A FRESH LOOK AT WRITING INSTRUCTION: DIGITAL MULTIGENRE RESEARCH PROJECTS IN THE SECONDARY ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOM

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A Fresh Look at Writing Instruction: Digital Multigenre Research Projects in the Secondary English Language Arts Classroom

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To my husband, Jay, who supported me on this journey from start to finish, and to Veronika, for reminding me why I do what I do—and for showing me what is truly important in life.
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Abstract

Multigenre writing projects originated as a high-interest alternative to traditional essays. The multigenre essay is generally produced in print form. Electronic portfolios, or e-portfolios, have been used in education as an engaging means by which to encourage digital literacy and demonstrate student learning. They evolved from the traditional print portfolio assessment format to incorporate digital tools into the classroom environment. PowerPoint and Prezi are also promising digital tools that can be used to showcase student work. The purpose of this research project is to combine the multigenre research project with a digital format and examine the effectiveness of the multigenre project in its new format as it pertains to student learning, student engagement, and student performance. The primary question guiding this study is: What are the effects of implementing digital multi-genre writing projects into the ELA curriculum at Sunnydale High School? The study will also investigate the effects of the project on student learning and achievement, student interest and engagement, and student-centered pedagogy. The theoretical frameworks for this study are narratology, which is based in language arts critical theory, and expectancy-value achievement theory, which is based in motivational theory. The study examines students’ reactions to and experiences with both a traditional research-based essay and the experimental digital multigenre project in order to form comparisons between the two writing assignments.

Keywords: multigenre, research instruction, electronic portfolios, digital tools, writing instruction and assessment, research papers, persuasive writing, secondary English Language Arts, multiliteracies, digital literacies, multimodality, PowerPoint, Prezi, student-centered learning
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Chapter I: Introduction

Traditionally, the secondary English Language Arts classroom has been comprised of the intensive study of literature, vocabulary, grammar, and writing. Students have been expected to read the required texts mandated by the school, district, or state curriculum frameworks. They then write formal essays adhering to the conventions of standard written English to demonstrate what they know. It is important to note, though, that the world in which these ELA students live has changed dramatically over the last few decades, particularly regarding digital tools (Lasmana, 2010; McCullough, 2010; McLeod & Vasinda, 2009; Merchant, 2007). Many different modes of communication are surrounding them at all times. Technology is now inextricably linked to the everyday lives of children and adolescents, pervading their thoughts, actions, and social interactions in a way that it never has before (Bittman, Rutherford, Brown, & Unsworth, 2011; Roberson, 2011).

When asked what literature they studied in their high school English classes, most people list a few of the “classics,” including miscellaneous plays by Shakespeare, particularly Romeo and Juliet, along with The Scarlet Letter, Great Expectations, The Great Gatsby, Of Mice and Men, The Lord of the Flies, To Kill a Mockingbird, and The Catcher in the Rye (Cruz, 2010). While these works are all noteworthy and important to the world of literature for their own reasons, they are becoming increasingly difficult to connect with the lives of adolescent readers (Bittman, et al., 2011; Lasmana, 2010; McCullough, 2010).

Furthermore, these works are often taught to students via the traditional teacher-centered approach (Estes, 2004; Gelisli, 2009), where the students sit and take notes on all the important information while the teacher lectures about symbols, themes, motifs, irony, foreshadowing, and so on. At the end of the unit, the students write a five-paragraph essay in which they dutifully
regurgitate the information the teacher gave them. This method of instruction certainly had its relevance at one time, but that time has passed, and educators must find new ways to teach literature and writing meaningfully and thoughtfully (Allen, 2001; Allison, 2005; Benson, 2008; Lasmana, 2010; Merchant, 2007; Romano, 2000).

The question driving this paper is: How can secondary English Language Arts (ELA) instructors effectively utilize digital modes of expression, such as PowerPoint, Prezi, or electronic portfolios, in conjunction with multigenre writing projects to demonstrate student-centered learning in literary analysis and ELA proficiency? These questions are discussed through the perception of one ELA instructor and her Grade 11 students.

**Organization of this Document**

Chapter One presents the problem of practice, followed by a significance statement. It also addresses the author’s positionality and presents the research questions along with the theoretical frameworks. Chapter Two provides a comprehensive review of the existing literature as it pertains to multiliteracies, multimodalities, multigenre writing projects, digital natives, and ELA pedagogy. It also presents an advocacy argument for incorporating digital multigenre writing projects into the ELA curriculum. It concludes with an analysis of how the literature relates to the problem of practice and suggestions for future research. Chapter Three presents the methodology of this study, including the research questions, research design, research tradition, site, participant recruitment and selection. It also discusses the data collection process, data analysis procedures, trustworthiness and validity of the study. Chapter Four explains the case study and presents the results of the study, providing detailed descriptions and analyzing the data collected during the study. It identifies six significant themes discovered during the case analysis and discusses them at length. Finally, Chapter Five concludes this study with a
discussion of the findings and their significance to the field of ELA and writing instruction, digital tools in the secondary classroom, and student motivation and engagement. It also discusses the limitations of the study and provides recommendations for future research.

**Research Problem of Practice: Relevance and Accessibility of Writing Instruction**

The traditional English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum in secondary schools across America is in need of modernization (Estes, 2004; Gelisli, 2009; Gillespie, 2005). While many high school ELA teachers are still upholding the strong literary traditions formed by centuries of authors in America, England, and beyond, the students are no longer finding the literature as accessible as it perhaps once was. The reason for this is simple; the world around the students has changed, but the content and pedagogy of the ELA classroom has remained largely the same for generations. A few simple changes in the pedagogical approach to teaching literature and writing might very well be the solution to the problem of accessibility and relevance plaguing today’s teachers and students (Lasmana, 2010; McCullough, 2010; McLeod & Vasinda, 2009; Merchant, 2007).

Much of the information accessed and used by today’s adolescents is available online via the Internet. Students routinely use their Smartphones, tablets, laptops, e-readers, and other digital tools to communicate and obtain information (Bittman, Rutherford, Brown, & Unsworth, 2011; Roberson, 2011). They also use these tools for entertainment purposes. They are inundated with information from many different media sources, including music, videos, blogs, social networking sites, online news and entertainment sites, and more. They rarely write with the traditional pen and paper anymore, because to them, this form of communication is tedious, bordering on archaic (Bittman, et al., 2011; Lasmana, 2010; McCullough, 2010). Yet, in the
ELA classroom, they are expected to read books and write essays about things that have little to do with their own lives in contemporary America (Jewitt, 2005; Kern, 2010; Snehi, 2011).

The disconnection between the content of the literature, the modes of communication and assessment, and the students themselves has never been as pronounced as it is now in the digital age (Bittman, et al., 2011; Lasmana, 2010; McCullough, 2010; Yancy, 2009). ELA teachers are searching for effective, engaging and relevant ways to work with the curriculum (Gaughan, 2008; Walters, 2010; Wickersham & Chambers, 2006), often in districts that do not have the resources to conduct an overhaul of the existing literature and assessment materials. They may have limited access to technology within the classroom setting, and they may be working with a variety of needs and abilities within a single class. As it stands right now, there is only very limited research available on how to achieve the goal of accessibility, relevance, and student engagement in the ELA classroom.

The research that has been conducted offers useful information. Bittman, et al. (2011) coined the term “digital natives” to describe our current generation of students, because these children were born into a world of technology. Kern (2010) explains that our digital world affects how students read and process information, and Yancy (2009) claims that technology’s influence extends to student writing as well. A lot of the available literature advocates for the use of “multimodal” content in the ELA classroom, incorporating many different forms of information and communication. According to Jewitt (2005), a multimodal approach allows different meaning-making tools to work together with new technologies to create a richer, more meaningful learning experience with literacy.

A few simple changes in the curriculum and pedagogy of the ELA program, regardless of level or grade, can increase student interest in reading and writing by making it more relevant
and personal to them. This in turn may increase their success both in secondary school and beyond by fostering literacy and creativity. A very promising method of reading and writing instruction in the digital age is a concept called **multigenre writing** (Allen, 2001; Allen & Swistak, 2004; Romano, 2000). This type of writing requires students to experiment with a number of different styles, genres, and concepts within one coherent final product (Allen; Romano). Multigenre writing projects are useful for many different purposes across the curriculum. Combined with a relatively new digital tool such as the electronic portfolio, or e-portfolio (Goodson, 2007; Herring & Notar, 2011), or PowerPoint or Prezi, the multigenre writing project has the potential to be very successful in developing literacy, critical thinking, creativity, communication, and technology skills in students (Allen; Gillespie, 2005; Goldfinch, 2003; Romano) while still maintaining the traditional curriculum valued and adhered to by many secondary schools across the country. This study will examine the effectiveness of the digital multigenre project as it pertains to student engagement and learning outcomes among eleventh grade ELA students at Sunnydale High School, the school at which the researcher has been employed as a classroom ELA teacher for the past eleven years.

**Significance of the Problem**

There has been a noticeable and drastic change in student learning and retention of information over the past decade. A major contributing factor to this change is the influx of technology in our society (Bittman, et al., 2011; Gaughan, 2008). Children communicate now in very different ways than they did in generations past, and this shift has had a trickle-down effect to many other aspects of their learning and behavior (Jewitt, Bezemer, Jones & Kress, 2009). Because of the accessibility of information via the Internet, and because of the inundating force of digital tools in virtually all aspects of our lives, it is time to revisit what educators believe to
be critical skills for secondary school students to possess before graduation (Jewitt, et al; Shoffner, DeOliveira, & Angus, 2010; Yancy, 2009). Consequently, educators must also revisit the ways in which these skills are taught to the students.

High school students need unique and specialized content and instruction in the ELA classroom (Goldfinch, 2003). Educators often find themselves facing a difficult challenge: the Internet (Kern, 2010; Shoffner, et al., 2010; Snehi, 2011). Students have at their disposal any number of sources that will provide them with the information they need with the simple click of a mouse or the touch of a screen (Bittman, et al., 2010). They can access summaries of books in the blink of an eye. They can also access entire databases full of student essays about a myriad of topics on virtually any work of literature in the world. The problem facing educators, then, is how to make students want to read, and more importantly, how to convince them that they need to be able to read (Jewitt, et al., 2009; Kern, 2010; Lasmana, 2010). In addition to that, educators must find ways to encourage students to write about what they just read, and to do so in meaningful, insightful and critical ways.

Educators would be well served by any tools that can address the Core Standards, work with the existing ELA content, incorporate technology, and foster student engagement all at the same time (Benson, 2008; Davis, Lovell, Pambrun, Scanlan, & Hadle, 1998; Gelisli, 2009; Powers, 2007). The digital multigenre writing project, when implemented effectively, has the potential to do exactly that. The digital multigenre project has several benefits to the field of education (Allen, 2001; Allen & Swistak, 2004; Romano, 2000). ELA teachers will be able to reach reluctant writers by making the assignments more approachable and interesting (Gillespie, 2005; Kissell & Kiser, 2008); the multi-genre projects are created in small increments and appeal to a variety of interests. Furthermore, these projects address the need for differentiated
instruction by reaching many different learning styles throughout the creative process. In
crafting their projects, students are learning how to communicate effectively, analyze various
forms of media, and work collaboratively to peer-edit and draft pieces of their multigenre
projects (Allen, 2001; Allen & Swistak, 2004; Romano, 2000). These skills are also relevant to
college classrooms and the future workforce (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2012); students
will learn to work with a diverse population, respect other viewpoints, and provide and receive
productive feedback. These are the types of skills deemed necessary in the 21st Century
(Partnership for 21st Century Skills), and the children are actually enjoying the process as they
learn (Gillespie, 2005; Kissell & Kiser, 2008). When they move beyond the walls of the high
school, they will be bringing these unique and necessary skills with them.

Positionality Statement

Author’s Background. I was raised in a working-class suburban White family in
Massachusetts. I am the first in my family to attend college, and I firmly believe that hard work
and dedication can take a person quite far in this world. I overcame many personal obstacles as
an adolescent, and I am proud to be where I am today. I hope to use my own life experiences to
help others succeed. I was also raised to love reading, and through literature I have experienced
lives, worlds, cultures, and time periods I could not have otherwise encountered. I value reading,
creativity, and writing.

As the product of a small town with little racial or ethnic diversity, I found myself limited
in my exposure to other cultures, religions, and belief systems. I also found that literature was an
incredibly valuable tool; through reading, I could discover new worlds, new societies, new
lifestyles, and new perspectives. I learned a great deal by reading the works of diverse authors
from various races, ethnicities, geographic locations, and time periods. Reading made me aware
of the world around me, and it helped me understand how to relate to the people who live in that world.

For the past eleven years, I have been working as an ELA educator in a town similar to the one in which I was raised. I teach all grades and levels, and am therefore exposed to a very wide range of abilities, interests, and work ethics. It always astonishes me when students simply do not want to read and refuse to do so. I cannot understand this mentality, but I find a way to work with it and reach these students so that they will be successful in the world after high school. I aim to help my students learn to be tolerant of other beliefs and values, cooperate effectively with various types of people, and work hard to achieve their goals.

**Interest in Revision of ELA Pedagogy and Assessments.** I believe that reading, writing, and communicating effectively are essential skills for the workplace, regardless of the occupation a person chooses. If a person can do these things, he or she can be taught other skills and content relevant to practically any field. Students should leave high school with these skills so they can go on to college or to the workforce and be successful. There needs to be some balance of responsibility between the teacher, the student, and the parent in this regard. The teacher must provide the tools for success, the student must learn to use the tools, and the parent must support the student at home. The question still, then, has to do with which tools a teacher should be providing in our changing world.

I have been teaching high school English Language Arts for eleven years, and in that time I have noticed significant changes in student learning. With the increasing accessibility of information on the Internet, as well as the changing ways in which students communicate with each other, it is important to look at how we teach students and see if changes need to be made to current practice in order to accommodate the needs of students in the future. As Lasmana (2010)
indicates, reading and writing are not the same in the digital world; information is as readily available in text form as it is in video or audio form, and our instruction needs to incorporate these modes of communication as well.

I would like to discover a way to best instruct formal writing in a world where everything seems to be informal, abbreviated, and turned into acronyms. Should we include contemporary American fiction, perhaps with a focus on multiculturalism, in our curriculum? What makes students want to read in the first place? How much short fiction and short non-fiction should be in the curriculum, and how is this related to the shortened attention spans of today’s teenagers? How do we adapt to the new Common Core Standards, with an increased focus on non-fiction reading and persuasive writing? How do we teach students to locate and utilize scholarly research when they can find anything they think they need on Google or Wikipedia? These are the questions that guide my interest in the subject of my research.

Documenting and Addressing Biases. I recognize that I have a distinct bias in my area of research (Carlton Parsons, 2008). I have always been an avid reader and a habitual writer, so it is sometimes difficult for me to imagine why anyone would NOT want to read and write. Sometimes when my students complain about the books I assign them to read, I take it as a personal affront. I love those books. It is not always easy to remember that some students feel about reading the way I feel about calculus—completely out of my element. I grew up in a house of readers, and as a child, I was read to every night before bed until I was old enough to read myself to sleep. Television and movies seem more prominent in children’s lives these days. I had to acknowledge these things when conducting my research.

I also come from a background of teaching remedial level English classes for many years, and this comes with the realization that many teenagers still read at an elementary level. Even
my more advanced classes have a tendency to read the online Sparknotes of a book instead of reading the actual novel. These things might have contributed to a certain sense of cynicism on my part.

Professionally, I have experienced many unfortunate and frustrating obstacles interfering with my efforts to revise the pedagogy within my department. The most prevalent issue is budgetary, because we simply do not have the funding to provide the necessary resources for prolonged, substantial Internet use. We have enough computers for 2 classes to use at any given time, but we have approximately 50 teachers in the building competing for their use. This factor contributes to the availability of computers for student use in the digital aspect of the multigenre project, particularly since several of my students do not have computer access at home.

**The Author as Researcher.** In conducting this type of research, it is important to consider the perspective of the *other*, since the educational researcher might be classified as an oppressor who does not give a voice to the teenager he/she is studying. The *other* might also be individuals from limited-income or low-income homes, ethnic, racial, or religious minority groups or English Language Learners (ELLs). Briscoe’s (2005) argument that issues of identity and positionality might influence educational research is valid and worthy of consideration. Still, my personal background as a middle-class White female will certainly affect my positionality. Conducting research on a group of people unlike me, regardless of the ways in which they are different, requires understanding on my part rather than sympathy (Jupp & Slattery, 2006).

Although I personally enjoy traditional writing assignments, I understood as I embarked on this scholarly journey that my research could lead me to the conclusion that these things are no longer relevant to the lives of the typical American teenager. I knew I might discover that short, contemporary non-fiction pieces are the best way to instruct the new generations in the art
of reading and writing. I hoped I had the potential bring to the forefront an entirely new form of assessing writing and critical thinking skills in secondary schools. I also understood that I might discover that the technology in my workplace is insufficient for this type of project to succeed in any long-term or large-scale way. Although the topic is relatively recent, I was able to find research about the changing pedagogy and curriculum in the digital age (McCullough, 2010).

What was always at the forefront of my research is the fact that I want what is best for the students, because I want them to go on and become educated, informed, skilled, and productive members of society so our country has a bright future and we can continue to thrive as a nation (Dewey, 1900). I understood that my own professional frustrations and personal beliefs could impact my research, but by articulating them, I was more aware of their existence and therefore more capable of accounting for these influences in my work.

**Research Questions and Goals**

The questions guiding this qualitative research project are:

1. What are the effects of implementing digital multi-genre research projects into the ELA curriculum at Sunnydale High School on student perception of the relevance and accessibility of the content?
2. What effects do digital multi-genre research projects have on student learning and achievement in the ELA classroom?
3. How do students feel about the digital multi-genre research project in comparison to a traditional research paper?
4. How can secondary English Language Arts instructors effectively utilize digital tools in conjunction with multigenre writing projects to demonstrate student-centered learning in literary analysis and ELA proficiency?
The goal of the researcher is to determine whether or not the digital multigenre project is a valuable means of assessment in the ELA classroom. The researcher seeks to understand how students respond to this project, and whether they find it more valuable and engaging than a traditional research-based writing assignment. For practical purposes, the researcher also seeks to understand how this project works in a typical high school classroom.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

A review of the existing literature on writing instruction and student motivation reveals a gap in how today’s students best learn how to write and communicate effectively in a digital world. The purpose of this research is to qualitatively explore an alternative research and writing project that might be effective at motivating students, increasing student interest in writing and research, and enhancing 21st Century skills in the process. This research is grounded in two theories: narratology and motivational theory.

**Narratology.** Because this case study involves the subject of English Language Arts, specifically literary analysis and writing instruction, one theory chosen to serve as a framework for this research study is narratology. Narratology is defined as: “the theory of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events; cultural artifacts that ‘tell a story’” (Bal, 1997, p.3). The theory helps readers to comprehend, analyze, and evaluate the various types of narratives (Bal). The central concepts of the theory of narratology are plentiful, but simply defined. One central concept of narratology is *narrative text*, which is a text in which a story is told in a particular medium (Bal). Another central concept is *fabula*, known as the series of related events caused or experienced by actors; a *story* is a fabula presented in a specific manner (Bal). *Event* is defined by Bal (1997) as the transition from one state to another. *Actors* are those agents that perform actions, and to *act* is to experience or cause an event (Bal). Narratives consist of three
layers: (a) text, (b) story, and (c) fabula (Bal). In simpler terms, the text is the mode of communication; the story is how the information is conveyed; the fabula is the plot; the event is the organization; and the actors are the characters in the story (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Major components of narratology. Definition: the study of narrative
Origins: Structuralism, humanities, human sciences, logic, rhetoric
Uses: Heuristic tools to make meaning of various texts; tool to create meaning in narrative texts and other narrative media

Narratology evolved from the philosophy and theory of many critical theorists. It was developed most clearly by Roland Barthes and Tzvetan Todorov (Lietch, Caine, Finke, & Johnson, 2001), though Fredric Jameson and Jean-Francois Lyotard also played a role in its conception (Abbott, 2008). Jameson described narrative as “the central function or instance of the human mind” (qtd in Abbott, 2008, p.1). Lyotard identified narration as “the quintessential form of customary knowledge” (qtd in Abbott, p. 1). Todorov actually coined the term narratology, defining it as the scientific study of narrative based in linguistics (Lietch, et al., 2001). Todorov (1969) wrote “Structural Analysis of Narrative” as a manifesto of narratology in
which he identifies and explains the components of literary analysis: (a) schema or plot, (b) part of speech, (c) actions, (d) modality, (e) perception, (f) relationships, (g) organization, and (h) time. He was influenced by structuralism and linguistics, particularly the works of Ferdinand deSaussure, and used these elements to analyze other elements of human culture (Lietch, et al., 2001).

Barthes (1966) argues that narrative is pervasive and exists in many forms all over the world. Barthes refers to narrative as “a prodigious variety of genres…able to be carried by articulated language, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances” (p. 80). Narrative exists in an infinite variety of forms and is “present in every age; in every place; in every society…narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself” (Barthes, 1966, qtd in Abbott, 2008, p. 2).

