final chapter, Chapter 13, **Candance Doerr-Stevens** is actively "Cultivating Complex Climate Understandings through Digital Video Response" for her students and readers. Leveraging DV as a transformative composition process, Candance immersed her students in opportunities to read, reflect, and respond to the reality of climate change. She provides three portraits of students' use of DV to respond to climate-change related narratives and nonfictions. In their reflections, her students shared how the space required for this inquiry provided purpose and time for them to transact with their selected text in ways that helped them come to new understandings. Candance's students describe how they were able to learn first-hand, using DV as a composition tool to explore the power of play, curiosity, and wonder. Throughout the chapter, the reader has access to her students' deepening awareness and transformative thinking about the realities related to climate change, understandings that her students attribute to the time, space, and expectation to "dwell in the story."

As a versatile multimodal educational tool, DV has become ubiquitous in 21st Century culture, allowing users to produce, share, and view others' work. Through these examinations of the authors' intentional use of learning, teaching, and assessment practices with DV as a multimodal reading and composing tool, it is our hope that the various portraits presented in this edited volume will provide readers with a montage of how DV is being used in a range of educational settings. We hope you will choose to join us in your teaching and learning contexts, using these chapters' offerings to support you in your inquiry.

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SECTION 1

LEARNING ABOUT DV: FOUNDATIONAL ASPECTS

CHAPTER 1

MULTIMODAL AND SEMIOTIC APPROACHES TO THE INTERPRETATION OF STUDENT-PRODUCED DIGITAL VIDEOS

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ABSTRACT

This chapter outlines semiotic and multimodal approaches to interpreting and understanding student-produced digital videos. After reviewing semiotic and multimodal approaches that have been established thus far, the author the outlines a signifier-based approach that identifies key signifiers from across modes as the fundamental building blocks of meaning, and then characterizes the relations between these signifiers across multiple dimensions as sites for the emergence of possible meanings. This form of semiotic interpretation of student-produced digital video approaches meaning tentatively to account for the creative, emergent, and unplanned ways in which students create artistic multimodal compositions through video. The chapter also reflects on applications of the approach for the conceptualization of creativity in student multimodal composing, pedagogical attention to the unplanned

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doi:10.1108/978-1-80592-409-820251001

and emergent compositional elements, and the development of an interpretive approach toward student-produced videos that attends to the nuances involved in the emergence of meaning.

Keywords: Composing; multimodality; creativity; digital; film; meaning; interpretation

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I will discuss how multimodal and semiotic frameworks can aid in the interpretation of student-created digital videos. Semiotics is the study of *signs*—a fundamental unit of language that designates a single bit or piece of meaning—and how they operate in the processes of meaning-making and communication. In its classic formulation, the sign has been theorized by de Saussure (1916/1983) as a unit that is comprised of two parts, the *signifier* and the *signified*. Many theorists have taken up the sign since de Saussure, and the signifier has been widely theorized as the signal to or indicator of meaning, and the signified as the mental concept or meaning that is associated with the signal. Semiotics has been particularly useful in interpreting the meaning of literature, photos, and films since it offers a way to understand meanings that are outside of language or that use language in unusual or figurative ways.

Applied to the study of youth digital video production, a semiotic approach offers the potential to allow a tentative mode of interpretation in order to capture the nuances of meaning that youth can realize multimodally using digital video. By turning to semiotics in this way, viewers of student-produced videos can recognize the multiple meanings and wide variety of possible interpretations that are encoded in the videos. This perspective on interpretation of student-produced digital videos is in line with theorizations of semiotic approaches to film studies related to the problems involved with interpretation and the determination of fixed or definitive meanings in films (Metz, 1982; Silverman, 1983). The implications of these theorizations are that meanings that youth produce with digital video are always tentative and a product of sign operations. Like all composers, student digital video creators may not always be fully conscious of all of the meanings that they create, and meanings are generated in the film productions themselves as part of the process and working of the medium itself. As teachers and interpreters of student digital-video creations, instead of determining meanings, per se, we can outline the *signals toward meaning* (signifiers) and examine how they are combined. I refer to signifiers as the signals toward possible meanings in this way because they point toward or indicate a possible meaning, without definitively designating or specifying a certain or determined meaning. This perspective allows more ambiguity

in interpretation and the acknowledgment of multiple possible meanings. Rather than identifying specific meanings, this approach provides a vocabulary, set of terms, and parameters for outlining meaning, meaning potentials, or *terrain of meaning* (rather than fixed meaning) that are produced in student digital video. This is what Burn (2003) referred to as the identification of the "signifying properties" of digital videos, which "demand an expanded vocabulary from us if we are to describe them adequately" (p. 20).