**Expectancy-Value Theory of Achievement Motivation.** Because of the education aspect of this research study, the second theory framing this study is the expectancy-value theory of achievement motivation developed by Wigfield and Eccles (1992) and based in motivational theory developed by Atkinson and Feather (1966). According to Wigfield & Eccles (2000), the expectancy-value theory of achievement motivation is based on the premise that “individuals’ choice, persistence, and performance can be explained by their beliefs about how well they will do on the activity and the extent to which they value the activity” (p. 68). This concept is grounded in the motivational theory posited by Atkinson (1957) and developed further in multiple subsequent studies (Atkinson & Feather, 1966; Eccles et al., 1983; Wigfield, 1994; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). The Eccles et al. (1983) study examined the expectancy-value model of achievement performance and choice specifically in the field of mathematics, based on the idea that expectancies and values directly influence achievement choices, performance, effort,
and persistence. In turn, expectancies and values are influenced by task-specific social cognitive variables such as perceived difficulty, belief in ability, and individual goals and self-perception (Eccles et al., 1983).

Figure 2. Eccles, Wigfield expectancy-value model of achievement motivation (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000, p. 69).

The constructs of expectancy-value achievement motivation theory are outlined above in Figure 2. First, expectancies for success are defined as “children’s beliefs about how well they will do on upcoming tasks, either in the immediate or longer term future” (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000, p. 70). Second, ability beliefs are defined as “the individual’s perception of his or her current competence at a given activity (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000, p. 70). Ability beliefs are different from expectancies for success because ability beliefs are focused on the present, whereas expectancies are focused on the future (Wigfield & Eccles), but the two concepts are
clearly related. Bandura (1997) included self-efficacy with his discussion on expectancies, distinguishing between efficacy and outcome expectations—efficacy being the individual’s belief that s/he can accomplish a task, and outcome being the belief that a certain action will lead to a certain outcome (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Bandura (1997) argued that efficacy expectations more accurately predict performance and choice than outcome expectations, while Wigfield and Eccles (2000) focus primarily on their participants’ success expectat

Motivation theories focus a great deal on the role one’s beliefs about one’s own ability plays in one’s motivation. Weiner (1985) posits that in general, individuals see ability as a trait over which they have little control. This perception of ability impacts motivation. When one attributes success to ability, motivational consequences are largely positive; but when one attributes failure to a lack of ability, motivational consequences are largely negative. Covington (1992) develops these ideas further, explaining that individuals preserve their self-worth by attempting to maintain a positive sense of their own ability (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).

In order to judge individuals’ perceptions of their own abilities, various methods are employed. Wigfield and Eccles (2000) asked individuals to rate their own individual abilities, but they also had participants compare their abilities across many subject areas as well as to other individuals. This measurement allowed researchers to obtain an accurate gauge of individuals’ perceptions of ability for the purpose of the study. Findings indicate that “ability and expectancy beliefs are crucial to the expectancy-value theory of motivation” (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000, p. 72).

Eccles et al. (1983) identify four main components of what they refer to as “achievement values.” These “achievement values” consist of: (a) importance, (b) intrinsic value, (c)
usefulness of the task, and (d) cost. Importance, or attainment value, is defined as the importance of doing well on the task. Intrinsic value refers to personal enjoyment gained from doing the task. Usefulness, or utility value, is how a task fits the individual’s future plans. Cost refers to what the individual must sacrifice or give up in order to complete the task (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).

According to studies in expectancy-value theory with child and adolescent participants, several important trends have emerged. First, an individual’s expectancy for success and beliefs about his/her own ability is the strongest predictor of student grades (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). These factors outweigh both previous grades and achievement values in predicting outcomes. Second, the individual’s subjective task values are the strongest indicators of whether or not the individual will choose to take on a particular task (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). In studies conducted by Wigfield (1997) and Wigfield, Eccles, and Roeser (1998), researchers examined how children’s ability beliefs and interest values affected their performance in different domains. Findings indicated that achievement beliefs, in conjunction with prior performance, were strong indicators of future performance, but interest was not a significant indicator of actual performance (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).

**Application of Narratology and Motivational Theory to Research.**

The theory of narratology is well suited to serve as the framework for a research study on literacy instruction and writing. The theory encompasses the various elements of storytelling, including plot, characterization, organization, language, time, and modality (Lietch, et al., 2001). In addition, it includes the many different genres of narrative storytelling, such as poetry, short stories, ballads, novels, and so on (Abbott, 2008). In order to apply the theory of narratology to the study of multiliteracies, the researcher will need to use Barthes’ (1966) definition of genre
and narrative. This definition will then need to be expanded to include more modes of storytelling, specifically those in digital form; these genres include Internet sites, blogs, videos, music, images, and other contemporary modes of communication and expression. The researcher will use the theory of narratology to study students’ meaning making and literacy skills, including writing, as they create their own stories using multiple modes and genres in digital form.

The theory of expectancy-value achievement theory is well suited for this research study because the researcher sought to determine what, if any, effects the digital multigenre project had on student achievement and engagement. The case study was designed to evaluate whether or not the digital multigenre project increases student performance on a writing assignment in comparison with a traditional essay. It also evaluated whether students were more interested or less interested in the project than in the paper.
Chapter II: Literature Review

Today’s students are preparing for life after high school; specifically, life in the digital world. As a new set of required skills emerges in the workplace, secondary schools must adjust their curriculum and pedagogy to teach these skills. The new skill set has become a staple in the field of education and beyond. It stems from the idea that digital tools have altered the needs of the workplace, and employees must be able to manipulate and analyze these digital tools in a meaningful and productive way. The following literature review is intended for an audience comprised of current and future English Language Arts teachers, middle school and secondary school teachers, curriculum coordinators, literacy coaches, department chairs, and other administrators.

Today’s children are born into a world of digital media (Bittman, et al., 2011; Jewitt, et al., 2009; Kern, 2010; Lasmana, 2010; McCullough, 2010; Merchant, 2007; Shoffner, et al., 2010). They are constantly exposed to various forms of technology such as computers, cellular phones, and television. They are inundated by images, videos, audio clips, text messages, emails, and social media updates. These factors affect the way they process information as well as the ways in which they communicate their own ideas to others (Bittman, et al., 2011; Jewitt, et al., 2009; Kern, 2010; Lasmana, 2010; McCullough, 2010). Though the amount of exposure these children have to digital media may vary based on cultural, religious, socioeconomic, or other factors, the fact remains: America now relies heavily on technology.

One way researchers are suggesting teachers might adjust to these changes is by using *multimodal* methods of communication; in other words, the integration of various contemporary modes or genres of text and language into the classroom rather than only the traditional paper-and-pencil assessments and teacher-centered instruction (Archer, 2006; Benson, 2008; Cope &
The idea behind multimodal instruction is to integrate the students’ knowledge base into their learning experience at school. This technique fosters the development of **multiliteracies**, through which students are able to demonstrate literacy in traditional ways as well as emerging ones; namely, visual, audio, web-based, and other creative modes of text (Archer, 2006; Bailey & Carroll, 2010; Lasmana, 2010; Merchant, 2007; Shoffner, et al., 2010; Unsworth, 2006).

An engaging and creative way to incorporate multimodal communication methods while developing multiliteracies is by incorporating **multigenre** projects into the curriculum (Allen, 2001; Allen & Swistak, 2004; Romano, 2000). These projects, originally developed by Tom Romano, allow students to express themselves creatively through various genres while still demonstrating critical thinking and analysis, research, writing, and other necessary skills for the ELA classroom (Davis, et al., 1998; Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, 2011). The multigenre project concept has been in existence for over a decade, but it has always existed primarily in paper form, because that is how it originated (Romano, 2000). Students submit their multigenre projects in scrapbooks, binders, or portfolios, but this format is perhaps becoming a bit outdated. This thesis advocates for the use of a digital format similar to an electronic portfolio (e-portfolio), in conjunction with the multigenre project in order to remain relevant in a changing world while meeting the needs of digitally savvy, diverse, skilled 21st Century learners (Bittman, et al., 2010; Kern, 2010; Lasmana, 2010; McCullough, 2010; Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2012).
Multiliteracies

Overview. Shoffner, De Oliviera, & Angus (2010) discuss the concept of digital influence on literacy, stating that conceptions of literacy have expanded beyond the prior emphasis on basic reading and writing. They argue that the concept of literacy needs to evolve and be reinvented as “multiliteracies” (p. 75) to address the broader modes of representation now prevalent in the lives of the students. Despite the many forms of digital communication now available, the traditional forms of print media are still most commonly found in the American classroom. This fact needs to change, because the 21st century English classroom “requires an extended understanding and enactment of adolescent literacy” (Shoffner, et al., p. 76).

English teachers should address and include other literacies like technology and multimedia in their curriculum (Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, 2011; Shoffner, et al; 2010). The reason behind this change is simple: 21st Century skills require creative thinking, effective communication, high productivity and digital literacy (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2012). As Shoffner, et al. argue, when the English classroom incorporates these skills in a meaningful way, students are able to develop literacy in other areas as well, including technology, science, information, media, and multiculturalism. The authors state that in order to do so, the English teacher must include multiple types of texts as well as multiple ways of reading and understanding those texts.

Digital Literacies and English Language Arts. Bittman, et al. (2011) refer to the current generation of children as “digital natives” because they have “been born into a ubiquitous digital media environment” (p. 161). These children have never known a world not dominated by media. These authors research technology’s influence on the following skills: (a) development of vocabulary and traditional literacy; (b) access to digital devices; (c) use of these
devices; (d) parental mediation practices; and (e) the association between patterns of media use and family contexts on children’s learning. The authors assert that growing up in a world mediated by technology has altered the way this generation undertakes cognitive and information processing. Today’s children are native speakers of the digital language of computers, natural multitaskers and active, experiential learners with their own informal learning agendas (Lasmana, 2010; Shoffner, et al., 2010).

As McCullough (2010) states, the digital age provides us with “new and different tools for communication, collaboration, and creative expression” (p. 65). We have new ways and modes of communicating that did not exist a few decades ago. These tools challenge our traditional conceptions of both reading and interpreting of literature. Furthermore, as Lasmana (2010) argues, the increasing prevalence of digital media in communication, reading, and writing practices has inspired new ways of thinking and communicating and has altered the ways in which we engage with texts. Lasmana states that because reading and writing is occurring increasingly online, we are interacting with the virtual world at least as much as we are interacting with the physical world. She believes that this phenomenon is causing materiality and virtuality to increasingly blur into each other. Lasmana also states that multimedia like video, text, audio, and images require us to redefine writing in digital writing environments.

Jewitt, Bezemer, Jones and Kress (2009) argue for a process of transforming literacy instruction in the technological age that reflects the changes in the outside world. The authors claim that the “digital landscape of the classroom” (p. 9) has fundamentally changed, and as a result, “shifts in classroom practice need to be located in a broader cultural and technological frame” (p. 9). The way in which students communicate has changed significantly, and now music, images and videos are inextricably linked to their everyday lives (Bittman, et al., 2011).
The majority of students now have access to various multimodal resources, and these resources have increased the reading and writing opportunities for them (Jewitt, et al., 2009). The new forms of information acquisition are part of the concept of “educational modernization” (Jewitt, et al., p. 10), a policy intended to regulate teaching and learning in order to keep them current with cultural change.

Shoffner, et al. (2009) argue for the integration of the arts into the English classroom as a means by which to engage students in “multiliteracies” (p. 77). The authors assert that teachers should include paintings, ceramics, photographs, films, plays, concerts, etc. in their curriculum to develop meaning in the text. They believe that these elements will serve to enhance the literature and the students’ ability to critically analyze texts in an interesting way. They also advocate for the use of digital texts in the classroom, including online sources such as newspapers, magazines, films, documentaries, blogs, video clips, and other media. These multimodal texts help students develop their own skills by creating their own digital texts, synthesizing and applying knowledge in a significant way (Unsworth, 2006). Shoffner, et al. recognize the fact that the conception of the English curriculum might need to change in order to accommodate new technologies and required skills.

In terms of reading comprehension and language acquisition, Jewitt (2005) writes that screen- and print-based technologies have created new and different modes of instruction and learning. The effectiveness of an old curriculum consisting solely of print-based literature is being questioned by many researchers (Benson, 2008; Bittman, et al., 2011; Jewitt, 2005; Jewitt, et al., 2009; Kern, 2010; McCullough, 2010). As a result, Jewitt (2005) explores the curriculum design used in contemporary English Language Arts classrooms to convey meaning through
writing, speech and image. Jewitt seeks to encourage educational research as it pertains to multimodal analysis in school literacy instruction.

Jewitt, et al. (2009) explain that English Language Arts instruction has been strongly affected by complicated and often unrelated processes of change, including shifts in policy, professional identity, technology and cultural atmospheres. The subject is one that, in general, every student must take at every grade in every public school system throughout the country. It is also a subject that is the basis of many standardized tests nationwide, and it is a benchmark by which we judge our educational progress (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011). Jewitt, et al. note that English is the subject most sensitive to changes in the cultural landscape. The cultural landscape of the United States is certainly changing, particularly as the number of English Language Learners (ELLs) continues to rise and the influence of technology continues to grow. This sensitivity is mostly due to the subject’s inclusion of language, literature, film and other media (Jewitt, et al.), because these forms reflect the changing culture of our nation’s people. Educators need to understand and reflect upon the ELA curriculum and pedagogy as they pertain to the interpretation of image, writing and moving image in the classroom as well as the changes technology influences in the classroom (Benson, 2008; Bittman, et al., 2011; Jewitt, 2005).

**Digital Literacies and Writing.** Merchant (2007) investigates the effects of technology on student writing. The author focuses specifically on the impact digital media has had on literacy curricula. He examines the definition of the term “digital literacy” (Merchant, 2007, p. 118) and identifies several key priorities for literacy teachers. He examines the future of writing and writing instruction in the digital age, and seeks to discover how teachers and parents might best help children become fluent “in digital literacy in the wider context of digital
communication” (Merchant, p. 118). In his investigation, Merchant evaluates the effects of various forms of technology, such as blogs, online videos, discussion boards, and other forums on literacy and literacy instruction. His findings show that the concept of writing is changing dramatically because of new media such as email, instant messaging, text messaging, etc. Writing has become more abbreviated and concise, but at the same time less formal and structured.

Merchant (2007) identifies four trends emerging from these new media types: (a) convergence, (b) portability, (c) pervasiveness, and (d) transparency. Convergence refers to the ability of one device to serve multiple functions. Portability refers to the ability to transport technology easily and effectively, thereby increasing its prevalence. Pervasiveness refers to the increasing presence of technology in our everyday life, and transparency refers to the ease of use of these devices. Despite these four trends, it is unlikely that our need for writing will diminish; we simply have different forums in which to write now. Merchant concludes that the integration and instruction of digital literacy is going to become increasingly significant in the future. It appears as though there is a gap in the literature regarding these four trends identified by Merchant, and perhaps more research is needed in this area. More research is also needed in terms of how to adjust to writing instruction in light of the new forums mentioned by Merchant.

Building upon Merchant’s (2007) initial discussion of the changing needs of writers, Yancy (2009) explains that writing in the 21st century has evolved, both in print and online. This evolution presents three distinct new challenges: (a) developing new models of writing, (b) designing a new curriculum, and (c) creating models for teaching the new curriculum. These challenges are presented as opportunities to make important changes to the instruction of writing.
so that we can better aid students in writing well and often so they can become productive citizens of the world in the future (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2012).

Yancy (2009) argues that reading has always been the focus of English Language Arts instruction, but that writing should now become the focus instead because it is the means by which citizens express their opinions and control their own environment. In the past, Yancy claims, writing was linked to testing and hard work, making it an undesirable undertaking. Now, however, with the new forms of digital communication available via the internet (Jewitt, 2005; Kern, 2010), writing is more prevalent and less challenging. Yancy argues that people are now writing to express themselves rather than to convey required information to a demanding institution. Writers now write just to share their thoughts and ideas with others, and to participate in a social environment (Jewitt, 2005; Kern, 2010; Yancy, 2009).

Multimodalities

**Overview.** Multimodality allows for many different benefits within any classroom, but its advantages are even more evident within the secondary English Language Arts classroom (Archer, 2006; Benson, 2008; Cloonan, 2011). Allowing teachers and students to experiment and communicate through various modes of communication such as art, photography, film, music, blogs, videos, and websites enhances the students’ abilities to express themselves effectively, analyze sources of information coherently, and apply their knowledge to other aspects of their lives (Cloonan, 2011; Unsworth, 2010). It also promotes creativity and critical thinking (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). Multimodality is particularly useful with students with special needs and students who are English Language Learners (ELLs) because of its appeal to means of communication beyond the written word (DeBruin-Parecki & Klein, 2003; Walters, 2010).
According to Jewitt (2005), a multimodal approach allows different meaning-making tools to work together with new technologies to create a richer, more meaningful learning experience with literacy. The conventional methods of reading instruction have been impacted by the changing character of text in general; many people no longer read print texts in the traditional sense because they now read online (Bittman, et al., 2011; Yancy, 2009). Text has, in essence, become multimodal. Jewitt seeks to understand “how the relationship between image and writing changes both the shapes of knowledge and the practices of reading and writing” (p. 326).

Digital texts offer the reader different ways to approach the text, and different ways to make meaning of that text (Jewitt, 2005). Different modes can be combined, conveying more than one meaning and encouraging the reader to interpret more than one possible reading of a text (Jewitt). These modes also allow the reader a unique means of engagement with the text that did not exist in simple print form (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Tanner-Anderson, 2009). For example, students might now perform a Web Quest to gain insight on a text, or they may interpret an image that supports a theme connected to a work of literature. Jewitt argues that the educator must embrace these opportunities afforded by digital media in order to reach the students by connecting with their “out-of-school worlds” (p. 330).

**Multimodality, Critical Thinking and Creativity.** Jewitt (2005) asserts that both reading and writing are multimodal activities because both are affected by the “spatial organization and framing of writing on the page” (p. 326). Though that may be true, there are also many other modes of communication to consider in the ELA curriculum. Benson (2008) seeks to discredit the belief that “nonprint-based literacy activities are somehow less valuable or even irrelevant” (p. 634) in the Language Arts classroom. Benson’s study demonstrates how the
use of multimodality in the ELA classroom, incorporating film, music, photography, art, and websites, enhances the traditional ELA curriculum and contributes meaningfully to the student learning process. Benson’s study also shows that multimodality promotes differentiated instruction by appealing to the various learning styles (kinesthetic, visual, spatial, aural, etc.) and helping students to develop critical thinking skills.

Benson (2008) explores the possibility of incorporating varying modes of communication and expression into the Language Arts curriculum and pedagogy. The reason, Benson states, is that in life, adolescents are increasingly expected to demonstrate literacy in many different modes, often visual or spoken, but their Language Arts courses generally still adhere to the traditional, formal writing assignments in their instructional practices. Benson argues that the Language Arts classroom is the ideal place to instruct students on the appropriate use of these other modes, allowing them to experiment with and become adept at many different ways of expressing themselves and communicating with others. Likewise, Unsworth (2006) discusses the increasing presence of visual modes of expression within literary texts, particularly within electronic media. Because of this shift in content, teachers must address the literacy instruction to ensure that students are able to effectively and accurately interpret and analyze texts consisting of more than one mode of expression (Unsworth).

In an effort to expand students’ communication skills beyond the traditional academic paper, Archer (2006) created an engineering assignment in which students had to produce academic writing as well as a poster for a research presentation. Archer noted that the posters demonstrated different types of connections than did the traditional writing assignment. Upon further analysis, the author concludes that the visual genre creates a different level of depth and critical thinking, opening up new avenues of discourse and insight allowing students to link their
research to other aspects of the course in a succinct, accessible manner. Archer does not advocate for replacing traditional writing with other modes of communication, but rather for incorporating other modes of expression into the curriculum and pedagogy of courses when they are appropriate and useful.

Due to the ever-increasing focus on standardized tests, teachers often struggle to find a place for creativity in the ELA classroom (Tanner-Anderson, 2009). Tanner-Anderson (2009) states that imagination is “the heart of authentic learning” (p. 12), and argues that multimodal instruction is an effective way to foster creativity and imagination in students. To that end, Tanner-Anderson creates an assignment that incorporates music, art, and literature for her adolescent students in an effort to promote higher-order thinking and literary analysis. The result was a positive, successful and creative learning experience where students made meaningful connections across genres (Tanner-Anderson).

**Multimodality and Special Needs Students.** Specifically in regard to technical education, special needs students are facing new and difficult challenges in the classroom (Walters, 2010). As Walters (2010) notes, special needs students are a quickly increasing population in the public schools. Part of their educational experience involves the use of digital tools for which there are no accommodations or modifications to meet their diverse needs (Walters). Regardless of their disability, these students are still expected and required to use digital tools effectively (Walters).

As Walters (2010) explains, multimodal communication tools are a necessary and valuable addition to the technological learning experiences of disabled students. For example, a student with vision impairment might utilize audio files to communicate, whereas a student with hearing impairment might communicate through videos and images instead. Students with
learning disabilities can utilize modes that appeal to their strengths, and teachers can use various modes of instruction to differentiate and meet the needs of all learners (Walters).

Nilsson (2010) describes how multimodal methods of communication and assessment can assist special needs students in the classroom. Nilsson identifies a student named Simon who struggles with school because of obstacles in the traditional approach to reading and writing. When given the opportunity to work with digital tools, however, Simon becomes creative, insightful, and engaged (Nilsson). The author attributes Simon’s success to his ability to utilize tools with which he is comfortable and skilled, which in turn allows him to think about the content rather than the method. As a result, a student who is unable to convey his thoughts and ideas through traditional means is able to use digital tools across multiple genres and modes of expression to communicate in a way his teachers never thought possible (Nilsson). In addition, DeBruin-Parecki & Klein (2003) claim that the multimodal instruction methods allow ELL and LEP students to learn and participate in classes more effectively because this pedagogy does not rely solely on the written or spoken word of a language that is foreign to them.

Cultural Benefits of Multimodality. DeBruin-Parecki & Klein (2003) identify another benefit of multimodal literacy activities; with creative uses of alternative modes of communication, students can cross language barriers and interact with other children from anywhere in the world. In this particular study, DeBruin-Parecki & Klein utilize multimodal activities to allow their American students to communicate with students in Bosnia. The lessons learned help students understand other cultures and life experiences. The authors explain that these lessons are important not only for this one unit, but also for the future of the students as they grow and learn in an increasingly diverse district; according to the authors, the limited
English proficiency (LEP) population is rising rapidly in the district due to an influx of immigrants in the community.

**Multimodal Tools and Techniques for Educators.** In order to effectively teach multimodal communication and expression in the ELA classroom, it is necessary to educate teachers on the proper and effective ways to do so. It is also necessary to create a common language regarding the literacy practices in order to maintain consistency and understanding among teachers. According to Cloonan (2011), Australia has incorporated a multimodal element to the English curriculum. Cloonan identifies the current problem with the Australian curriculum guidelines, namely, that the guidelines “indicate expectations that teachers will support their students’ interpretation and creation of multimodal texts” (p. 23), but fail to establish a “metalanguage” (p.23) clearly outlining the expectations and core concepts to the teachers.

Cloonan (2011) states that the development of this metalanguage is still in its early stages, and presents a review of existing research focused on applying a framework to multimodal instruction for ease and consistency in practice. Unsworth (2006) also discusses the importance of establishing a metalanguage to deal with the integration of visual media with print literature, arguing that the meaning-making of these multimodal texts without a common metalanguage would be limited.

Cope & Kalantzis (2009) attempt to identify a framework for the instruction of multimodal grammar based on the increasing need for multimodal literacy in the digital age. The authors state that the production and reproduction of meaning have changed as a result of the changing modes of communication. As new modes emerge, so does the need for new literacies to interpret and interact with these modes (Shoffner, et al., 2010). Traditional literacies do not
“recognise or adequately use the meaning and learning potentials inherent in different modes” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 363). Cope and Kalantzis identify the need for a multimodal grammar because of the transformation of language and communication that has occurred in the last few decades, particularly as it pertains to digital tools and visual images.

Cope and Kalantzis (2009) identify core concepts necessary to the development of a multimodal language that could be applied to “literacy learning” (p. 362). Among these core concepts are: (a) written language, (b) oral language, (c) visual representation, (d) audio representation, (e) tactile representation, (f) gestural representation, and (g) spatial representation. The authors explain that each of these elements has unique characteristics that allow students to express themselves in different ways, but depending on the context, they may also be interchangeable in certain situations. In order to use these tools effectively, however, teachers must be aware of the unique characteristics of each mode, assessing students’ use of these modes appropriately (Cloonan, 2011; Unsworth, 2006). As Cope and Kalantzis explain, too often teachers continue to adhere to the assessment tools for traditional writing assignments, despite the fact that these tools are inadequate or inaccurate for alternative modes of expression.

Jewitt et al. (2009) argue that the English curriculum, the organization of time and space within the English classroom, and the modal resources used in English classes must all be altered to improve the state of learning. Key to this change is the concept of multimodality, because these modes are relevant to the lives and future required skills of the students. The authors also argue for the inclusion of social communications in the curriculum and pedagogy. Most significant is the connection between the written word and visual representations of the concept behind the written word (Bailey & Carroll, 2010; Cloonan, 2011; Jewitt, et al., 2009; Powers, 2007).
Powers (2007) suggests an alternative method of composition involving the use of video text in lieu of the traditional written text. She argues that because of students’ multimodal experiences with technology, they should be able to compose not simply in writing, but in other ways as well. She sets out to examine the reading and writing (“designing”) processes and influences in the secondary English Language Arts classroom (p. 8). The author seeks to explore the answers to two specific research questions: 1) What processes do students use to Design with video text? 2) What influences students’ decision-making while Designing video texts? (Powers, 2007). Powers sets out to answer this question by conducting an experiment with two of her own classes. Her results indicate that the video composition process is a successful, engaging, collaborative, student-centered multimodal means of instruction worthy of future study.

Tatum (2009) discusses the importance of integrating multimodal methods of instruction into the ELA classroom. She suggests using activities that connect students’ reading and writing skills to their increasing “multimodal literacy” skills (p. i). In her dissertation research, she studied a group of students who created digital slide shows and videos based on the text they had just read. She defines digital storytelling as a form of narrative, usually short, first person narrative, that is presented in visual form. This type of storytelling shows promise in the area of writing improvement, particularly if the genre is expanded to include other forms of composition such as documentaries, informational stories, news reports, etc. Tatum’s study concludes that digital storytelling is a potential solution to the dilemma of literacy and writing instruction versus technology.
Multigenre Writing Projects

Overview of Multigenre Projects. Perhaps the most promising method of writing instruction in the digital age is a concept called multigenre writing (Romano, 2000). The term was coined in 1995 and expanded upon in 2000 by Tom Romano, then a professor at the University of New Hampshire. He introduced the idea of combining many different genres into a single piece of writing, collected and presented in project form. These genres may be poetry, song lyrics, pictures, narratives, dramatic or musical performances, video clips, blog posts, text messages, news articles, diary entries, letters, etc. (Allen, 2001; Allen & Swistak, 2004; Romano). The multigenre essay may be a personal narrative, an expository or persuasive writing assignment, or even a research-based essay (Allen & Swistak, 2004; Allison, 2005; Bailey & Carroll, 2010; Davis, et al., 1998; Gillespie, 2005; Goldfinch, 2003; Romano, 2000). The concept allows adolescent writers to demonstrate critical thinking, analysis and creativity in a way that connects to their interests and lifestyles (Allen & Swistak, 2004; Bailey & Carroll, 2010; Gillespie, 2005; Goldfinch, 2003; Howdeshell, 2007; Kissell & Kiser, 2008; Romano, 2000).

As Romano (2000) originally defined them:

A multigenre paper arises from research, experience, and imagination. It is not an uninterrupted, expository monolog nor a seamless narrative nor a collection of poems. A multigenre paper is composed of many genres and subgenres, each piece self-contained, making a point of its own, yet connected by theme or topic and sometimes by language, images and content. In addition to many genres, a multigenre paper may also contain many voices, not just the author's. The trick is to make such a paper hang together. (x-xi)
Possible Uses for Multigenre Projects. Davis, Lovell, Pambrun, Scanlon, and Hadle (1998) explain how to use multigenre assignments for a variety of purposes, such as biographies and structured research projects. The authors discuss how the assignments can be tailored to meet state standards for the subject area, and advocate for the use of the projects across disciplines. Allison (2005) worked with computer teachers and social studies teachers to create a library skills lesson in which students use the Internet to research various countries. The students then presented their research projects as detailed, multigenre trifold poster presentations (Allison). Bailey & Carroll (2010) incorporate multimodal literacies into their multigenre project, requiring students to read and analyze various modes of communication such as videos, music, and images in addition to the traditional written word. According to the authors, the multigenre approach increased student engagement and retention of knowledge because of the personal and involved nature of the assignment (Bailey & Carroll).

Goldfinch (2003) demonstrates how the multigenre assignment can be used to teach research in an interesting and meaningful way. Goldfinch explains the importance of using a well-designed rubric and creating clear guidelines for the assignment in research situations. Howdeshell (2007) also incorporates the multigenre project into her research instruction, arguing that the project empowers students and helps them take pride in and ownership of their work. Howdeshell also claims that the project expands the students’ knowledge and ability to think critically and demonstrate authentic reading and writing skills.

Kissel, Wood and Kiser (2008) adapted Romano’s multigenre concept to become a “Life Moment” project. In this project, the writers analyze the effectiveness of writing instruction through this particular medium. The assignment allows students to reflect upon their own life experience and write about it using multiple genres. This approach allows the writers to see their
own experiences from multiple perspectives. The teachers emphasize the drafting, editing and revision process before the students create their final product in composition form. The projects are then collected and compiled as a book of all student work, allowing students to understand a larger scope in terms of audience; their project will be published, not simply graded. The premise of the assignment is that students write better and more when they are writing about things that are meaningful to them and will be presented to a real audience.

Gillespie (2005) used the multigenre project to encourage students to make critical thematic connections to a literary work. Her goal was to allow students to write for an audience larger than herself, and for a purpose more significant than a grade. She created a project assignment for her students to write about the novel, *Shards of Glass*, using multiple genres organized around a central theme. Gillespie notes that a great deal of classroom instruction time needs to be devoted to teaching and working with the different available genres, but that the students tend to use this time effectively because they have so much creative freedom with the project itself. Overall, Gillespie found this project to be meaningful, relevant and successful.

Multigenre projects can also be used for cultural awareness and diversity training. Hughes (2009) uses the multigenre research project to allow her students to express themselves, their cultures, and their identities in a meaningful, creative way. She gives the example of a student who is a Mexican immigrant describing her family’s immigration experience to the class through the multigenre project. The project begins with a spoken narrative in the student’s native Spanish, followed by a hand-painted mural, an explanation of the pieces of the mural in English, and a letter written in her grandfather’s voice (Hughes). According to Hughes, this assignment was designed to meet the requirements of a program called, “This We Believe,” including high expectations for all members of the learning community, teachers and students
involved in active learning, and multiple learning and instruction techniques that respond to the diversity of the students and the community (Hughes). As the student audience watches and learns from the presentation, they reflect on what is being demonstrated and consider ways to approach their own projects differently in the future (Hughes). The audience, as well as the presenter, is actively engaged, interested, and most importantly, learning (Hughes).

Dickson, DeGraff, and Foard (2002) use the multigenre projects to increase student awareness of other cultures, races, and ethnicities in an effort to teach tolerance and acceptance. Through the use of songs, skits, videos, and other performances in addition to the regular written word, the students learned to make connections between people and cultures in a way that may not have otherwise been possible (Dickson, et al.). Gaughan (1998) uses the multigenre project to enlighten students about important issues like violence, racism, and homophobia in the classroom, focusing on the personal nature of the multigenre experience to appeal to the emotions of the students.

Guidelines for Effective Use of Multigenre Projects. In order to effectively use multigenre projects in the ELA classroom, educators must be mindful of several important things (Allen & Swistak, 2004; Allison, 2005; Bailey & Carroll, 2010; Davis, et al., 1998; Gillespie, 2005; Goldfinch, 2003; Romano, 2000). First of all, they must provide adequate time and resources for students to work on the projects in the classroom with access to teacher feedback, peer conferencing, and multiple drafts (Romano, 2000; Allen, 2001). Secondly, they must instruct students on how to conduct research, utilizing library resources if possible (Allen, 2001). Thirdly, they must design several mini-lessons to educate students on the various genres that will be incorporated into the final product (Allen & Swistak, 2004). Allen also advocates for the inclusion of student feedback when creating the rubric for the assignment. Finally, Romano and
Allen both advocate for the presentation aspect of the assignment to showcase the final product to peers, educators, and even parents and administrators. Allen suggests having a celebratory event to display and present student work.

Allen and Swistak (2004) argue for the importance of designing a “blueprint” for the project, and for ensuring that students are allowed to choose a topic to work on so that they will remain engaged and interested in the project for its entire duration, which may span several months. The authors designed an activity called “Facts-Questions-Interpretations,” or FQIs, to help students create this blueprint (Allen & Swistak). In this activity, the students write down facts, create questions about those facts, and determine which genres will best answer those questions. The FQIs also help students organize their projects, and they help the teachers create effective mini-lessons (Allen & Swistak).

Digital Projects and Electronic Portfolios

In light of the need for 21st Century skills, many scholars and practitioners advocate for teachers to incorporate digital tools into the curriculum. Particularly in light of the literature referenced previously regarding multimodality, multiliteracies, and digital natives, this researcher seeks to find a meaningful, relevant and accessible way of incorporating the multigenre project developed originally by Tom Romano into the ELA classroom in a newer, more contemporary way. This section examines possible new means by which a digital multigenre project might be created.

An organization called the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) created a set of standards known as the National Educational Technology Standards, or Nets. Recently, these standards have been revised and renamed ISTE Standards, and there is a set for each of the following subgroups: teachers, students, administrators, coaches, and computer
science teachers (International Society for Technology in Education, 2012). The standards are designed to “set a standard of excellence and best practices in learning, teaching and leading with technology in education” (ISTE, 2012). The goals of the program include: (a) improving higher-order thinking skills, (b) preparing students for the future in a competitive, global society, (c) developing “student-centered, project-based and online learning,” (d) creating systemic change in schools to include digital tools, and (e) inspiring “professional models for working, collaborating and decision-making” in a digital age (ISTE, 2012). The ISTE website provides a host of tools and resources for educators, administrators, and others to learn about and even implement the ISTE standards in their classrooms and schools. It is important to note, however, that the educational paradigm must exist within the school/district in order for these standards to be successfully implemented; as LaMaster (2012) states, “The NETS offer a framework for creating this plan, but without a clear educational paradigm, technology integration goes nowhere).

LaMaster (2012) advises educators interested in using the NETS/ISTE technology integration model to follow a series of steps, based on her own experience integrating technology into an outdated school system. First, LaMaster advises educators to assess the current technology infrastructure, as well as the success or failure of past attempts at technology implementation. Then educators must assess the educational objectives, state standards, paradigms, goals, and mission statements. Once these things have been evaluated, LaMaster advocates for a small-scale integration with some key faculty members. First, they should brainstorm ways to align the educational objectives and the NETS standards. Then they should gather a supportive group of teachers willing to integrate free and existing technologies into their learning activities. Then the NETS vocabulary should be introduced into discussions with staff.
After this has been done, it is important to conduct surveys and obtain feedback from faculty and students to gauge their reactions to the new elements in the curriculum. Finally, professional development, resources, and policies can be introduced to faculty on a larger scale to implement the tools throughout the school community (LaMaster, 2012).

**Electronic Portfolios Overview.** Electronic portfolios can be an effective means by which to incorporate student-centered learning into the ELA curriculum (Goodson, 2007; Herring & Notar, 2011). Student-centered learning involves replacing the traditional teacher-centered learning experience with one that places the students themselves at the center of the learning process (Estes, 2004). Recent research indicates that student-centered learning is more effective than teacher-centered in developing 21st Century skills (Estes, 2004; Gelisli, 2009; Roberson, 2011; Snehi, 2011;). The skills that are crucial to the workforce include critical thinking and problem solving, creativity and innovation, effective communication, and collaboration (Roberson, 2011). As Snehi (2011) notes, the education system in America needs to be updated in order to produce a generation of workers who are able to perform well in an environment filled with and run by technology. Gelisli (2009) concludes that there is significant increase in the success of students in student-centered learning environments when compared to students in teacher-centered environments.

Electronic portfolios, or e-portfolios as they are often called, are defined as "personalized. Web-based collections of work, responses to work, and reflections that are used to demonstrate key skills and accomplishments for a variety of contexts and time periods" (EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative as cited in Wickersham & Chambers, 2006, p. 739). E-portfolios allow a variety of stakeholders— instructors, administrators, students, employers—to compile and display their achievements, accomplishments, research, projects, goals, and artifacts in a unique
and contemporary manner (Wickerson & Chambers, 2006; Yancey, 2009). Essentially, these e-portfolios are simply a digital tool used in the same way that a binder or traditional portfolio once was; however, because of their digital nature, e-portfolios allow for an additional ease of communication and a wider variety of elements to be included (Yancey). While the use of e-portfolios is still in its early stages, research indicates that they can be highly effective (Goodson, 2007; Herring & Notar, 2011; Stansberry & Kymes, 2007; Yancey, 2009). It is important, however, for these portfolios to follow a proven model, utilize effective technology, and be used in an appropriate context for a clear purpose (Yancey).

Uses and Benefits of E-Portfolios. Instructors and institutions that have utilized electronic portfolios have been able to do so both in the curriculum and the assessments of their courses (Goodson, 2007; Yancey, 2009). There are many benefits to including e-portfolios in a course, provided that the instructor is skilled with the use of these digital tools and is able to instruct his/her students in them as well (Stansberry & Kymes, 2007; Wickerson & Chambers, 2006; Yancey, 2009). Electronic portfolios make it simple and efficient to include many different genres, particularly artifacts that extend beyond printed texts (Goodson, 2007). They can be used as an assessment tool to demonstrate student learning and mastery of skills (Stansberry & Kymes, 2007). They are particularly appealing to educators because they enable students to incorporate various types of artifacts to support goals and standards as well as reflections on the learning process (Stansberry & Kymes).

According to Yancey (2009), the “creating, evidencing, connecting, and reflecting involved in electronic portfolios engage students in new and beneficial ways” (p. 28), but only if the element of student engagement is clearly evident in the project. The students must have a personal involvement and/or connection to the project and its contents, and the students must
also remain committed to the project for its entire duration (Yancey), which tends to be prolonged because of the nature of portfolios in general. For e-portfolios to be successful, they must be designed as much by the student as by the institution (Yancey). A good e-portfolio assignment has the ability to teach students how to create a variety of texts and organize them in an interesting, meaningful way as they weave their narratives together with reflections and analyses for a cohesive final product (Goodson, 2007).

Wickersham & Chambers (2006) used e-portfolios for the duration of an entire course to assess “three student learning outcomes: self-knowledge, technological and organization skills development, and knowledge and skills transfer” (p. 738). While their study was conducted on adult students in a Masters’ degree program, some of their results can be applied to any student demographic that uses e-portfolios. Because educators are often required to provide documentation of student learning, they can use e-portfolios themselves to document assignments, assessments, goals, essential questions, and results (Wickersham & Chambers, 2006). In addition, educators can use e-portfolios with their students to document student growth and development by displaying progress over time (Wickersham & Chambers).

Herring & Notar (2011) use a program called LiveText as a publishing tool for e-portfolios with their students, referring to it as a “safe environment to research, read, write, collaborate, and publish in an engaging and motivating manner” (p. 786). They use e-portfolios as a means by which to teach 21st Century skills and ensure the future success of their students in school, life, and work (Herring & Notar, 2011). The premise of their focus on e-portfolios is the simple fact that the digital environment in which students live, along with the pervasive nature of today’s media, is inevitably changing the way adolescents perceive and process information (Herring & Notar). It is also changing the workplace, where skills like critical thinking,
collaboration, communication, creativity, media and technology, and life and career (Partnership for 21\textsuperscript{st} Century Skills, 2012), are of increasing value and necessity.

**Current Limitations of E-Portfolios.** Technology, for many students, is readily available in various forms at any given time. Many children have cellular phones, laptops, iPads, iPods, Kindles, and other digital tools, and they are generally quite adept at using them. But what happens to underprivileged children who do not have access to this type of tool because of the financial cost of buying them and sustaining them with Internet access? As Herring & Notar (2006) conclude, if educators intend to make technology a useful and meaningful tool for our students, we have an obligation to make these devices available to all students. Herring & Notar argue that access to a public, shared personal computer (PC) is not sufficient; students must have access to a personal device that belongs only to that individual student in order to make it a truly useful and meaningful tool.

Educators might demonstrate resistance to the idea of e-portfolios for several reasons. Often, teachers are “digital immigrants” rather than “digital natives” like their students (Bittman, et al., 2011). In other words, teachers may be inexperienced with the use of technology, knowing that their students are more adept at it than they are. Furthermore, schools often lack the technology resources needed to implement this type of digital tool on any large scale; if the school has only one computer lab with 30 computers for hundreds of students, it would certainly be difficult to have even one class use them on a regular basis. Finally, teachers are so inundated with the latest catchphrases in educational theory that they are reluctant to jump on the latest bandwagon until the technique stands the test of time. As Stansberry & Kymes (2007) note, there is still little research proving the effectiveness of portfolio assessments on increased student learning.
Educators must use caution and exercise good judgment when working with the Internet in their classrooms (Dorman, 1997; Taranto, 2007). Students must learn Internet etiquette; they must learn how to evaluate sources; they must learn how to express themselves appropriately (Taranto); and most importantly, the educators must find and utilize a safe and secure website through which to work with the e-portfolios (Herring & Notar, 2006). Teachers who do not exercise proper precautions and protocols for the use of online sources, media, and information might easily find themselves under close scrutiny by administrators, parents, and school board members (Dorman).

Suggestions for Future Research with E-Portfolios. The use of e-portfolios is the subject of an increasing amount of research, but the tool itself has not been in existence long enough to generate a streamlined, standardized means of implementation or assessment. Teachers need training, schools need resources, and students need instruction on the use of online portfolios (Wickersham & Chambers, 2006; Yancey, 2009). Technical support should be provided to users within the school district, and teachers must develop accurate, relevant and meaningful assessment tools to grade the students and document student learning once the portfolios are complete (Walters, 2010; Yancey, 2009).