MULTIMODAL STUDIES OF YOUTH DIGITAL VIDEO PRODUCTION

Educational scholars have turned to semiotic frameworks in studies of student digital video production as a multimodal phenomenon (Burn, 2009; Burn & Parker, 2003; Doerr-Stevens, 2016; Gilje, 2010; Hull & Nelson, 2005; Mills, 2011; Ranker, 2015a). Within this paradigm, researchers have introduced the term *mode* to capture the ways in which thinking, communicating, and meaning-making extends beyond language. The term "mode" refers to other ways of representing, creating, and communicating meaning, such as the visual mode (e.g., photographs, paintings), audio mode (music), gestural mode (facial gestures, hand gestures), actional mode (body movements, actions), and object-based modes (uses of objects). From a multimodal perspective, language (which, in turn, also includes modes such as speech, writing, and reading) is one mode amongst others, rather than the primary or only recognized mode of communication. Researchers have studied how each of these modes (in addition to other modes) has its own forms of signs, ways of representing and communicating meanings, and associated media. In his discussion of the concept of "mode," Kress (2010) notes that "instances of commonly used *modes* are *speech*; *still image; moving image; writing; gesture; music; 3D models; action; color*. Each offers specific potentials and is therefore in principle particularly suited for specific representational/communicational tasks" [emphasis in original] (p. 28).

Digital video is made up of component modes (visual, audio, actional, gestural, object-based, etc.) that are coordinated into a new mode, which has been termed the "kineiekonic" (from the Greek terms "move" and "image") mode (Burn, 2009; Burn & Parker, 2003). Burn notes that "the moving image has its sign-making systems in space and time, which combine different modes (image, sound, music, dramatic gesture, lighting), as well as the material media these deploy" (p. 60). Studying the particularities of modes has led to understanding of how each mode has its own particular ways of representing and communicating meanings. Multimodality can, in this sense, be seen as a response to the ways in which linguistic

understandings have dominated the conceptualization of representation, meaning-making, and communication (Jewitt, 2007; Kress, 2003). This has led scholars of multimodality to outline the *affordances*, or the "limitations and potentials" of different modes, which can include the material aspect of the mode. Kress discusses the concept of a modal affordance as follows:

> The materiality of a mode, for instance the material of sound in speech or in music, or graphic matter and light in image, or the motion of parts in the body in gesture, holds specific potentials for representation, and at the same time it brings certain limitations. (p. 45)

The concept of an affordance has enabled scholars to conceptualize how each mode, and each specific combination of modes, creates particular ways of thinking, making-meaning, and communication. This has revealed how digital video, as a distinct combination of modes, offers student-creators particular affordances that are very different from the language-based modes most commonly used in school. For example, in his study of the affordances of student-produced digital videos, Burn (2009) identified the following as unique composing tools that digital video offers youth creators:

> …iteration (the ability to endlessly revise); feedback (the realtime display of the developing work); convergence (the integration of different authoring modes, such as video and audio, in the same software); exhibition (the ability to display work in different formats, on different platforms, to different audiences. (p. 17)

In my study of the affordances of digital video in the composing processes of two 9th-grade students who created a documentary about fast food, the focal students drew upon *montage* as a particular affordance of digital video (Ranker, 2015a). Montage is a concept from film studies that refers to the sequential and strategic placement of images into a chronology that produces a cumulative message based upon how the images relate and build meaning (Eisenstein, 1949). Through a close examination of their video and composing processes, I examined how montage allowed the students to link images and words sequentially to produce specific types of critiques of fast food in an insightful subtle, and novel way. The students used montage sequences throughout the video to communicate their meanings without explicit narration, thus offering viewers an alternative and multimodal way of exploring the meanings that were presented. For example, in one montage sequence from the video, the students first present an image of confined cows in a barn under harsh conditions. The next image is then an image of a Taco Bell advertisement that features a new item, "seasoned beef." The video then presents a third image in the montage sequence, an image of a McDonalds Big Mac advertisement onto which the students superimposed the following message: "Beef is any part of a cow." During

this montage sequence, there is no narration, and the viewer is positioned to make the connections between these images in order to arrive at the students' critique of the inhumane treatment of animals that goes into the production of fast food. The affordances of montage allowed the students to present their critique in a way that presents the viewer with a unique visual and graphic presentation of animal treatment.