Digital Projects: Alternatives to E-Portfolios. Other alternatives to electronic portfolios also exist, and may in fact be preferable because in reality, e-portfolios are designed specifically to showcase a collection of work over a period of time. The multigenre project is designed to display a collection of ideas or points about one specific topic for one specific assignment or purpose. Because of this discrepancy, alternatives to an e-portfolio must be examined in order to best serve the needs of this study. The researcher recommends the use of PowerPoint, a Microsoft software product, or Prezi, an online presentation tool, to fill this need.
Many of the ISTE (2012) standards are in line with both Common Core Standards (2011) and the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2011). This fact makes it easier and more accessible to begin integrating the ISTE standards into the curriculum, but of course the ability to integrate is limited by the amount of resources available to any given school or district. One of the ways in which the ISTE standards can be implemented is through the use of digital presentation tools such as PowerPoint or Prezi. Other technology tools suggested by LaMaster (2012) to meet these standards include Skype, Movie Maker, Delicious, Zoho, Kidspiration, Edublogs, SMART Notebook 10, and Wordle.

**Advocacy Argument**

**The Changing Digital World.** The 21st century workplace requires digital competences and social skills never before seen (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2012). The needs of learners are changing as well, because technology is now part of the everyday American lifestyle (Bittman, et al., 2011; Jewitt, 2005; Jewitt, et al., 2009; Kern, 2010; Lasmana, 2010; Shoffner, et al., 2010). As a result, English Language Arts teachers need to modify and modernize their curriculum and instruction in order to best meet the needs of these learners (Powers, 2007; Stansberry & Kymes, 2007; Walters, 2010; Wickersham & Chambers, 2006). The best approach to this change is a hybrid model of integrating both old and new methods of instruction and content (McCullough, 2010; Merchant, 2007). Today’s students need to be ready for the future so they can be productive and informed citizens of the world (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2012). Their surroundings have changed, as have the ways in which they experience life and acquire information (Bittman et al., 2011; Yancy, 2009).

**Digital Students and Digital Education.** If educators want to prepare students for their future, we must meet them where they are comfortable and build upon the skills they already
have. Technology is the way of the present, and undoubtedly of the future, so our classroom environment should acknowledge that fact (Bittman, et al., 2011; Jewitt, et al., 2009; McCullough, 2010). Educators should include necessary content and methods to help students prepare for the workforce (Turner-Anderson, 2009). The ELA curriculum and pedagogy need to be revisited to incorporate student-centered cooperative learning (Estes, 2004; Gelisli, 2009; Snehi, 2011) as well as technology and multimodal texts (Archer, 2006; Benson, 2008; Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Jewitt, 2005; Unsworth, 2006). According to Taylor, Casto, and Walls (2007), curriculum integrated with effective and appropriate technology demonstrated significantly greater gains in student achievement than curriculum without technology. These findings are applicable to a variety of subjects and a range of grades from K-12.

Lasmana (2010) states that because reading and writing practices are being transformed by multimodal approaches like videos and images, our understanding of these concepts as literary practices based only on words must be reexamined. New media technologies such as blogs, social networks, games, wikis, etc. are being used to communicate and share information, and rather than deeming them irrelevant, we should use them to supplement traditional forms of reading and writing. Lasmana encourages us to embrace the convergence of old and new media forms as the text continues to expand into digital environments. Likewise, McCullough (2010) seeks to understand the effect of technology on literacy by studying the transformation of reading practices as literature becomes increasingly digitalized. She argues that these new technologies do not hinder literacy or the cultural and humanistic values of society, but instead offer new opportunities for rich literary experiences as a reflection of modern culture.

In response to the issue of effective writing instruction in the digital age, Merchant (2007) argues that educators should use more technology, integrate digital literacy into the
classroom, provide many and varied online learning experiences, and develop pedagogy for critical digital literacy. Merchant encourages innovative work in educational settings revolving around digital literacy. Similarly, Yancey (2009) argues for a change in writing instruction that involves the writer in the process in a meaningful way. Yancey refers to the 21st century as “The Age of Composition” (p. 74), because in the digital era, everyone is a writer. The difference is that now writers compose not through direct and formal instruction, but through interactions on social media. We post on Facebook, Twitter, etc. in hopes that people will read and respond to what we have to say. As a result, Yancey argues, the role of the teacher is now less significant than the role of the general audience. Yancey explains that this shift is due to a phenomenon referred to as “social co-apprenticeship” (p. 74), where people learn from each other through social interactions online. Yancey also argues that as print literacy is no longer the primary form of communication, having been replaced by digital and networked literacy, today’s English Language Arts educators need to use multiple models of literacy acquisition simultaneously in order to best meet the needs of today’s learners.

**Evolution: Digital Multigenre Projects.** The multigenre assignment is a creative, differentiated way to assess student learning and growth while also allowing the students to express themselves and create a unique approach to a variety of subjects (Romano). As Allen (2001) explains:

> Each piece in the paper utilizes a different genre, reveals one facet of the topic, and makes its own point. Conventional devices do not connect the pieces in a multigenre paper, nor are the pieces always in chronological order. The paper is instead a collage of writing and artistic expression with an overarching theme that engulfs and informs the reader. (2)
The projects can be used for many different purposes, including research-based, narrative, persuasive, expository, or creative writing instruction and assessment. Because of the nature of the projects, they can also be used to teach collaboration, peer editing, and public speaking (Allen & Swistak, 2004; Allison, 2005; Bailey & Carroll, 2010; Davis, et al., 1998; Gillespie, 2005; Goldfinch, 2003; Romano, 2000).

As Chen (2010) revealed, research is quite limited about how technology can enhance student-centered learning. Several studies are available advocating for the use of PowerPoint by teachers to enhance lessons, but these are predominantly teacher-centered lessons that include PowerPoint as simply a different way of lecturing. Furthermore, as Chen notes, many teachers are not using these tools correctly or effectively. Chen’s (2010) study was designed to encourage pre-service teachers to incorporate tools such as PowerPoint into their lessons in a student-centered way; in other words, in a way that allows students to use technology to learn and present their new knowledge to their peers.

As noted above, little research is available on the student-centered use of PowerPoint or Prezi in the ELA classroom, but existing research does support the idea that e-portfolios can be effective in this environment. When e-portfolios are implemented correctly and effectively, the students demonstrate a markedly higher rate of success and engagement than their peers who do not use e-portfolios (Yancey, 2009). According to Yancey, students who use e-portfolios demonstrate a documented increase in student engagement throughout the course. They also demonstrate higher rates of course completion and higher rates of student retention, as well as an increased ability to work well with others, exercise leadership, and make meaningful connections (Yancey). They retain information and knowledge at a higher level because the e-portfolio provides a hands-on, experiential, active learning experience (Wickersham & Chambers, 2006).
In addition, students gain more experience collaborating and interacting with their peers and instructors, and they earn ownership of the learning materials as well as the final product, resulting in a deeper, more meaningful learning experience (Wickersham & Chambers).

The multigenre project, in combination with a digital format similar to an e-portfolio, PowerPoint, or Prezi, has the potential to allow educators and students to expand upon the original purpose and function of the multigenre project while meeting the needs and interests of 21st Century learners. While the traditional project was done in portfolio, binder, or scrapbook format, the digital project opens more doors for students to experiment with even more genres. For example, they might include a sound clip, a video clip, an embedded hyperlink, or color images and animation that would otherwise be unavailable. Since the integration of e-portfolios into the secondary curriculum is a relatively new concept, and since the multigenre project has yet to reach a widespread audience, little research is available on the blending of multigenre projects with digital formats or e-portfolios.

Summary

This paper does not advocate for a complete change to rely entirely on technology and modern materials, but rather for a hybrid method of instruction that includes both traditional and contemporary curriculum and pedagogy. As Kern (2010) explains, major cultural changes, specifically regarding technology, require us to reexamine how people construct meaning from reading a wide variety of text, including videos, newspaper columns, articles with hyperlinks, books, and advertisements. In fact, much of the literature available on this topic advocates for the integration of multiple modes of reading, writing and communication. As a result, the integration of multimodal texts through multigenre projects, displayed and presented through e-portfolios, is a topic worthy of future research and discussion.
Chapter III: Methodology

Research Questions and Goals

The purpose of this research was to determine secondary English Language Arts (ELA) students’ reactions to and perceptions of the introduction of a new project into the ELA curriculum. This project, the digital multigenre writing project, is intended to incorporate digital tools, multiliteracies, and multimodality into the existing curriculum to enhance student learning and engagement. The study was designed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the effects of implementing digital multi-genre research projects into the ELA curriculum at Sunnydale High School on student perception of the relevance and accessibility of the content?
2. What effects do digital multi-genre research projects have on student learning and achievement in the ELA classroom?
3. How do students feel about the digital multi-genre research project in comparison to a traditional research paper?
4. How can secondary English Language Arts instructors effectively utilize digital tools in conjunction with multigenre writing projects to demonstrate student-centered learning in literary analysis and ELA proficiency?

Methodology

Research Design. The research approach used in this study was qualitative (Creswell, 2008). An action research case study was conducted to examine students’ experiences with the digital multi-genre pilot project in the ELA classroom. The researcher is presenting her findings in narrative form, which is appropriate for an action research case study in writing instruction. A qualitative research tradition is an appropriate approach for addressing both research questions
for several reasons. The subject matter, English Language Arts, lends itself more readily to qualitative research by nature, although some aspects of the subject could certainly be studied quantitatively. Ontologically, the study is concerned with making meaning of the constructed and subjective reality of the participants (Ponterotto, 2005); namely, 21st Century high school ELA students.

The researcher’s active role in the project as an action-researcher also contributed to the need for a qualitative study, as the researcher was unable to remove herself from the research process (Creswell, 2008). This epistemological research approach is grounded in the constructivism-interpretivism paradigm, which holds that knowledge relies on a shared “lived experience” between the researcher and the participants (Ponterotto, 2005). The researcher, in the role of classroom teacher, worked closely with the students throughout the entire process, documenting the experience from a teacher’s perspective as the students expressed their experiences from the learners’ perspectives.

**Research Tradition.** The research tradition is a case study. As described by Yin (2009), case studies collect evidence from six different sources: “documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observation and physical artifacts” (p. 101). Thomas (2011) describes a case study as an analysis “of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions, or other systems that are studied holistically by one or more methods. The case that is the subject of the inquiry will be an instance of a class of phenomena that provides an analytical frame — an object — within which the study is conducted and which the case illuminates and explicates” (p. 511). A case study made the most sense for this type of research because the study sought to determine how a group of students feel about a new project.
Therefore, the researcher introduced this project to a class of high school students and documented their experiences as they worked through it from inception to completion.

Axiologically, the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm (Ponterotto, 2005), which studies the perceived social reality of the participants, dictates that the researcher’s role (here, as a classroom teacher) and values (namely, the belief that reading and writing skills are important) are not separated from the research process (Ponterotto) in this case study. While the researcher’s beliefs and values were presented forthrightly in the study (Ponterotto), they are not disregarded or segregated during the research process. These values are “bracketed” (Ponterotto) and addressed during the interactive processes of the research. Due to the interactive and subjective nature of this particular paradigm, the rhetorical approach to the presentation of the study is personalized and told in the first person, generally in a narrative style.

The methodology of this study relies predominantly on the creation of shared experiences to support the paradigm and on the documentation of these shared experiences. Multiphasic participant focus group discussions and reflection journals, along with observations by the researcher as she was immersed in the natural environment of the participants (Ponterotto, 2005), were the primary forms of data collection.

**Participants**

The subject population was 17 students, ages 16-18, of both sexes and various ethnicities from two different eleventh-grade ELA classes at Sunnydale High School. The criteria for inclusion in the study were simply enrollment in the class and voluntary participation based on informed consent. The rationale for the use of adolescent participants is the fact that the study was designed to examine the effectiveness of an experimental writing project in the secondary ELA classroom. Random convenience sampling was used for this site.
Recruitment and Access

Site. The site for this study was Sunnydale High School, the only public high school in a small southeastern Massachusetts town, with an enrollment of approximately 750 students in grades 9-12. The school is fed by the only middle school in town, which serves grades 5-8. The researcher is an ELA teacher who has been working in this role at Sunnydale High School for the past eleven years.

Sample Selection. The participants of the case study were selected randomly based on their enrollment in an English Language Arts (ELA) class at Sunnydale High School. The sample was initially selected by a computer program, Admin Plus, used by school administrators to schedule students based on grade and level (honors, college prep, or inclusion) and then assign them to a section taught, in this case, by the researcher. The researcher chose to work with two ELA classes in order to create the ideal circumstances for a case study and to collect data from a sample large enough to consider a variety of perspectives (Yin, 2009), but small enough to be focused on the research questions and the multigenre project. These classes included one eleventh-grade honors class and one standard (college prep) level eleventh-grade class. All eleventh-grade ELA classes are required by department policy to write a research paper.

Recruitment. Once enrolled in the class, students were informed of the project itself, the purpose of the study, the concept of action research, and the alternative procedures for non-participating students. After receiving full disclosure about the anticipated benefits and risks of participating in the study, students were given the opportunity to participate in the study with the understanding that they would not be penalized in any way if they chose not to participate, and that they may withdraw from the study at any time. Students were asked to provide assent to participate in the study, and their parents/guardians were required to sign the “Informed
Consent” form (Appendix C). Only students who provided both assent and parental consent participated in the study; all others were not included in the data collection process.

**Ethical Considerations and Confidentiality.** The name of the school, school district, administrators, and faculty members were changed in order to protect the identity of the school itself. In addition, the names of all participants were changed. Audio data from focus groups was recorded anonymously via a Sony digital audio recorder. Pseudonyms were given to all participants and were used for the reflection journals and observational notes. All surveys and transcribed focus group discussions were anonymous. NVivo was used to code data with pseudonyms and coding techniques, and all recordings will be destroyed upon submission of this thesis.

**Research Site Approval.** In order to conduct this study, the proposal was approved by the following individuals/organizations: Sunnydale High School’s Principal and the Sunnydale School District’s Superintendent of Schools (Appendix B). Access to the site and population was provided by the school district, with permission from the Superintendent of Schools.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Data was collected through a combination of survey questions, focus group discussions, reflection journals, and teacher observations. The data for this study was collected in six phases: 1) Traditional essay pre-writing; 2) Traditional essay in-progress; 3) Traditional essay post-writing; 4) Multigenre project pre-writing; 5) Multigenre project in-progress; and 6) Multigenre project post-writing. The final phase, Phase 7, included the collective analysis of all combined findings.

**Phase I: Traditional Essay Pre-Writing.** Prior to the beginning of the project, students were given the assignment sheet and rubric (Appendix D) and asked to complete a survey about
traditional writing assignments (Appendix F). They then participated in a 30-minute recorded focus group discussion about the assignment (Appendix G). Finally, students responded to a 10-minute reflection journal prompt (Appendix H). These questions were all about how students feel about writing assignments in terms of relevance, accessibility, learning, and interest. The survey questions were intended to collect data that is more objective than interviews while still allowing participants to express their thoughts and feelings about the writing assignments, but in a measurable way.

Throughout the six phases, all four surveys were conducted in the school’s computer lab via an online survey tool, Survey Monkey (2013), and responses were anonymous. Prior to filling out the surveys, students were provided with the assent form (Appendix C) and were informed that they could leave questions blank if they chose not to answer them. Surveys had a time restriction built in so that data could not be entered or altered outside of the set data collection period. Focus group discussions were recorded via Sony digital technology, and data was transcribed and analyzed by the researcher. Data was compiled by survey questions and coded according to the frequency of each response in a Structural Coding method (Saldana, 2009). All data was coded and stored in NVivo 10.

Phase II: Traditional Essay In-Progress. In this phase, students responded to multiple reflection journal prompts in multiple class periods during the writing process (Appendix H). During this phase, the action researcher also took observational notes during each class period.

Phase III: Traditional Essay Post-Writing. After submission of the final product, students participated in another 10-question survey, another 30-minute focus group, and another 10-minute reflection journal. Data was coded and analyzed by the researcher.
Phase IV: Multigenre Project Pre-Writing. Prior to the beginning of the multigenre e-portfolio project, students were given the assignment sheet and rubric (Appendix E) and asked to complete a survey about digital tools and writing assignments (Appendix F). They then participated in a 30-minute recorded focus group discussion about the assignment (Appendix G). Finally, students responded to a 10-minute reflection journal prompt (Appendix H). These questions were all about how students felt about the multigenre project in terms of relevance, accessibility, learning, and interest.

Phase V: Multigenre Project In-Progress. In this phase, students responded to multiple reflection journal prompts in multiple different class periods during the writing process (Appendix H). During this phase, the action researcher also took observational notes during each class period.

Phase VI: Multigenre Project Post-Writing. After submission of the final product, students participated in another 10-question survey, another 30-minute focus group, and another 10-minute reflection journal. Data was coded and analyzed by the researcher.

Phase VII--Final Phase: Collective Analysis of Findings. Once Phase VI was complete, the researcher utilized NVivo 10 to compile the data and perform a round of secondary coding which combined the various phases and displayed similarities and differences in the coded data. This final round of coding was essential to the analysis and presentation of findings. The following artifacts are included in the final analysis:

- Transcribed copies of 4 focus group discussions
- Results of 4 surveys
- Student responses to reflection journal prompts
- Observational notes from the action researcher
• Assignment sheets and rubrics for both the traditional essay and the digital multigenre project

• Examples of student work including final products of both assignments

Data Storage and Access

Individuals who may have access, during or after completion, to the results of this study, whether they be published or unpublished, include members of the Northeastern University faculty, staff, and student body; members of the Sunnydale High School faculty, staff, and student body; researchers interested in multi-genre projects and/or digital projects in the ELA classroom, and anyone with access to dissertations on a database.

Participants maintained a reasonable degree of anonymity throughout the research study and should expect the same upon its completion and possible publication. The name of the school was changed to protect student confidentiality, and all students were referred to by pseudonyms. Data collected was coded so as not to reveal any specifically identifying factors. Recordings were stored in password-protected files on the researcher’s personal computer, and transcripts of interviews and other notes were also stored in password-protected files. The password protection ensured that only the researcher had access to the raw data and that the confidentiality of the participants was secured. These files will be archived upon completion of the research project and discarded upon publication of this thesis.

Trustworthiness and Validity

Trustworthiness. In addressing the issue of trustworthiness, this researcher addressed the credibility of the research by recognizing, acknowledging and accounting for researcher bias and other factors. In this study, the “findings should represent, as far as is (humanly) possible, the situation being researched rather than the beliefs, pet theories, or biases of the researcher”
internal validity of the study was maintained through the consistency of the data collection and documentation processes and tools. The transferability of the study, along with the subjectivity and reflexivity (Morrow, 2005) was also addressed.

**Quality.** The quality of the study was ensured through the collection of adequate data and evidence to support the research questions (Morrow, 2005). Data was collected until it reached the point of redundancy, where no new information could be collected without being repetitive (Morrow). The data was triangulated because it was collected at a variety of times and stages throughout the process, and it was collected in a variety of ways (Creswell, 2008). This included interviews, reflection journals, observational notes, and survey responses. Sampling was purposeful and criterion-based in connection with the research questions (Morrow).

**Verification.** As stated by Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers (2002), “verification is the process of checking, confirming, making sure, and being certain. In qualitative research, verification refers to the mechanisms used during the process of research to incrementally contribute to ensuring reliability and validity and, thus, the rigor of a study” (p. 17). This research study utilized multiple verification strategies to ensure the reliability and validity of the data. *Methodological coherence* (Morse, et al., 2002) was used to ensure the connection between the research questions and the methodology of the study. The research questions and the methods were aligned (Morse, et al.). If these two components were not aligned, changes may have been made to either the methods or the questions to ensure congruence.

*Appropriate sampling* was used in an effort to ensure that the participants are representative of the demographic and the research topic under investigation (Creswell, 2008). The sample was adequate based on “saturation and replication” (Morse, et al., 2002, p. 18) to
show sufficient evidence for all elements of the phenomenon under investigation. Data was collected and analyzed concurrently to show a connection and interaction between what is known and what still needs to be known (Morse, et al.). Theoretically, the ideas that emerged from the data were reconfirmed with new data, and the new ideas were also verified through looking at data that was already collected (Morse, et al.). All research and data were collected and analyzed through the lens consistent with the theoretical frameworks of narratology and motivational theory in tandem with the methodology of a case study.

In order to ensure the validity of the research, member checking during and after the interview process was conducted. Data was triangulated. Interview questions and survey questions were as objective as possible, addressing all possible anticipated views, and ensuring that responses were confidential and without consequence (Creswell, 2008; Morse, et al., 2002).

**Protection of Human Subjects**

**Protecting Participants.** Participants should have expected a reasonable degree of anonymity throughout the research study and upon its completion and possible publication. The name of the school was changed to protect student confidentiality, and all students were referred to by pseudonyms (Creswell, 2008). Collected data was coded so as not to reveal any specifically identifying factors (Saldana, 2009). Though the study was recorded in narrative form, the focus of the study was on student perceptions of the assignment itself, not on the students as individuals. This distinction helped minimize exposure of students’ personal information and traits.

**Anticipated Risks.** The risks of participation in this research study were minimal. Physically and legally, there were no risks, as this was an academic assignment. Psychologically and socially, the risks were negligible as well. Students may have felt concerned that their grade
would be dependent upon their participation in the study. They may also have felt as though their grade would be affected by any negative feedback they provided about the project. This risk was minimized by the data collection methods; participants provided written feedback via an anonymous online questionnaire, and they were not asked to reflect on the final product until the project was graded to minimize the perceived risk of negative feedback.

**Anticipated Benefits.** Potential benefits to be gained by the subjects from this study include the opportunity to be creative and original in writing about a particular subject in their ELA class. They were exposed to various modes of communication instead of solely the written word. They were also able to work with digital tools, which enhance their 21st Century skills and prepare them for work and education after high school. The study could benefit the field of ELA on a larger scale by allowing teachers another mode through which to encourage critical thinking and analysis in a more accessible and relevant way.

**IRB Certification**

Required IRB certificate of completion was obtained on 04/17/2013 from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research for the NIH web-based training course, “Protecting Human Research Participants,” Certificate Number 1165321 (Appendix A). Researcher obtained IRB approval prior to introducing the study to the site and potential participants (Appendix A).

**Summary**

This qualitative case study employed an action research approach to evaluate the effects of the digital multigenre research project on student performance and perception. The researcher used observations, focus groups, reflection journals, and survey results to collect data to answer the
research questions. Data was collected anonymously and stored securely. School and student names were changed for privacy.
Chapter IV: Report of Research Findings

This research study was designed to provide information and insight about the research questions. To understand the implications of the digital multigenre research project in the Grade 11 ELA classroom, particularly in comparison with a traditional research paper, various data collection tools were employed. Participants from two classes were asked to participate in four focus group discussions, eight reflection journals, and four surveys. Data were also collected via student work samples, assessment tools, and a teacher observation journal. The observations, assessment tools, journal entries, survey data, and focus group discussion results were used to provide insight into how students responded to the Digital Multigenre Research Project, as well as into how educators might successfully use these projects in their classrooms in the future.

Case Study District

Context

This case study was conducted in a small suburban school district in Massachusetts. To protect the identity of the participants, the district name has been changed, for the purpose of this study, to Sunnydale School District. The district schools are accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). As of the 2012-2013 school year, 2,629 students are enrolled in this district. Five schools, divided by grade level, serve the entire district. Table 1 displays the ethnicity and gender of students in the district as well as the state demographic information for comparison. All demographic information in this section was provided by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA DESE, 2013).
Table 1

District Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>% of District</th>
<th>% of State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>92.8</td>
<td>66.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>% of District</th>
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<tbody>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander</td>
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<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Enrollment by Gender (2012-13)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1,352</td>
<td>489,289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1,277</td>
<td>465,484</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,629</td>
<td>954,773</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students come from a wide variety of socio-economic statuses (SES) within the town. 0.4% of the district population is classified as English Language Learner (ELL), 19.9% are classified as Low-Income, and 20.3% are classified as Students with Disabilities. 12% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch. The district is a Title I district. The district does not offer school choice, nor does it participate in METCO, the urban busing program from Boston.

Case Study School

Context

This research study was conducted at the public high school, which serves 707 students in grades 9-12. Table 2 displays the ethnicity and gender of students at the high school.
Table 2

**School Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>% of School</th>
<th>% of District</th>
<th>% of State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>94.6</td>
<td>92.8</td>
<td>66.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity (2012-13) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>% of School</th>
<th>% of District</th>
<th>% of State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>94.6</td>
<td>92.8</td>
<td>66.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Enrollment by Gender (2012-13) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>1,352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>1,277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>707</td>
<td>2,629</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The high school is not a Title I school. According to DESE data, the Class of 2012 Cohort demonstrated an 86.7% graduation rate. Of the remaining students, 2.4% of the cohort remained enrolled at the high school, whereas another 2.4% obtained a GED in lieu of a diploma. 8.6% of the cohort dropped out of school. Many of those students who dropped out were considered “High Needs:” a total of 16.1% of the Students with Disabilities population and 15.4% of the Low-Income population. Table 3 displays the plans of high school graduates from the 2012 Cohort.
Table 3

Plans of High School Graduates (2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plan</th>
<th>% of School</th>
<th>% of District</th>
<th>% of State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4-Year Private College</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-Year Public College</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-Year Private College</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-Year Public College</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Post-Secondary</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The high school employs 52 full-time teachers, 100% of whom are licensed in their teaching assignments. 100% of the teachers are considered “Highly Qualified.” The student-teacher ratio is 13.6 to 1.

Table 4

School Technology Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students per Computer</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classrooms on the Internet (%)</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Case Description: The Grade 11 ELA Classroom at Sunnydale High School

The Grade 11 ELA curriculum focuses on American Literature. The school operates on a rotating block schedule, so each class meets every other day for 90 minutes. Honors classes move at a slightly faster pace and include longer writing assignments and more extensive reading selections than the college prep classes, but the curriculum for both is essentially the same.

Students read a selection of works, including those by Hawthorne, Emerson, Thoreau, Fitzgerald, and Walker. The literature selection covers the time span from the seventeenth century to the
twenty-first century and addresses a variety of ethnicities. Students read fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and drama. Students are also expected to prepare for the reading and writing sections of the SAT. In addition, the curriculum mandates a research paper for all Grade 11 students. For many of them, this is the first exposure they have to conducting formal research.

The Grade 11 research paper is generally introduced in Term 2 or Term 3 of a 4-term school year. In 2011, the assignment was changed from a literary analysis paper to a persuasive paper. Because this is the first time students receive formal research instruction within the department, the teachers have devised a step-by-step process for students to become accustomed to finding, using, and citing primary and secondary sources. The school librarian also gives each class a presentation on how to use the library databases to search for sources and how to evaluate the authenticity and reliability of those sources. From start to finish, the research paper process takes about eight weeks and is worth three test grades for the term. Honors classes are expected to write an 8-9-page paper with approximately 7 sources, and College Prep (CP) classes are expected to write a 6-7-page paper with approximately 5 sources.

**Case Study Participants**

**Case Study Group A: College Preparatory English**

Seven out of 22 students participated in the research study from this class. According to Survey #1 (Appendix F), out of those 7 students, 57% claim to like English class, while 43% dislike it. 29% of participants like reading books for school, but 71% do not. Similarly, 29% like reading books outside of school, but 71% do not. 28% of students like writing fiction, short stories, and non-fiction, and 71% dislike writing those things. Only 17% of participants like writing papers and essays for school; 50% dislike it and 33% strongly dislike it. Not one single participant considers him/herself to be a good writer; 86% disagreed with that statement and 14%
strongly disagreed. 14% of participants spend an estimated 2-3 hours per week on average doing homework; 43% spend 4-5 hours, 29% spend 6-7 hours, and 14% spend 8 or more hours per week on homework. All participants claim to turn most or all essays in on time for English class, and all of them claim to use at least one of the following writing tools: Graphic organizer, peer editing, rubric, proofreading, and drafting.

According to Survey #3 (Appendix F), the majority of Group A, 50%, spend only 2-3 hours per week watching television. 25% watch 4-5 hours, and 25% watch 6-7 hours. Nobody watches less than 2 hours or more than 8 hours of television per week on average. Every student in this group, however, spends a minimum of 4 hours per week online, including access via computers, tablets, Smartphones, and similar devices. 25% of participants fall into the 4-5 hour range, 50% in the 6-7 hour range, and 25% are in the 8 or more hours range. All students (75% agree, 25% strongly agree) feel comfortable finding information online. Half of them use video sources like Youtube to find information and/or learn how to do things, while the other half do not; however, all participants claim to use Youtube and other online video sources for entertainment purposes. No students consider themselves proficient in using Google Drive or Google Docs, and no students have ever used an online portfolio site before. 50% of the participants have had a blog. All students claim proficiency in Microsoft PowerPoint. Only 25% of participants have used Prezi before; the other 75% have not.

Case Study Group B: Honors English

Ten out of 24 students participated in the research study from this class. According to Survey #1 (Appendix F), out of those 10 students, 88% claim to like English class, while 12% dislike it. 56% of participants like reading books for school, but 44% do not. 66% like reading books outside of school, but 34% do not. 38% of students like writing fiction, short stories, and
non-fiction, and 62% dislike writing those things. Only 33% of participants like writing papers and essays for school; 44% dislike it, and 22% strongly dislike it. 78% of participants consider themselves to be good writers; 22% disagreed with that statement. 11% of participants spend an estimated 2-3 hours per week on average doing homework; 44% spend 4-5 hours, 22% spend 6-7 hours, and 22% spend 8 or more hours per week on homework. All participants claim to turn most or all essays in on time for English class, and all of them claim to use more than one of the following writing tools: Graphic organizer, peer editing, rubric, proofreading, and drafting.

According to Survey #3 (Appendix F), 44% of Group B students spend 4-5 hours per week watching television. 11% watch 0-1 hour, 33% watch 2-3 hours, and 11% watch 6-7 hours. Nobody watches more than 8 hours of television per week on average. Every student in this group spends a minimum of 2 hours per week online, including access via computers, tablets, Smartphones, and similar devices. 22% of participants fall into the 2-3 hour range, 33% are in the 4-5 hour range, 11% are in the 6-7 hour range, and 33% are in the 8 or more hours range. Most students feel comfortable finding information online, but 11% do not. Slightly more than half (55%) of them use video sources like Youtube to find information and/or learn how to do things, while the remaining students do not; however, most participants (89%) claim to use Youtube and other online video sources for entertainment purposes. Only 11% of students consider themselves proficient in using Google Drive or Google Docs, and no students have ever used an online portfolio site before. Only 11% of the participants have had a blog. 89% of students claim proficiency in Microsoft PowerPoint. None of these participants have used Prezi before.
**Case Study Group Comparisons and Analysis**

Based on participants’ responses to survey questions, the following conclusions may be drawn about the two case study groups. Participants from Group A, the college prep level class, enjoy English class less than their Group B counterparts. Group A is predominantly a group of non-readers, meaning the majority of them do not enjoy reading books in or out of school. Group B, on the other hand, consists of a majority of readers; 56% of them like reading books for school and even more students, 66%, enjoy reading outside of school. Student writers are in the minority from both groups; only 28% of Group A students and 38% of Group B students like to write creatively on their own, and even fewer, 17% in Group A and 33% in Group B, like writing for school. Both groups use multiple tools during the writing process to help them succeed, and all members from both groups claim to submit most or all of their English essays on time. Group B tends to spend more time per week doing homework, but both groups spend an average of at least an hour per night on homework. The most significant finding in this survey data is the fact that not a single participant from Group A feels as though he/she can identify him/herself as a “good writer,” whereas an astonishing 88% of participants from Group B identified themselves as “good writers.”

According to the technology survey results, Group A and Group B have more similarities than differences in this area. On average, both groups of participants spend more time online than they do watching television. They have access to multiple digital tools that provide them with Internet access, including computers, tablets, and primarily Smartphones. They use Youtube for both instructional and entertainment purposes, but gravitate towards the latter. No student from either group has ever used an electronic portfolio before, and less than half have had a blog. Very few of the participants are familiar with Google Drive or its components, but
most of them are comfortable with PowerPoint presentations. A small percentage of participants have experience using Prezi, but most do not.

**Research Study Participant Profiles: Group A**

**Anthony.** Anthony is a 17-year-old Caucasian male. He is quiet, polite, kind, and hard working. He always puts forth his best effort on every assignment, and he is very conscientious about completing his work, meeting deadlines, and fulfilling requirements. He stays focused on class work, and he is good at working in groups and demonstrates a high level of critical thinking. He is comfortable using technology.

**Allie.** Allie is a 17-year-old Caucasian female. She is a senior who plans to graduate this year. She is currently enrolled in both junior and senior English because she failed freshman English and had to repeat the course, but she has enough credits otherwise to be classified as a senior. She is on an Individual Education Plan, or IEP, and qualifies for services through the Special Education Department due to some learning disabilities that affect her processing and retention abilities. She is good at demonstrating critical thinking and analysis orally, but struggles to convey her ideas effectively in writing. She also neglects to submit homework in a timely manner. She is polite, funny, and thoughtful. She loves drama and will participate in the senior class play this spring.

**Cara.** Cara is a 16-year-old Caucasian female. She was a student in my honors level English class last year, but she chose to move to the regular college prep level class this year because she often felt overwhelmed and frustrated by the fast pace of the honors course. She is extremely capable and intelligent, but she has a lot of time-consuming interests outside of school that played a role in her decision. She also demonstrates a lack of confidence in her abilities in
English Language Arts, but these concerns are unfounded. Cara is a talented figure skater, and she loves skating. She is an honest, outspoken, intelligent, talented, and capable young woman.

**Kerri.** Kerri is a 16-year-old Caucasian female. She is a very dedicated, conscientious, and hard-working student. She completes all assignments to the best of her ability, and she could easily handle the rigor of an honors class. I will likely recommend her for honors English next year. Everything she does is of excellent quality, and she consistently demonstrates outstanding critical thinking and analysis. She is kind, friendly, respectful, and thoughtful, and she is good at keeping group members on task to complete class assignments. She is involved in school sports, and her family is prominent in the community.

**Krista.** Krista is a 17-year-old Caucasian female. She is a very good student, and she completes the majority of her homework. She does well on class work and written assignments. She is involved in extracurricular activities at school, and she is a kind, thoughtful and friendly young woman. She has experienced a great deal of emotional trauma in the past year due to some very public family events, but she has not allowed her family’s actions to define her, nor has she allowed these events to ruin her. She demonstrates a rare and impressive strength of character and determination to succeed.

**Katie.** Katie is a 17-year-old Caucasian female. She is kind, outspoken, and honest. She does not enjoy reading, and often falls behind in her homework as a result. She struggles with reading comprehension and critical analysis, but when things are explained to her in a one-on-one conversation, she demonstrates a solid understanding and is visibly uplifted by her newfound competence. She is often frustrated by technology, and her absences affect her ability to keep up with the pace of the class, but she tries hard and does not give up. She has a wide variety of interests outside of school, including family, the outdoors, and country music.
Natalie. Natalie is a 17-year-old Asian female. She has a solid work ethic and does good work, but she sometimes neglects to complete her homework. Her peers believe she is the highest performing student in the class, but in reality she is currently ranked at #8 out of 24 students. She is a hard worker, and she is very polite and considerate. She is kind and generous, and she is a natural leader. She is an officer for the student government for the Class of 2015, and she is very involved in the school community.

Research Study Participant Profiles: Group B

Alexa. Alexa is a 16-year-old Caucasian female. She is a very talented and intelligent young woman who demonstrates diligence and perseverance. She often finds herself in the position of having to live up to her older sister’s reputation, because her sister was a star performer and prominent leader during her time at the school. Alexa handles this challenge with dignity and grace, and has managed to establish herself as an individual worthy of recognition in her own right. She is a bright, happy, thoughtful person with a naturally outgoing and charismatic personality. She is a talented gymnast and a wonderful student.

Amanda. Amanda is a 17-year-old Caucasian female. She often demonstrates a lack of confidence in her ability to be successful in English class, but her work does not substantiate these concerns. Quite to the contrary, she submits very good work that demonstrates critical thinking and analysis above grade level. She is an honest, straightforward young woman who sometimes does not have time to complete her homework because of her hectic schedule. She is very involved in school sports, particularly soccer, and this takes up a great deal of her time and energy.

Erika. Erika is a 16-year-old Caucasian female. She is bilingual, as her mother is from Russia. She sometimes demonstrates difficulty with the finer nuances of the written English
language, but these difficulties are consistent with bilingualism. She was a victim of intense bullying when she first moved to the town in elementary school, and this bullying has given her a tough exterior. She is, however, a strong, intelligent, determined, fiercely loyal and kindhearted young woman who relates well to those she trusts. She enjoys music and creative writing, and is in the process of writing a short novel.

**Emma.** Emma is a 16-year-old Caucasian female. She is shy, quiet, and dislikes speaking in class, but she is also funny, sarcastic, warm, and generous once she feels comfortable around the people she is with. She is very intelligent and very good at English, but her family life has been a bit difficult this year and she has missed a few assignments as a result. Still, she has a good support system, and her best friend is in the class with her, so she has managed to thrive in my class this year.

**Jim.** Jim is a 17-year-old Caucasian male. He is very outgoing, and always offers to go first in class presentations and discussions. He is also very meticulous, and tries very hard to do his best on every assignment. He is a delightful student to have in class. He is the younger brother of a somewhat notorious former student who was known for outrageous antics, but Jim has managed to successfully establish his own identity within the school community. He truly wants to learn and do better, so he seeks out feedback and advice from teachers throughout each assignment.

**Lori.** Lori is a 16-year-old Caucasian female. This is her second year in my class; like Cara, she was in my honors English class as a sophomore as well. She is a hardworking, outspoken, intelligent young woman. Since last year, she has become more comfortable expressing her opinion, and she always supports her claims with convincing evidence. She is a conscientious and responsible student, as well as a thoughtful and funny person. She is great
with debates and class discussions, and she is a natural leader in group work. She dislikes writing, but she is quite good at it. She is very interested in health and wellness, and she is also very involved with school sports.

**Lindsay.** Lindsay is a 16-year-old Caucasian female. She was a student in my French II class as a freshman, but this is my first year with her as an English student. She is funny, outgoing, kind, and thoughtful. She struggles to complete work in a timely manner, but not for a lack of ability. She seems to have difficulty with time management, and she also suffers from “writers block” which cripples her from time to time. She is extremely intelligent and insightful, but her grades do not always reflect her abilities.

**Melissa.** Melissa is a 17-year-old Caucasian female. She is highly intelligent and insightful, and often demonstrates college-level thinking, writing, and behaviors. She has a quirky, offbeat sense of humor that reflects her unique personality. She does not like peer editing or teacher critiques because she feels as though she has put her heart and soul into her work, so she does not want anyone to criticize it because she finds it hurtful. She enjoys music. She is a talented writer, and she prefers creative writing, particularly poetry and short stories.

**Pete.** Pete is a 16-year-old Caucasian male. This is his second year with me; he was in my sophomore honors English class last year along with Lori and Cara. He has matured a great deal since we first met, but he has always been a very good student in English. He works hard, he is intelligent, and he is a talented writer. He is very social and well liked, and his family is very supportive. He works well in groups and is able to keep group members focused and on-task. He enjoys sports and is active in extracurricular activities.

**Sara.** Sara is a 16-year-old Caucasian female. She is quiet, reserved, kind and thoughtful. She is absent from class frequently because of some medical issues, but she is very
good about making up her missing work and keeping up with the pace of the class. She is a talented writer and an intelligent young woman, and although she does well on group work, she prefers to work with a partner she knows well instead.

The Case Study

Assignment Overview

For contextual purposes, it should be noted that all students from both of the teacher’s junior English classes were receiving the same instruction and completing the same assignments, regardless of whether or not they were participants in this research study. It should also be noted that the research process, along with the traditional research paper, are required elements of the junior ELA curriculum at Sunnydale High School. See the Appendix section for the assignments.

In general, the research process itself spans over approximately 3 weeks and counts as a test grade. It consists of choosing a topic, writing a thesis statement, creating an outline, finding sources, creating a bibliography, and choosing quotes. The traditional research paper in the English department is usually 6-7 pages for College Prep classes and 7-9 pages for Honors classes. The paper itself usually spans approximately 4 weeks and counts as 2 test grades. It is a major assignment, and students who do not complete it do not generally pass the class for the term in which it is assessed.

For this case study, I altered some aspects of the traditional research paper so that I could incorporate the digital multigenre research project into the same unit. The research process itself remained entirely the same as it always has. Nothing changed in that regard. The traditional research paper assignment, however, was abbreviated. I asked students to write an essay that was half the length of the typical junior assignment and used half of the usual required sources.
It was also done in half the time and was worth one test grade instead of two. The remaining test grade, time, and sources were to be accounted for in the digital research project instead. In essence, these students were doing the same amount of research and writing in the same amount of time for the same grade weight; it simply worked out so that some of their work was on a project instead of a paper. Table 5 shows the amount of time spent in and out of class on each portion of the assignment.

Table 5

Instructional Dates and Times by Assignment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Start-Finish Dates Group A</th>
<th>Duration Group A</th>
<th>Class Time/ Technology Time Group A</th>
<th>Start-Finish Dates Group B</th>
<th>Duration Group B</th>
<th>Class Time/ Technology Time Group B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Process</td>
<td>11/4/13-11/20/13</td>
<td>16 calendar days</td>
<td>3 full classes @ 90 mins each Total: 4.5 hours</td>
<td>11/1/13-11/19/13</td>
<td>18 calendar days</td>
<td>3 full classes @ 90 mins ea Total: 4.5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Including Topic, Thesis, Sources, Quotes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Essay</td>
<td>11/20/13-12/4/13</td>
<td>15 calendar days</td>
<td>2 full classes @ 90 mins each Total: 3 hours</td>
<td>11/19/13-12/5/13</td>
<td>16 calendar days</td>
<td>1 full class @ 90 mins ea Total: 1.5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multigenre Project</td>
<td>12/9/13-12/19/13</td>
<td>10 calendar days</td>
<td>4 full classes @ 90 mins ea Total: 6 hours</td>
<td>12/6/13-12/20/13</td>
<td>14 calendar days</td>
<td>3 full classes @ 90 mins ea Total: 4.5 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Research Process Assignment from Start to Finish

The research process instruction began on November 4, 2013 for Group A, and Friday, November 1, 2013 for Group B. Both classes received the step-by-step research process assignment during the prior class meeting, and were instructed to determine their research paper
topic for homework so that they would be able to launch directly into the research when they were shown how to do so. The research process had four separate steps with four separate due dates, but the collective parts were assessed as a 100-point total test grade for Term 2. Each step had further instructions and guidelines available on Edline.

The assignment for the research paper and the assignment for the research project were not provided at this time. Students were simply told they should find a topic of interest to them that could be argued persuasively. I chose not to give them the assignments in advance because I did not want research participants’ perceptions of either the paper or the project to be affected by the actual research process; I felt they were likely to associate the process with the paper only because it was the first thing they were doing with their research, and I was concerned that they might have a negative perception of the paper as a result.