In their semiotic exploration of a youth-produced digital video, Hull and Nelson (2005) developed a detailed multimodal analysis of "Lyfe-N-Rhyme," a video that combined poetry and rap in an autobiographical reflection on the video creator's life and thinking. In this study, Hull and Nelson carefully analyzed the relations between images and words as they were coordinated in the video, identifying a "symbolic unity" that was an "orchestration (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001) or braiding (Mitchell, 2004) of language, image, and music into a whole" (p. 238), creating a "different system of signification, one that transcends the collective contribution of its constituent parts" (p. 225). Hull and Nelson found that it was in the precise ways that elements from across modes were combined that a synergistic force—rather than the specific potentials of the modes—was created that lent multimodality its expressive power in the video. This finding has led to insights for researchers of youth-produced digital videos to look for the precise and unique combinations of signs and modes as a way of understanding how the medium affords new ways for youth digital video creators to represent and express complex, nuanced, and multiple possible meanings that require viewers to take an open and tentative approach to interpretation.

EMERGENT, CREATIVE, UNPLANNED, AND NONLINEAR DIGITAL VIDEO COMPOSING PROCESSES

In many cases, the meaning of student-produced digital videos emerges from the students' composing processes, and is not preplanned or even consciously conceived of by youth video-makers. In this section, I will thus discuss how multimodal and semiotic lenses are especially useful in interpreting student-produced digital videos whose meanings are shaped and generated through the creators' experimental exploration of digital video as a medium. For example, studies have outlined different approaches to youth digital video production, contrasting a focus on preplanning and storyboarding with more emergent and exploratory production processes (Buckingham & Harvey, 2001; Fulwiler & Middleton, 2012; Holzwarth & Maurer, 2001). When students use digital video, they sometimes have their own conscious intentions that are determined beforehand, while at other times they are exploring meanings as they emerge through experimentation

with the medium in a "complex, recursive process that allows for sequential multimodal representation of thoughts and ideas" (Bruce, 2009, p. 443). For example, Holzwarth and Maurer (2001) explored the pedagogical effects of nonlinear editing (which moved students directly into video production from the start of the project rather than "storyboarding" and planning first), whereas Buckingham and Harvey (2001) investigated how student production of videos for an actual audience contributed to their production process.

In another study of creative, novel, and emergent uses of digital video, Ranker and Mills (2014) discussed students' use of absurdity in their digital videos in a seventh and eighth grade video-making workshop. Fostered by their use of a class video blog as a place for the display of their videos, the audience within the class created the conditions for the use of humor and absurdist elements in their videos. This project evolved into a "theater of the absurd" (Beckett, 1954; Camus, 1955), which has had a long and legitimate tradition in the arts. Like the theater of the absurd, the students' videos challenged straightforward and logical approaches to making meaning and the creation of a unified and linear story or overarching explanation or meaning. The students composed short, minimalist, absurdist videos with titles such as "Police" and "Drums and Dinosaurs," which produced class reactions that favored a proliferation of death as a common theme and artistic challenges to traditional approaches to making meaning, creating a context whereby "the students pushed the boundaries…by bringing something new into the mix in the classroom that had a transformative and productive effect"(Ranker & Mills, 2014, p. 442).

Burn (2003) studied a group of students' digital video composition about skateboarding, which used the medium to display their skateboarding skills and techniques and exploring their passion for the sport. During the filming of their video, an unexpected event occurred when an elderly man entered the filming space and told the skaters to go away. The students then later edited this section of the film by superimposing text that says "Enter old Man" and "Old Man Gives Up." This emergent development in the video, which Burn characterized as "unrehearsed, improvisatory drama" that created an "unwritten script of a generic generational conflict and territorial contestation" (p. 10). By closely analyzing the "rapid cutting, cutting on the beat of the music track, black and white color, a thrash music track, and a variety of other devices to signify excitement, skill and the coolness of the skaters" (p. 10), Burn articulates a new lens for interpreting this creative and nontraditional digital video, which he characterized as a "performance which is cultural, theatrical and embodied" (p. 9). The interpretations that Burn arrived at offer an example of the interpretive mode that I explore in this chapter: one that does not jump too quickly to declare a purpose or meaning, but rather outlines a system or process for making