Table 6

Research Topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESEARCH TOPICS—GROUP A</th>
<th>RESEARCH TOPICS—GROUP B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COLLEGE PREP</td>
<td>HONORS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texting and driving</td>
<td>High salaries for sports stars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSA spying (both foreign and domestic)</td>
<td>Drugs and athletes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health and Illness awareness</td>
<td>Impaired driving vs. distracted driving</td>
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<tr>
<td>Junk food</td>
<td>Factory farming</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Casey Anthony trial and verdict</td>
<td>The effects of diet on health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-smoking</td>
<td>Birth control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same-sex marriage</td>
<td>bullying</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Abortion rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Euthanasia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Step 1. Each class received an instructional presentation from the school librarian on November 4 and 1, respectively, about using the library databases to find sources. They also
learned how to evaluate sources, use search terms, and use MLA format for in-text citations and Works Cited documentation. The librarian brought the Computers on Wheels (COW) laptop cart with her for this lesson so that students could use the computers to follow along with her as she explained things and demonstrated her strategies on the Smartboard. After her presentation, students were free to use the laptops to begin finding research sources for their papers and projects. The library instruction lasted for the full 90-minute class block. Step 1, the topic and working thesis statement, were due at the start of class for 10 points. I collected these documents at the beginning of class so I could review them and make sure the topics were viable for this assignment while the librarian was working with the students. Any student whose topic was difficult or unclear was called over for a discussion during class to revise and rework their ideas.

Step 2. On Thursday, November 7, Group A had the COW in class for the full 90-minute block. Group B had the COW on Friday, November 8 for the full class. During this time, students were expected to locate valid, reliable sources to be used in their research papers and projects. They were instructed to find sources that supported their side of the argument as well as sources that supported the opposing side. Group A was required to find a total of 8 sources, and Group B was required to find 10 sources. Students were advised to save all required research documents as .pdf files in a folder on the server, and they were also advised to cut and paste all citation information into Easybib.com as they worked. At the end of class, students were instructed about the two different structures for argumentation, Aristotelian and Rogerian, and encouraged to choose the format that best fit their topic so they could organize their ideas more effectively. Students were told to reference the graphic organizer formats available to them on Edline and to use one formatting template to create an outline or organizer for their arguments.
On Friday, November 8 for Group B and Tuesday, November 12 for Group A, the graphic organizer/outline portion of the assignment was due for a total of 20 points. I reviewed these documents in class and conferenced briefly with each student to provide helpful insight and direction for the remainder of the process and to make sure they were comfortable and on the right track with the assignment. Both classes received a handout designed to help them evaluate the usefulness of the sources they found for their topic. Group A was allowed to use this packet in lieu of an official annotated bibliography, as it covered the same information but was handwritten and less formal. Group B, the honors class, was given an example of a formatted annotated bibliography on the Smartboard to use as a reference for their own formal, processed annotated bibliography in MLA format. Annotations were expected to be one full paragraph discussing the source as a whole as well as its relevance to the student’s topic.

**Step 3.** Group A had the COW in class on November 14 and Group B had the COW on November 15. Annotated bibliographies were due as an uploaded file on Edline for students in Group B on Friday, November 15 by 11:59pm. The research evaluation packet was due for students in Group A at the end of class on Thursday, November 14 because they were handwritten documents. Students in both classes were able to conference with the teacher and ask any questions they had about the annotated bibliography or anything pertaining to their sources during the class work on November 14 and 15. Once the students completed their annotations, they were free to move on to the quote collection step. Annotated bibliographies were graded online, and students were able to access their grades prior to the start of the research paper.

**Step 4.** The final step of the research process involved the students collecting quotes from each of their sources. Students were allowed to use either traditional handwritten notecards
or copy-and-paste quotes in a Word document. In either case, they needed to include the quote, the source, the author, and the page number (if available), along with a brief analysis of the quote and its relevance to the research topic/argument. Group A was expected to have a minimum of 16 quotes, and Group B was expected to have a minimum of 20 quotes. Students were encouraged to use more than the minimum required. Note cards were due for Group A at the start of class on Wednesday, November 20 and for Group B on Tuesday, November 19. Note cards were worth 20 points and were returned to the students at the beginning of their next class meeting. At the end of this process, students had earned a test grade out of 100 points.

The Traditional Research Paper

Before being introduced to the traditional research paper assignment, case study participants were asked to complete Focus Group Discussion #1 (Appendix G) and Survey #1—Traditional Essay Pre-Writing (Appendix F). These tools were designed to provide background information about the two participant groups and their overall experiences as readers and writers. They were then asked to complete Reflection Journal #1 (Appendix H) along with the rest of their class so that I could collect meaningful data about the participants’ individual feelings about reading, writing, and English class in general. I also used the non-participant reflection journals as a formative assessment tool to guide my research paper writing instruction.

Group A received their assignment sheet and rubric for the traditional research paper on Wednesday, November 20. Group B received their assignment sheet and rubric on Tuesday, November 19 (Appendix D). As the classroom instructor, I went over the assignment sheet with them, explained the rubric, and allowed time for questions during class. Classes did not have computer access on the day they received the assignment sheet. Group A was expected to write a 4-5-page persuasive research paper using a minimum of 4 sources and 2 quotes per body
paragraph. Group B was expected to write a 5-6-page persuasive research paper with a minimum of 5 sources and 2 quotes per body paragraph. Group A’s paper was due on Turnitin.com by 11:59pm on Wednesday, December 4th, and Group B’s paper was due on Turnitin.com by 11:59pm on Thursday, December 5th. The traditional research paper was worth 100 points as a test grade.

Participants were instructed to use the information they had collected during the research process in their traditional research paper. They were expected to use the graphic organizer/outline for either Aristotelian (aggressive) or Rogerian (evaluative) argumentation to organize their ideas into paragraphs. They were to use the note cards to place quotes into their papers, and they were to use their annotated bibliography as the Works Cited page. They were instructed that they did not need to use all 8-10 of their sources on this paper; anything they did not use on this assignment could be used on the project instead. The students had approximately 2 full weeks to complete this assignment. Participants completed Journals #2 and #3 (Appendix H) during that time span.

Group A had the COW in class twice during the 2-week span: on Friday, November 22 and Thursday, December 5 (the due date) to work on their research papers. Group B had the COW only once, on Monday, December 2nd. The remainder of the assignment was done independently. Because students from both classes had already done the majority of the research, I felt as though 2 weeks and limited class time would be sufficient for them to get the assignment done, particularly in light of the fact that they had a lighter reading workload during that time. I provided classroom instruction on how to use Turnitin.com to submit their final draft as well as how to set up the Works Cited page in MLA format. After participants submitted
their final drafts, they completed Focus Group Discussion #2 (Appendix G), Survey #2 (Appendix F), and Reflection Journal #4 (Appendix H).

The Experimental Digital Multigenre Research Project

In the class period following the due date of the traditional research paper, students received their assignment sheet and rubric (Appendix E) for the Digital Multigenre Research Project. Students were able to choose a digital mode in which to present their argument: PowerPoint, Prezi, or Google Electronic Portfolio. This assignment required a great deal of explanation on my part, and students had many questions about it. They did not really understand what the project was or what my expectations were, despite the assignment sheet and rubric. They did, however, understand that they were doing the project on the same topic, and using some or all of the same research they had used in their traditional research papers. I realized at this time that I would need to provide a working example to use to demonstrate the project to the class. Participants completed Focus Group Discussion #3 (Appendix G), Survey #3 (Appendix F), and Reflection Journal #5 (Appendix H) after receiving the assignment sheet in class (Group A on Monday, December 9 and Group B on Friday, December 6).

This project was worth a 100-point test grade, and was due on Edline as an uploaded file by 11:59pm on December 19 for Group A and December 20 for Group B. These dates were chosen because they were regular class meeting dates, but also because they were the last days of class before the 2-week holiday break. As a source of motivation, I assured students that they would have no homework over the break because they had to work so hard on the research paper and project before the break. Ideally, I think they could have used another class or two to finish their work in a more relaxed manner.
Group A had the COW in class on Wednesday, December 11, Friday, December 13, Tuesday, December 17 and Thursday, December 19. Group B had the COW in class on Thursday, December 12, Monday, December 16, and Friday, December 20. Group A had one more class period with the computers, and both classes had the computers on the project due date in an effort to address last-minute concerns and to ensure on-time submission from as many students as possible. Participants completed Reflection Journals #6 and #7 (Appendix H) during the process, and Survey #4 on the due date. Participants completed Reflection Journal #8 (Appendix H) and Focus Group Discussion #4 (Appendix G) in the first class period following the holiday break. Participants did not receive their grades or instructor feedback on their projects until after they had completed all case study questions so that their responses would not be affected by their grades.

Traditional Paper Outcomes

**Group A College Preparatory Class Outcomes**

**Overview.** This class as a whole was hesitant to begin writing a research paper. They lacked confidence in their own writing abilities, but were interested in the topic they had chosen and were glad they had already found the sources they needed to proceed with the paper. They were confident in their topics and their ideas, but they were not confident in their potential to succeed on this assignment because they do not consider themselves to be good writers. Their overall success on the assignment was affected by their writing ability, as well as by their ability to organize ideas, meet assignment requirements, and document sources in MLA format. The mean grade for participants in this group for the traditional research paper was 89% (B+), and the median grade was 94% (A). See Table 7 for more information.
Pre-Writing: Student Strengths. Prior to the beginning of the research paper writing process, participants were asked to reflect upon their strengths as writers. Participants self-identified the following strengths: “Explaining my thought on the topic and supporting myself;” “My strengths as a writer are mostly when I’m involved in something that I am interested in. I tend to like writing and I can make up ok stories;” “I have really good ideas;” and “Writing very detailed experiences of my own. I am good at making the reader feel as if they are experiencing what I am writing about” (reflection journals, November, 2013). Two out of the seven participants, however, could not identify any strengths in writing, responding instead with these statements: “I don’t really have a lot of strengths in writing;” and “I’m not a strong writer” (reflection journals, November, 2013). Overall, participants from Group A identified the following writing strengths: (a) interest in topic, (b) creativity, and (c) self-expression.

Focus group responses for Group A demonstrated similar findings. Students indicated that they were used to writing “five-paragraph essays,” “essays about themes,” “essays about books,” and “topics from books.” When asked why they thought they were asked to write these essays, students replied: “To prepare for college, future purposes;” “to prepare for long college essays;” “to help us understand the book;” and “to make us understand the book more” (focus group #1A, November 18, 2013). Participants stated that they liked writing when they got to “make up stories or like write whatever’s on my mind;” “express my feelings when I write and to share things that I like;” and write about “relatable topics, like articles, like current events” (focus group #1A, November 18, 2013).

Pre-Writing: Student Weaknesses. Participants were also asked to reflect on their weaknesses as writers, and made statements such as: “My weaknesses are repeating what I’ve already said. I usually just say the same thing but in 5 different ways. I also jump from topic to
topic and don’t tie them together well;” “I can’t make thesis statements. I feel I’m an awful writer. Half the stuff I write makes no sense or it’s all repeated. My organization also isn’t the best it can be;” “I have horrible grammar when writing and a very bad speller. My ideas tend to go from one thing to another, back to the beginning again. I’m bad at coming up with good explanations of things;” “I’m not too great at grammar and sometimes I find it hard to focus on subjects that I do not find interesting. It can be hard to focus my thoughts and organize them;” “Sometimes I can’t express [my ideas] very well. My vocab words aren’t good. I don’t proofread my work most of the time;” “I have a hard time with organizing my thoughts and then getting them down. I can have an idea but I won’t be able to get it into words. I don’t know where to start when writing;” and “I am not very good at expressing how I feel about certain things, and I struggle with reasoning and explaining the subject. I have a hard time writing about something that I am not interested in” (reflection journals, November, 2013).

A detailed analysis of these statements can be found in the “Emerging Themes” section of this paper, but an overview of these findings indicate that students self-identified several weaknesses and difficulties in writing. Focus group responses indicated that students in Group A struggle most with “vocabulary,” “formatting,” length, “getting quotes,” and “MLA format” (focus group #1A, November 18, 2013). As one student explained, she doesn’t like “getting quotes and doing more than you actually have to, like doing organizers, outlines, and all that great stuff, rough drafts, and that peer editing, and teacher editing, and then you edit yourself after, I feel like that’s like unnecessary work.” and another student agreed, saying, “I don’t like quotes because if you don’t get taught quotes in a certain year you don’t get taught them again and everyone takes points off because you’re wrong but like you don’t know how to do it” (focus group #1A, November 18, 2013). Overall, students from Group A identified the following
writing weaknesses: (a) cohesiveness and organization, (b) grammar and spelling, (c) proofreading and editing, and (d) putting thoughts into words effectively.

**Mid-Writing: Student Values and Lessons.** Midway through the traditional paper, participants were asked to reflect upon the writing process to-date. They were asked specifically, “What is the most valuable thing you are learning during the writing process?” and, “What parts of the assignment are you comfortable with and why?” The responses tended to reflect the importance of organization, self-discipline, and time management. Cara claimed that “how to write a thesis” and “how to keep organized” were the most valuable lessons learned. Krista agreed: “To be organized makes everything easier.” Others revealed the importance of pre-writing: “I have learned that the more pre-steps you do before writing the paper makes it easier to construct the paper,” said Kerri. “I’m learning to organize my thoughts and get all of my information ready before I write,” said Anthony. Katie stated, “You don’t have to sit down and do the whole research paper at once, you can break it up to make it easier on yourself. Doing it step by step is more effective and makes you put more effort into it” (reflection journals, November, 2013). Student responses indicate that students were learning valuable skills for success in school, regardless of the subject. They were comfortable with the amount of research they had already gathered, because as Cara said, “I know I have enough to write it.” They were able to recognize the fact that they were basically just piecing their previous work together, because “the steps we took before was basically the paper just in pieces” (Kerri, reflection journal, November, 2013). Katie explained that she enjoyed being able to express “my thoughts on a subject,” and Anthony was glad to be able to “connect my knowledge that I learned with the outside information I already know.” Allie simply stated that she liked being able to “write about what interests me” (reflection journals, November, 2013).
Mid-Writing: Student Concerns. Although students were comfortable with many aspects of this assignment, they definitely demonstrated some difficulties as well. When asked, “What aspects of this assignment are you struggling with and why?” their responses reflected the same weaknesses identified in the pre-writing section. Participants were uncomfortable with writing in general, and this was the longest essay they had ever written. They expressed discomfort particularly with articulation, thesis statements, and transitions. Cara summed up the difficulty of “getting what I want to say on paper. I know what I want to say, but I can’t put it into words.” Others had difficulty with knowing “where to start, intro and conclusion” (Krista, reflection journal, November, 2013), and “coming up with thesis statements” (Allie, reflection journal, November, 2013). Kerri struggled with “making the paper flow from side to side in the body paragraphs” because of the two-sided nature of argumentation, and Anthony found it challenging to try “separating my personal opinion with the facts and opinions of others” (reflection journals, November, 2013).

Teacher Intervention. Based upon the feedback provided on these issues, I was able to supplement classroom instruction to appease the students’ fears and insecurities. I added a thesis statement writing activity, which helped students experiment with multiple ways of wording the same ideas. I added an activity on organization for persuasive essays, giving students a graphic organizer and practicing with random topics not related to their research papers. I also added another lesson about MLA formatting, along with an example of in-text citations and a Works Cited page. As we worked, I realized that a little confidence could go a long way, so I made a concerted effort to reassure students that their work was good, their ideas were meaningful, and they were doing nice work. As mentioned earlier, the students felt comfortable with their topics and the research they had already collected, so they were able to stay on track with the work.
Post-Writing: Student Satisfaction. After submitting the final draft of their traditional research paper, participants were asked to reflect upon their overall satisfaction with the paper they had produced. Most participants indicated that they were satisfied with their overall product. Krista stated: “I was satisfied with my submitted product because I said all that I needed to say and I think it came out good.” Cara said, “I was satisfied. I actually worked hard on it and thought I did well. I learned a lot about the case.” Anthony replied, “I was satisfied with my essay. I felt as if my paper proved my point and was well organized. My quotes helped back up my point very well” (reflection journals, December, 2013). Even students who were not entirely satisfied generally expressed satisfaction with certain elements of the paper, qualifying their satisfaction with “yes, but…” or “for the most part yes, but…” and following up with statements explained in the next section.

Post-Writing: Student Dissatisfaction. While responses from Group A participants were mostly positive, indicating a high level of satisfaction with the final draft of the research paper, some participants were not entirely satisfied with their final paper. Kerri said that although she “thought it was the best it could have been due to the preparation before writing it,” she still “thought some things could have been changed.” Katie stated that she was mostly satisfied with her final product, but not entirely: “For the most part, yes, I was just frustrated with the Works Cited page.” Katie was very frustrated about the MLA citation requirements, and I noticed after collecting this data that she was absent on the day I did the follow-up instructional activity on MLA, which would certainly account for her gap in knowledge. Only one student, Allie, was completely dissatisfied with the overall product she submitted: “No, I was not, I still needed a little more work on it because it doesn’t seem finished or backed up with enough information” (reflection journals, December, 2013). This statement indicates a possible
Group B Honors Class Outcomes

Overview. In general, the Honors class participants were more confident in their writing abilities and strengths. They were also more critical of their weaknesses. Group B participants identified a variety of strengths in writing, including poetry, creative writing, descriptive writing, organization, and supporting details. They identified a variety of weaknesses as well, including grammar, spelling, syntax, diction, and structure. The mean score on this assignment was 89% (B+), exactly the same as the mean score for Group A. The median score on this assignment for Group B was 90.5% (A-), which is actually 3.5 points lower than the college prep class median.

Pre-Writing: Student Strengths. Prior to beginning the traditional research paper, Group B students articulated their own strengths in a variety of areas in writing. Among these strengths was the ability to use descriptive language: “My strengths are describing things and situations. I feel I am good at being descriptive.” Another strength, discussed by multiple participants, was organization: “My strengths as a writer is that I am good at preparing and formulating my thoughts. I consider myself to be an organized writer. I am able to organize my work neatly.” Another participant stated: “I am very organized and am able to outline all of my thoughts on a piece of paper.” Others were confident in their ability to choose topics and convey their ideas effectively, identifying a personal strength of: “Being able to explain my thoughts and ideas fully with examples;” “getting my point or idea across. I can convey what is needed to be said;” and “communicating my thoughts, whatever they may be. I am good at making it sound nice and have a nice rhythm/flow to it” (reflection journals, November, 2013).
One participant, Lori, identified the ability to put time and effort into writing as her strength, stating: “In my opinion, I think I can be a quality writer when I put the time and effort into whatever I’m writing about.” Melissa expressed strengths in creative writing: “My strengths as a writer are in poetry and analytical writing. I absolutely love poetry and I love to write about literature if it is a book that I enjoy. I am very good at…setting up stories in engaging ways.” Lindsay explained her strengths in creativity, topic selection, and audience appeal: “My strengths in writing are being creative with my topics. I like to do different few points and find cool information to add in my writing to make it more interesting. I like evoking people’s emotions and inspiring them with words, it’s my favorite” (reflection journal, November, 2013). No students in Group B stated a complete lack of strength in writing, unlike the two participants in Group A, who could not identify a single strength in writing.

**Pre-Writing: Student Weaknesses.** When asked about their weaknesses as writers, Group B had a variety of responses for this question as well. Many of their concerns, however, were the same as or similar to those expressed by Group A, including issues with grammar, spelling, syntax, and organization. As Emma stated, “My weaknesses are spelling and using a big vocabulary.” She was joined by Lindsay, who stated: “I am bad at spelling, it’s scary.” Alexa claimed, “My weakness is probably being too repetitive, spelling, and over complicating things. I tend to write more than is necessary or required. I need to learn to be more concise” (reflection journals, November, 2013). Multiple participants discussed issues with organization as well. Pete claimed, “My weaknesses are staying organized and being repetitive. I have a hard time simply saying what I need to say at times. I will include too much info or wording and I can’t just say one thing that is needed. Basically, it is too wordy and I struggle to make it succinct.” Lori stated, “One of my weaknesses would probably be focusing on one topic/one idea
in my essays because my brain works all over the place, and I don’t like being limited to what I have to write about” (reflection journals, November, 2013).

Students were grateful and relieved because the research process and organization process had already been completed prior to the beginning of this assignment, but they were still anxious about putting all of that information into actual paragraphs. As Jim humorously noted, “I am bad at getting my thoughts into well thought-out sentences. My brain knows what to write, but my hand won’t let it. It will spit out an awful sentence” (reflection journals, November, 2013). Some students have difficulty with thesis statements and length requirements, struggling to “make it the length it should be” (reflection journal, November, 2013). Multiple students expressed difficulty with assignments that do not encourage their creativity. Lindsay said: “I don’t do well with structured writing. I know that it’s easier to put together but I hate when I feel like my creativity is blocked all the time.” Lori said: “I don’t like being limited,” and Melissa said: “I don’t like to write to a specific suggested sentence.” Multiple students also claimed that they felt weakness in writing simply because they “don’t enjoy it” (reflection journals, November, 2013).

**Mid-Writing: Student Values and Lessons.** When asked what the most valuable thing they were learning during the traditional essay writing process, Group B participants had a wide variety of answers. Some students focused on the topic they were writing, explaining what they were learning from the actual research process. For example, Erika, who wrote her paper on the effects of bullying, stated: “I learned that many children like me who were bullied were affected greatly and the way they grew up; their personalities were affected with how harshly they were bullied as children, along with their career paths were affected by bullies” (reflection journal, November, 2013). Others discussed what they learned about organization. Melissa simply said,
“Organization is important.” Amanda learned “how to organize my thoughts before writing it all down,” and Emma learned “how to organize my thoughts better and put them together” (reflection journals, November, 2013).

Some participants referenced the various steps they had completed during the research process. Pete stated: “The most valuable thing I learned, although time consuming and painful, was the annotated bibliography and note cards. I hated doing them, but they help immensely. It helped me organize and figure out what I will say in the paper.” Jim said the most important thing was “how to cite and create a bibliography. What we did so far was very helpful. I have always had a difficult time doing that.” Melissa said she learned a lot from “the research aspect, such as the note cards. As tedious as the research process may feel, once it’s done the paper is practically written for you; all you have to do is insert your opinion.” Alexa discussed the importance of learning about proper argumentation for a persuasive essay, claiming that the most valuable thing she learned was “the difference between Aristotelian and Rogerian arguments. Also that it’s ok to be in the middle of an argument.” And finally, procrastination-prone Lindsay realized that the most valuable thing to learn here was “time management because finding the correct information can be time consuming and you can’t wait til the last minute to do this. You won’t be able to get your best work done” (reflection journals, November, 2013).

When asked what parts of the assignment students were comfortable with, many of them demonstrated confidence in the act of expressing their thoughts and opinions on their topic. The self-aware Amanda stated: “I’m comfortable with arguing my point because I’m opinionated.” Lindsay said, “I feel fine explaining what I am thinking too because I have a strong opinion on this topic” (reflection journals, November, 2013). Other participants were comfortable using research because they felt they were already prepared for writing from their work on the research
process portion. Melissa said she was comfortable “knowing that I have adequate representation of the differing sides of the argument in my sources. I am also comfortable with having enough material to write intelligently about and still have 4-6 pages.” Likewise, Pete stated that he was comfortable “gathering, analyzing and explaining my data and research. I can convey my thoughts and ideas through the research I have done.” Alexa agreed, stating: “I’m ok with making my argument because I have heaps of evidence and facts to support it. I hope it sounds okay when I’m done and not just a bunch of random thoughts” (reflection journals, November, 2013). Students expressed a general sense of preparedness due to their prior work finding and analyzing sources, creating a graphic organizer, and working on thesis statements. Jim enthusiastically and confidently stated: “Once I start and formulate paragraphs, I can develop a well-thought out research paper. I am interested in my topic and I believe I can write a great paper” (reflection journals, November, 2013). This kind of confidence was reassuring to me as I prepared my students to finish the first research paper of their academic career.

Mid-Writing: Student Concerns. When asked what they were struggling with on this assignment, Group B participants identified three main issues: (a) organization, (b) research integration, and (c) wording. In terms of organization, students articulated similar concerns. Erika stated, “I am having trouble piecing the paper together, I always struggled with starting a paper.” Jim said, “I’m having trouble forming paragraphs. I know what I want to say and how to say it, I’m just not sure how I should organize it. My topic is difficult to formulate paragraphs for because it is not a very argumentative topic.” Amanda said she was having difficulty “transitioning between arguments, because I’m not sure how to” (reflection journals, November, 2013). These organization problems were likely to arise with a new type of writing; these students had not written a research paper or a formal persuasive essay prior to this assignment.
Those students who were having difficulty integrating the research into their argument explained what they were struggling with. Melissa said, “I’m struggling with balancing my opinions with evidence and quotes. My own personal thoughts are not really reflected in my sources, so I am putting in a lot of straight argument without being able to back up anything that I might counter it with, with facts.” Pete explained that he was “struggling to find arguments for my argument that are viable resources but are not a statistic. I have what I want to say, but I do not know where and when to say it.” Lindsay said: “Putting all the information together into a flowing research paper is what’s stumping me. It’s different than anything I’ve ever written before and I am not sure how much research should be put in or if I am supposed to put my own opinion in it too much or not enough” (reflection journals, November, 2013). These concerns are likely due to the fact that these students have had little or no experience integrating quotes or using other sources prior to this assignment, and their concerns are entirely normal at this stage, at least in my experience.

Finally, some students identified the writing process itself, including diction and syntax, as their primary concern. As Alexa stated: “I’m struggling with getting my thoughts on paper exactly how I want to say them. I don’t know how to get my ideas from my head to concrete words that make sense and say what I mean. Also, stating all the conditions of my opinion.” The length of the paper was a concern for Emma, who was struggling to make the paper “long enough without being too repetitive or wordy. I find it hard to put words together when I try to say something” (reflection journals, November, 2013).

**Teacher Intervention.** As with Group A, I addressed the concerns expressed by Group B in these reflection journals. I integrated additional instruction on MLA format, including quote integration, citation, and Works Cited. I also used the thesis statement activity from Group
A, even though this group of participants did not express difficulty in that area. It was still a valuable lesson, and they were able to improve their thesis statements as a result. I also worked with students on organization, explaining the form for argumentation in either Aristotelian or Rogerian format, but for the Honors group I took the lesson a bit further. I explained the purpose behind the formats, the origins of each, and had students practice using the formats to craft outlines and thesis statements for random controversial topics. This activity helped allay students’ fears and allowed them to continue working towards completion of their papers.

Post-Writing: Student Satisfaction. Whereas most participants in Group A were satisfied, at least in part, with their overall final product, the opposite turned out to be true with Group B. The Honors class only had a few participants who expressed even partial satisfaction with their final draft. Two students stated that they were completely satisfied. Lindsay said, “I was satisfied with what I submitted. I felt I had strong arguments to support my thesis.” Amanda said she was satisfied “because I put my heart and soul into it” (reflection journals, December, 2013).

Three participants expressed partial satisfaction with their final drafts. Of these three students, Pete stated that he was “somewhat satisfied” because “I feel as if I did decent on it, but at the same time I am not sure. I feel like I had solid evidence but I don’t know if I presented/analyzed it correctly.” This statement indicates a lack of satisfaction due to a lack of confidence in his ability to meet the standards of the assignment. Alexa said that she thought her paper “came out really well.” She was dissatisfied only with the length of the assignment, claiming it was too short of a paper: “I wish it was allowed to be longer because I had to cut some of my points out. I was happy with the points I made but wish I could have made more.” Melissa was upset because of a problem with her own use of technology; apparently, she
uploaded the wrong file to Turnitin.com. She stated: “No, I was not really satisfied because the file I submitted ended up not being my final draft. However, I did really feel that what I wrote was a good representation of my opinion and I was proud of my writing as I thought I did a good job” (reflection journals, December, 2013). Melissa’s attitude about the writing itself was positive; it was simply her technical difficulties that clouded her experience.

Post-Writing: Student Dissatisfaction. The remaining five participants expressed no satisfaction or pride in their final drafts. Jim was frustrated with the fact that the paper was submitted electronically instead of in hard copy form: “I had technical problems so my formatting was off and now I am going to get points off. I’d rather print out the essay.” Alexa was dissatisfied with her work in general, saying: “I didn’t like the structure of it, and I don’t feel like I was able to get my point across the way I would’ve liked to.” The participant did not express the reasons for this feeling.

The deadline was a source of frustration to this group. Emma said: “I was not satisfied with the overall product. I feel like I rushed to make sure I got it in on time and it was not as good as it could have been.” Erika stated, “I do not feel like I had enough time to do it. I feel like we should have had more time” (reflection journals, December, 2013). Melissa, who uploaded the incorrect file to Turnitin.com, also lost ten points for late submission, so it appears that time management was a bit of an issue with this particular group of students. They were rushing to get things done, and they made mistakes and missed the deadline. This fact is interesting because the honors class actually had 2 more days during the research process and 1 more day during the writing process than the college prep class had, yet not one student from the college prep class expressed frustration about the due date. Furthermore, none of the participants from Group A turned in a late paper, but two participants from Group B were a day late.
Experimental Digital Multigenre Project Outcomes

College Preparatory Class Outcomes

Overview. Participants from Group A were more positive and optimistic going into this project than they were going into the paper. Throughout the project, students were observed to be engaged and productive during class time, working diligently to complete their project. They enjoyed finding various sources and creating interesting genres in their project. They struggled to understand the assignment at first, but the use of an exemplar helped them to grasp the concept very well. Students were given the option of using an electronic portfolio, PowerPoint, or Prezi. Three students used Prezi, and the other four used PowerPoint. Nobody used the electronic portfolio. All seven students expressed satisfaction with their final product, and all seven students submitted their projects on or before the due date. The mean score on Group A’s digital multigenre projects was 94% (A). The median score was 93% (A) (see Table 6). This is a 5-point increase from the mean on the traditional paper, and a 1-point decrease in the median score on the traditional paper. See Appendix I for samples of Group A participants’ final projects.

Pre-Project Student Perceptions. Participants were asked to write a reflection journal after they submitted their traditional research paper, but before they began the digital multigenre project. They had received and reviewed the assignment sheet for the project when responding to this journal prompt. In response to the question, “Do you think this digital project will be easier or more difficult than the persuasive essay? Why?” all seven of the participants from Group A stated that they thought the digital project would be easier than the persuasive essay. Some believed this would be the case because they already had the research, others because it involved less writing, and others because they prefer projects to papers. Many participants did
also express some concerns about the difficulty of the project, but they still believed the project would be easier despite these concerns.

Three students thought the project would be easier because they already had the research and experience with the topic. Krista said: “It will be easy because it’s on the same topic and we already have all the information.” Cara thought it would be easier “because we already have all of information about it.” Allie agreed, saying she thought the project would be easier “because it’s all about the topic we had” (reflection journals, December, 2013).

Several students thought the project would be easier because it involved less writing and/or because they prefer projects to papers. As Anthony stated: “I believe it will be easier than the persuasive essay. I think that finding pictures, graphs, charts, etc., is much easier than taking my information and transforming it into an essay.” Similarly, Allie said the project would be easier because “it is less typing and more about pictures and videos.” Natalie and Kerri thought the project would be more interesting and entertaining than the paper; as Natalie predicted: “It will be easier because there is a lot of information that you can add in there that is about your topic in a good way.” Kerri simply predicted: “It may be easier since it is something more entertaining.” Katie was more eager to do a project simply because of her lack of confidence in writing; she humorously declared: “I think it will be easier than the essay. Essays aren’t my strongest point. I can’t write to save my life” (reflection journals, December, 2013).

Some students expressed minor concerns with the project itself at the onset of the assignment. These concerns were all related to a lack of clarity regarding the assignment itself. Krista said the project “will be hard because I don’t know what to do.” Katie thought the project would be easy, but only “once I know what I’m doing.” Kerri was unclear about how to use the
existing research alongside new sources such as videos, images, etc. (reflection journals, December, 2013).

**Pre-Project Student Predictions of Success.** For the reflection journal, participants were also asked, “What do you think you will do well with on this assignment? Why?” Participant responses indicated a high level of confidence in the use of sources and the creation of the project itself. Allie said: I think I will be able to do well on gathering the things I need.” Anthony said: “I think I will do well finding pieces that will support my research. I have a highly controversial topic, so it shouldn’t be too hard finding support.” Natalie, Cara, and Kerri all predicted success on the project for these reasons as well. Katie also felt comfortable with the use of research, saying: “I think I will do well with the graphics and charts to prove that texting and driving is bad. Because this is a big topic right now there will be more data on the subject.” Krista predicted that she would “do well with the technology part” (reflection journals, December, 2013), indicating comfort with the digital aspect of the assignment.

**Pre-Project Student Predictions of Difficulty.** The next part of the reflection journal asked participants, “What will you struggle with? Why?” Some students were uncomfortable with the creative nature of the assignment. Cara said: “I think I’ll struggle with the creative part of it because I’m not creative.” Many of the students’ predictions of difficulty reflected ongoing concerns about the nature of the assignment. They were clearly struggling to understand exactly what to do and what was expected of them. Krista predicted that she would “struggle with actually what to do on the project.” Anthony was frustrated with the idea of using the same topic for the project as he had for the paper, because he felt as if he had already exhausted all of his information and ideas. He said: “I think I will struggle on building off of the ideas I have already used. I already explained them so I’m going to need to do it another way.” Similarly,
Kerri predicted difficulty in “putting it all together” because “I don’t really understand the project as a whole.” Kerri was worried that she would run out of ideas and “struggle to find the info after three pieces” (reflection journals, December, 2013), indicating a concern about the use of so many different genres.

**Teacher Intervention.** These statements, combined with the statements in the previous section, indicated to me that I needed to provide the class with more tangible explanations of how they should proceed with the project. Since this is an experimental project, there were no student exemplars from previous years to show the class. It was at this point that I determined I needed to make my own project alongside the students and show them what I meant when I asked them to do certain things. I created a “work in progress” exemplar and projected it onto the Smartboard for students to see what I meant when I asked them to use “a variety of genres.” This approach definitely alleviated a lot of concerns and increased the confidence level of the class as a whole as they began the project.

**Mid-Project Student Values and Lessons.** As with the traditional research paper, students were asked, in the middle of the project creation timeline, to respond to the question, “What is the most valuable thing you are learning during the creation process?” in a reflection journal. As with the traditional paper, their responses revolved mainly around organization and time management. Allie, Cara, Anthony, Katie, and Natalie all cited organization as the most valuable lesson being learned throughout this process. Some of them meant organization of the content itself, while others were actually referring to their own ability to stay organized and keep their materials in a place where they could easily find them. Anthony said it was very important “to keep all my materials organized and write down more than what is necessary,” and Natalie agreed that “organization really matters” (reflection journals, December, 2013).
**Mid-Project Student Concerns.** As with the traditional paper, participants were asked to respond to the question, “What aspects of this assignment are you struggling with and why?” Student responses varied but were generally about the research and sources. Kerri said it was challenging to show “both sides of the argument because you have to find sources for both, and Katie claimed once again that she “had trouble with sources and citing my work. Sometimes the sources didn’t work half the time.” This student clearly struggles with technology and could use some more personalized or supplemental technology instruction. Natalie struggled to hand in “all the work before doing the actual assignment. I was lazy and other teachers would just make us do it by ourselves” (reflection journals, December, 2013). This student was resistant to the structure of the research process, but realized that it would have been helpful in the long run.

Krista said, “at first, finding good sources to use” was difficult, “but then it got easier.” Allie agreed that it was difficult “trying to find items/sources that I can use.” Cara was concerned about “looking for sources to use for the multigenre part” because “I couldn’t get ideas on what to do.” Anthony was actually frustrated with the use of quotes in his project because “I am stating my opinion and I don’t need evidence” (reflection journals, December, 2013). This particular statement appears frequently in other areas of findings and will be discussed in the “Emerging Themes” section of this paper.

**Post-Project Student Satisfaction.** As with the traditional research paper, all seven participants from Group A claimed to be satisfied with the overall product they submitted as the final draft of their digital multigenre project. Natalie was a bit hesitant about expressing satisfaction, qualifying the statement: “Yes, well, it was ok. I wished I had more time so I could express my ideas. I would’ve added more slides,” perhaps because of a time management issue. Otherwise, participants seemed quite pleased with their work. Allie said, “I was satisfied
because I tried my best.” Krista said, “I thought I did good.” Cara said, “I worked hard on it and I actually liked it.” Anthony said, “I am satisfied with my overall project because I followed the guidelines and did more than what was expected.” Kerri was proud “because I spent a lot of time on it and thought all my sources were helpful and presented both sides in an effective way.” And Katie, the most frustrated student of the group, declared: “I was proud of my work because I had more fun with it than the paper” (reflection journals, December, 2013).

**Post-Project Student Dissatisfaction.** The only expression of dissatisfaction from Group A on the digital multigenre project was because the student felt as though not enough time was given for the completion of the project. In fact, when students were asked to provide suggestions for the researcher in terms of how the assignment could be more effective in the future, the only suggestions were to provide more class time to work on the project, and to give more examples of format and types of genres. Throughout our process, we encountered multiple difficulties with school-provided technology, so that factor also contributed to minor frustration and dissatisfaction along the way, but students recognized the fact that the wireless network had nothing to do with the assignment itself and were willing to compartmentalize their frustrations for the sake of the case study.
Table 7

**Group A Participant Performance and Assessment: Course, Paper, and Project**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Grade in English as of Term 1 Report Cards</th>
<th>Grade on Research Process</th>
<th>Grade on Traditional Paper</th>
<th>Paper submitted Early/on time/ late</th>
<th>Grade on Multigenre Project</th>
<th>Format (Prezi, PowerPoint, or E-Folio)</th>
<th>Project submitted Early/ on Time/late</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allie</td>
<td>77/C+</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>On time</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Prezi</td>
<td>On time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>81/B-</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>On time</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>PPT</td>
<td>On time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerri</td>
<td>88/B+</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>On time</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>PPT</td>
<td>On time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony</td>
<td>89/B+</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>On time</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>PPT</td>
<td>On time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>86/B</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>On time</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Prezi</td>
<td>On time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cara</td>
<td>93/A</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>On time</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>Prezi</td>
<td>On time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krista</td>
<td>96/A</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>On time</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>PPT</td>
<td>On time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Honors Class Outcomes**

**Overview.** No participants from Group B chose the electronic portfolio format, and no participants from Group B chose to use Prezi. All ten participants from Group B selected PowerPoint as their preferred digital format. This is likely due to their comfort level with PowerPoint, as they were largely unfamiliar with Prezi and hesitant to experiment on a high-stakes assignment. When embarking upon the project, Group B exhibited a bit of fatigue. They expressed that they were feeling overwhelmed by the work and wished they had a break between the paper and the project, or that the reading assignments could be lightened during the process (in reality, the reading assignments were lighter. They perhaps did not realize it). Group B participants worked diligently on the project in class, but they often stated that they would prefer to work on it at home. Some students were observed to be working on other assignments on the computers instead of this one, and these same students struggled to meet the deadline of the
project. Although the Group B participants were clearly dissatisfied with their traditional research papers, the majority of them expressed much more satisfaction with the final products they submitted for the project assignment. See Appendix J for examples of Group B participants’ projects.

The mean score on Group B’s multigenre project was 89% (B+). The median score was 91.5% (A-). This is a 0-point change from the mean score on the traditional paper; the mean on both assignments was exactly the same. The median score showed a 1-point increase from the traditional research paper. In comparison with Group A, Group B showed a 5-point lower mean (94% for Group A, 89% for Group B) and a 1.5-point lower median (93% for Group A, 91.5% for Group B). Part of the reason for the lower mean on Group B is because two students submitted their projects late and lost 10 points off their score, and Lindsay submitted an incomplete late project, earning a score of only 65% on the rubric and 55% after the point deduction. See Table 7 for more information.

**Pre-Project Student Perceptions.** When asked whether they thought the digital multigenre project would be easier or more difficult than the traditional paper, Group B participants predominantly thought the project would be easier. Most students thought it would be “easier” and “less time consuming,” or “faster” because they did not have to write paragraphs and “it’s not a lot of words.” They were excited to use PowerPoint because they have experience using it, but they were hesitant to use the other formats because they were unfamiliar with them. As one student stated in a focus group discussion: “I don’t even know what Prezi or Foliospace is.” This statement sums up the reason why nobody in this group chose to use Prezi or Foliospace; they had never even heard of them. When asked, “What questions do you have
before you get started,” the group answered simply: “Prezi.” “Or Foliospace.” “That’s my question” (focus group #3B, November, 2013).

**Pre-Project Student Predictions of Success.** Group B participants predicted that they would be successful on the project in a variety of aspects. They were comfortable with the fact that they already had all of their research done, and they were already set up from their papers for the argument structure. Focus group discussions revealed that participants felt this project is “a good opportunity” and “a good project.” One participant said, “I like this because then I can get my feelings out” (focus group #3B, November, 2013), expressing the freedom of the project versus the limitations of the traditional paper.

**Pre-Project Student Predictions of Difficulty.** Group B expressed a great deal of apprehension about the technology side of the project in particular. One participant stated: “I just don’t know how the technology is going to work out.” While this particular focus group discussion was in progress, the recording device was giving the group some trouble. They stopped the discussion and one student said, “Um, excuse me, if this is still recording, then this is an example of the technical difficulties we might encounter…” the recording caught their laughter and then stopped. At least they still had a sense of humor about it. The recording resumed moments later, and a participant noted: “I will not like doing this because PowerPoint and technology and everything stress me out.” Others were concerned about their own time management skills; one said: “I might procrastinate like the essay,” and another admitted: “I feel like I could pass it in the next day and stay up all night doing it” (focus group #3B, November, 2013).

**Mid-Project Student Values and Lessons.** According to my observation notes, at this point students had started asking about the scope of their topic and how much they should be
I advised several of them to collect any information they think they would use, and that we would divide the work up later and possibly split the topic into 2 subtopics, one for the research paper and one for the multigenre project (observation notes, November 8, 2013).

As with the traditional research paper, students were asked, in the middle of the project creation timeline, to respond to the question, “What is the most valuable thing you are learning during the creation process?” in a reflection journal. Like with the traditional paper and the Group A responses, their responses revolved mainly around organization and time management, but Group B also discussed the use of both research and technology to some extent.

Sara, Alexa and Erika specifically discussed organization. Sara said she was learning “how to organize my thoughts better and manage using the length given without going over/under.” Erika said, “I am learning how to organize and put information in the project,” and Alexa stated: “Being prepared and having things all laid out before starting the actual process makes things easier. It’s better to be thorough, maybe over thorough, than missing things.” Pete and Amanda referred to the importance of being prepared in advance by collecting and organizing research. Pete also discussed the value of “being able to gather a lot of evidence and present it in my work, especially different types of evidence.” Amanda said she learned “how to prepare and have all my facts/quotes/information ready” (reflection journals, December, 2013).

Other participants in Group B felt that the most valuable things they were learning had more to do with the use of technology. Emma said the most valuable lesson was learning “good ways to set up PowerPoints,” while another student said it was most valuable to plan ahead “because it takes time to set up the PowerPoint and plan what I want to do so it turns out well.” Melissa, who struggled a bit throughout both assignments with deadlines and technology, submitting the wrong version of her paper to Turnitin.com, said she learned that “the most
valuable thing was to make sure to save often and proofread everything. My project had multiple links to outside sources, and I needed to make sure that they all worked” (reflection journals, December, 2013).

When asked to discuss what parts of the project they were comfortable with and why, student responses were similar to those in the previous question. They focused on organization, research, and technology. Sara and Emma both cited organization as their most comfortable area. Erika and Pete said they were comfortable with “finding the research” and “gathering evidence.” Alexa, Sara, and Melissa were all comfortable with the technology aspect of the assignment. Melissa also said she was comfortable “formatting the PowerPoint as it is something I have used often.” Alexa said she was comfortable “putting the information into a PowerPoint and making it presentable,” along with “using PowerPoint and its functions.” Alexa also said she was comfortable “making collages and finding video clips because they don’t involve writing (which I don’t like).” Some students also expressed comfort with the topic and the nature of the actual assignment, because they feel as though they have a “strong argument” and “the information to back up my opinion.” Amanda was comfortable with “the information itself because I’m interested in the subject” (reflection journals, December, 2013).

**Mid-Project Student Concerns.** The participants were asked to discuss what aspects of the project they were struggling with and why, just as they had with the traditional research paper. The responses here indicated a variety of concerns from the students. Lindsay reported that “time management is what I’ve been struggling with. I’ve always had this problem and sometimes I need a push to get going instead of procrastinating.” This group was less concerned about the actual assignment than Group A had been. They appeared to have a better understanding of what was being asked of them in general. However, they were more concerned
with exactly how they should use their sources and to what extent. They appeared to understand
what a multigenre project was, but they were unclear about how to use sources in that project.
As Sara stated: “I had a tough time using my sources; I wasn’t sure if I should use quotes.” Pete
agreed: “I am struggling with analysis and finding a way to explain my evidence, if any
explanation is even needed” (reflection journals, December, 2013).

Group B also expressed concerns with the technology aspect of the assignment. Amanda
expressed a general sense of discomfort because of the use of technology, “because it is a subject
that gives me a fair amount of anxiety.” Alexa stated: “I’m struggling with making sure
everything electronic works as planned and no unwanted surprises arise.” Alexa also expressed
concerns about the format of the project, expressing difficulty “trying to make sure everything is
in the correct format when everything’s different” (reflection journals, December, 2013).
Particularly in light of the technical issues we experienced in the classroom, such as server
Crashes, missing documents, and the unreliable wireless network, these concerns were certainly
founded in past experiences. These issues were more closely documented in observation notes:

An issue we have right now is computer access. The laptop cart is not charging the
computers properly or sufficiently, so students are wasting significant class time trying to
find a laptop that works—and if that fails, they have to find a way to plug in the laptop
and charge it while they work, but since the chargers are anchored into the cart, it’s no
easy task. Furthermore, the wireless connection keeps going down, the students are
having login issues, the internet connection is interrupted, the Word documents are
freezing for several minutes at a time, and the Documents folders tend to disappear when
students go back in to look for information they saved previously, it is no longer there
and they have to start over. Tech support has been in several times to help, but the issues have yet to be resolved. He is contacting the computer company for assistance.

Overall, these obstacles are frustrating and time-consuming, but students remain understanding and good-natured about them. I had to extend the deadline on the annotated bibliography assignment due to the issues with computers, but we are still mostly on track. (observation notes, November 8, 2013).

Group B’s final major concern was the nature of the multigenre assignment. While they understood the concept, they were struggling to make it a reality. For some, the slide requirement (14 total slides) was an issue. Erika reported: “I am struggling to have a specific amount of slides because I don’t know what to do for the other slides.” Melissa said that she was “having trouble with fully expressing what I want to, however, by using videos, songs, and lots of explanation it is a little bit easier.” Alexa expressed concern with “making a convincing argument with different genres because some genres turned out to be harder in conveying a certain message” (reflection journals, December, 2013). This particular struggle demonstrates the importance of evaluating the scope and limitations of each genre prior to using it, as some are much more effective than others at conveying a message and others are much more time consuming than they need to be for this type of assignment.

**Teacher Intervention.** In light of the concerns raised by the participants in the mid-project reflection journal entries, I chose to adjust some classroom planning and instruction to address their needs. Like with the other group, I showed the class the in-progress exemplar so they would be more comfortable with the expectations of the assignment. The exemplar gave them ideas about how to choose genres and which genres they might use for a particular point in their project. I also provided students with a project planner worksheet so they could evaluate
the genre to make sure it worked for what they wanted to use it for, accomplishing their goal and appealing to the audience. In terms of technology, I requested the presence of the school’s technology staff member at the beginning of class so he could make sure the computers were working properly and connecting to the network. He was also able to address individual student concerns regarding files and other computer-related issues.

**Post-Project Student Satisfaction.** After submitting the final drafts of their projects to the digital drop box on my Edline page, participants were asked to complete one last reflection journal. The first question was, “Were you satisfied with the overall product you submitted? Why or why not?” While the Group B responses to this question on the traditional paper were overwhelmingly negative, the project got considerably more positive results. No participants stated outright dissatisfaction with their final product. Four participants stated complete satisfaction with their final product. Amanda was satisfied “because I worked hard on it,” and Erika was also satisfied “because I tried really hard and I think I did really good.” Alexa was “happy with it” because “I said everything I wanted to and it looked nice.” Melissa “thought it gave an accurate representation of what I wanted to convey, and that I did a very good job on it” (reflection journals, December, 2013).

**Post-Project Student Dissatisfaction.** Since no participants were completely dissatisfied with their projects, this section will be used to address the statements of students who were “somewhat satisfied” with their final products. Alexa said she was “80% satisfied. The 20% not satisfied comes from me being rushed to finish towards the end.” This dissatisfaction is a result of a set deadline and time management issues. Likewise, Emma said: “I feel like if I spent more time on it, it could’ve been better. I was rushing to get it done on time.” Other students were dissatisfied because of the limitations placed on them by the assignment; Jim said
that he was “mostly satisfied with my overall project because I feel like I expressed my opinion. But I also feel that it was a little repetitive since my topic is more opinionated than factual.” Sara was still unhappy about the length requirements of the project, “because I think I could’ve said more in my essay [project].” Pete simply stated: “I was somewhat satisfied. I feel like I could have done better, but at the same time I am unsure of how good or bad I did” (reflection journals, December, 2013). This student was waiting for the grade to determine self-satisfaction.

Table 8

*Group B Participant Performance and Assessment: Course, Paper, and Project*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Grade in English as of Term 1</th>
<th>Report Cards</th>
<th>Grade on Research Process</th>
<th>Grade on Traditional Paper</th>
<th>Paper submitted Early/on time / late</th>
<th>Grade on Multigenre Project</th>
<th>Project Format</th>
<th>Project submitted Early/on Time/late</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexa</td>
<td>99/A+</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>On time</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>PPT</td>
<td>On time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>97/A+</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>On time</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>PPT</td>
<td>On time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>90/A-</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>1 day late</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>PPT</td>
<td>On time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lori</td>
<td>92/A-</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>80/70</td>
<td>2 days late</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>PPT</td>
<td>1 day late</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindsay</td>
<td>95/A</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>On time</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>PPT</td>
<td>On time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pete</td>
<td>96/A</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>On time</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>PPT</td>
<td>On time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erika</td>
<td>85/B</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>On time</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>PPT</td>
<td>On time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>91/A-</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>On time</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>PPT</td>
<td>On time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>92/A</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>96/86</td>
<td>2 days late</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>PPT</td>
<td>1 day late</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>83/B</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>On time</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>PPT</td>
<td>On time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Case Analysis: Emerging Themes**

**Theme One: Student Performance Is Not Significantly Different on Paper versus Project**

For Group A, the mean score on the traditional paper was 89%, and the median was a 94%. The mean score on the digital multigenre project was 94% and the median was 93%. For
Group B, the mean score on the traditional project on the traditional paper was 89%, and the median was 90.5%. The mean score on the digital multigenre project was 89% and the median was 91.5%. These scores indicate a 5-point increase on the mean score for Group A on the project, but no increase on the mean score for Group B. For both groups, the median score remained within a 1-point difference. These findings indicate that although Group A performed slightly better on the project than on the paper, the two assignments produced results within a 5-point mean grade range. Results indicate no significant difference in student performance between the paper and the project.

These findings are consistent with findings put forth in studies conducted by Wigfield (1997) and Wigfield, Eccles, and Roeser (1998), which examined how children’s ability beliefs and interest values affected their performance in different domains. Findings indicated that achievement beliefs, in conjunction with prior performance, were strong indicators of future performance, but interest was not a significant indicator of actual performance (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Although students were, in general, more interested in the digital multigenre project than in the traditional paper, their performance on these assignments was not affected significantly by their level of interest.

**Theme Two: The Digital Multigenre Project Is Helpful for Research Instruction**

Research skills are a necessary part of the overall academic experience (Bailey & Carroll, 2010; Goldfinch, 2003; ISTE, 2012). The Common Core Standards contain a section entitled, “Research and Media Skills Blended into the Standards as a Whole.” This section explicitly states:

To be ready for college, workforce training, and life in a technological society, students need the ability to gather, comprehend, evaluate, synthesize, and report on information
and ideas; to conduct original research in order to answer questions or solve problems; and to analyze and create a high volume and extensive range of print and nonprint texts in media forms old and new. The need to conduct research and to produce and consume media is embedded into every aspect of today’s curriculum. In like fashion, research and media skills and understandings are embedded throughout the standards rather than treated in a separate section. (MA DESE, 2011, p. 4).

As I began introducing the assignments to my classes, the students asked some really good questions. They wanted to know if they were going to be using the same topic for both projects. At first, I thought I wanted them to do different topics, but the more I thought about it, the more I realized it made sense to have them do the same topic for both assignments. I discussed this thought with my advisor, and she agreed. That realization led me to another important thought. I had originally planned on doing all of the research instruction as part of the first paper, but if I did that, I thought it might impact their perception of the traditional paper; they would likely associate the tedious process with the paper itself, thereby giving them a more negative perception of the traditional paper than was perhaps necessary or accurate (observation notes, October 29, 2013).

What I decided to do instead was to provide students with a brief overview of the two assignments—the traditional research paper and the experimental project—and teach the research process before actually assigning either piece. This is especially important at my school because junior year is the first time students are exposed to research papers, so they need to be instructed about how to use the databases, how to evaluate and choose sources, and how to use research to support claims in a paper. The students began with a solid research unit to collect and organize their information prior to beginning either assignment. This way, they could focus
on the assignment itself rather than on the research portion, which tends to intimidate and overwhelm them. They have the information they need before they start, so they can focus on the process itself—which is the real point of this research study (observation notes, October 29, 2013).

Participants were anxious about the research process, and were hesitant to begin looking for sources and figuring out how to use them (observation notes, October 29, 2013). For most participants, this was their first foray into the world of formal research. They needed to be instructed on how to use the databases and how to find relevant, reliable and valid sources for their topics. Those students who were also anxious or insecure about their own writing abilities were even more likely to experience stress about beginning the research process with a paper as the end product. One student was anxious because, “I don’t know how I’m supposed to find stuff” (focus group #3B, December, 2013). Another was frustrated by “all the time and effort it takes from start to finish” and “when I get a bad grade on something I worked hard on” (reflection journal, November, 2013).

Most notably, multiple students were frustrated with the idea of having to find sources and use quotes in an argument paper at all. They simply did not see the reason for it, since it was an opinion paper. One student said, “I don’t like using sources,” and another said, “I feel like writing with quotes makes you sound choppy because you’re always stopping and starting your ideas with someone else’s” (focus group #1B, November 19, 2013). Alexa, a student in Group B, reflected that she did not like “having to incorporate quotes—I feel like it stops the flow of a thought process” (reflection journal, November 19, 2013). Erika was particularly outspoken about this issue: “I disliked the need for citations. I disliked them because I wrote from personal experience and knew both sides of the argument. I did not think that it was necessary to have
them” (reflection journal, November, 2013). She was supported by Emma, who said: “I like just writing my own thoughts and I don’t like incorporating someone else’s” (reflection journal, November, 2013).

Incorporating the digital multigenre project into the curriculum had a positive effect on the overall research experience for students. Participants were more comfortable working with research sources when they were not worried about the writing aspect, and they were more engaged in the project when they felt like they were able to be creative and in control of how their project was done (observation notes, December 10, 2013). Students were able to find more diverse and appealing sources to support their arguments when they were incorporating them into a multigenre project (Allen & Swistak, 2004). As one student explained, “My strategy was, hey, there’s a book lying around my house, and it worked. And hey, freshman year we watched a documentary and it worked for my topic, so I did that, and everything else I looked up on the Internet” (focus group #4B, January 3, 2014). Another student thought the project helped with research skills because: “We got to write what we wanted and we learned to do something other than from the book, so it’s more like life lessons.” Another student agreed that this was useful because “we could look things up. We learned how to find better research” and “we have other sources, other than just the book.” Her peers agreed, because “you can use like videos and stuff,” and “you can go beyond, expand beyond your horizons” (focus group #4A, January 2, 2014).

Students were observed to be more enthusiastic and adventurous when finding research for the project than they were for the paper (observation notes, December 13, 2013). Participants overall tended to appreciate the research process and the small steps associated with it much more after the paper and project were completed than they did when they were working on the
actual steps. They did not see the relevance or rationale for the steps as they were doing them, but they understood why they were necessary and useful after the fact. As one student explained: “I think I didn't like the pre-writing process while we were doing it, but in hindsight I think it must have…helped a lot” (focus group #4B, January 3, 2014). As another summed up: “You have a few quotes, you write a few things, you have some pictures, and done!” (focus group #4B, January 3, 2014). Students were more willing and likely to engage with the research sources available to them if they were able to utilize them in a way that they perceived to be creative and relevant (Davis et al., 1998).

**Theme Three: The Digital Multigenre Project Helps Integrate 21st Century Skills into the Secondary ELA Classroom**

According to the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, the following skills are necessary for students to be successful in the future: (a) life and career skills, (b) learning and innovation skills, (c) core subjects, and (d) information, media, and technology skills (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2011). The digital multigenre research project addresses, at least in part, all four of these categories. It addresses life and career skills by helping students learn how to find and evaluate information and convey that information to a specific audience. It addresses learning and innovation, subcategorized as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity, by allowing students to express and communicate their opinions in a creative and meaningful way after supporting their ideas with logical information. It addresses two of the “3Rs” by asking students to read and write effectively, and its main component, the digital presentation, addresses the information, media and technology skills in a way that few ELA assignments are able to do. It also addresses the need for multiliteracy instruction (Archer, 2006; Bailey & Carroll, 2010; Lasmana, 2010; Merchant, 2007; Shoffner, et al., 2010; Unsworth, 2006).
The digital multigenre project, by nature, helps meet the needs of 21st Century learners. As one focus group conversation so efficiently summed up:

“If I’m going to present an idea to some business guy, I’m not going to be like, here’s my essay, tell me what you think...I’m going to be like, here’s my visual, you don’t like this part, well here’s some stats. Here’s a collage. Here’s some writing. Here’s some testimonials. I don’t know...different aspects, and they have to believe you…”

“Big businesses, you know, logical people, not just one kind of person.”

“If you’re presenting it to a big group of people, you don’t want them all reading one essay, that’s boring, that’s tiring.”

“Let me read you this essay. Story time!”

“Just make a PowerPoint, and bam!”

“Fast, easy, efficient, same as paper.” (focus group #4B, January 3, 2014)

These findings are supported by the ISTE standards (2012), which advocate for the integration of technology into the classroom in a student-centered way in order to develop and promote skills students will need in the future. Particularly in light of the fact that these students are “digital natives” (Bittman, et al., 2011), incorporating digital tools into the classroom experience is a logical step to take. The students’ statements above indicate recognition of the need for multimodal tools in the real world (Archer, 2006; Benson, 2008; Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Jewitt, 2005; Tanner-Anderson, 2009).

Another significant finding is that, although this digital multigenre project was originally intended to be an electronic portfolio or e-portfolio, the e-portfolio format turned out not to be the best, most ideal format for the project for a variety of reasons. First of all, students were unfamiliar with the concept of an e-portfolio and were therefore hesitant to experiment. Second,
students were given a choice between e-portfolios, PowerPoints, and Prezis. The majority of them chose PowerPoints because they had used them before. A few students from Group A did experiment with Prezi, with positive results. Third, the e-portfolio is really designed to showcase a collection of work over a period of time, demonstrating student growth and performance. It is not really designed to be used to format a single assignment. And finally, the e-portfolio is not available in a free online format that is user-friendly and straightforward.

**Theme Four: The Digital Multigenre Project Fosters Student Engagement and Student Learning**

Not surprisingly, data collected for this study indicated that the majority of students do not like writing essays. As mentioned in an earlier section, results from Survey #1 demonstrated that only 17% of participants from Group A like writing essays, and 0% of Group A self-identified as a “good writer.” Only 33% of Group B participants like writing essays, and 78% of them self-identified as a “good writer.” Students from both groups particularly dislike writing about things they deem irrelevant or uninteresting. When asked what students dislike about English class and why, Group A responses included a dislike of vocabulary and of reading “stupid books,” but primarily, student responses indicated a strong dislike of “writing about topics in stupid books;” “writing about stuff I just don’t like;” and “writing about stuff that doesn’t pertain to you like, that has nothing to do with your life, why am I writing an essay on it?” (focus group #1A, November 18, 2013). Group B was less vocal about this issue; only one student mentioned not liking writing “because it’s too time consuming” (focus group #1B, November 19, 2013).

Students do, however, like writing more when it is creative, relevant, and interesting to them (Allen, 2001; Romano, 2000). In other words, they appreciate and enjoy digital storytelling
(Nilsson, 2010; Tatum, 2009), and they value student-centered writing activities that appeal to their interests (Estes, 2004; Gelisli, 2009; Snehi, 2011). When asked what they like about writing and why, one Group B student in a focus group discussion said she liked “expressing yourself.” Another said, “I like how you can write anything you want to and there’s not always just one way to do it, if you have a valid reason for it.” Yet another student explained that writing “helps you get your feelings out, the ones that you can’t say” (focus group #1B, November 19, 2013). Students from Group A corroborated this information. One student said she likes to “make up stories or write whatever’s on my mind,” and another said “I like expressing my feelings when I write and to share things that I like” (focus group #1A, November 18, 2013).

Findings indicate that participants like being able to choose their own topic, and they like writing persuasive essays more than literature-based essays. They like having the freedom to decide what they want to write about. The digital multigenre project appeals to these desires because it allows students freedom in form, topic, and focus (Allen, 2001; Allen & Swistak, 2004; Romano, 2000). These findings are consistent with the framework of narratology, because students write more and better when they are telling a story that is meaningful to them (Bal, 1997; Lietch, et al, 2001). These findings are also consistent with the theoretical framework of expectancy-value achievement theory (Eccles, et al., 1983; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992; Wigfield, 1994; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000; Wigfield, Eccles, & Roeser, 1998), as students are more engaged and motivated when they expect to do well and are confident in their ability to do the task. The findings are also consistent with the motivational theory from which expectancy-value theory was derived (Atkinson, 1957; Atkinson & Feather, 1966), which indicates that students are more likely to be motivated when they are involved and interested in the learning process.
Group A students in particular were observed to be highly engaged and focused in class while working on the project. They were on task and did not need any reminders to get back to work at any point during the project work in class. They were talkative, but not in a distracted way; rather, they were discussing the project itself, and the facts they were finding, because they were learning a great deal of information and eager to share. Many times I was called over to a student’s workstation because the student simply wanted to share some new fact or statistic he/she had just discovered (observation notes, December 17, 2013).

Some students were so excited about the final product in Group A that they asked to present their projects to the class. This demonstrates a successful project (Allen, 2001). For some it was because they were proud of their final product and wanted to share it; for others, it went beyond that. Some students, including Natalie and Allie, felt so strongly about their topic and found their evidence so convincing and important that they were compelled to share their message with the class. One student, Natalie, is even planning to present her project to Wellness classes in an effort to convey the importance of healthy living based on her discoveries. Group B was less willing to present their projects to their peers, but these students are honors students who are generally confident in their academic success (observation notes, December 20, 2013). The real surprise here is the fact that Group A students, who felt so unconfident in their academic and writing abilities that they sometimes do not submit written work, were so confident and proud of their final product that they wanted to share it with a larger audience.

According to survey results, 100% of participants liked writing the project more than the paper. Reflection journals corroborated this finding for Group A, but one or two students in Group B expressed slight dissatisfaction with the overall product and stated that they would prefer not to be assessed solely on the project, but instead on a hybrid combination of a paper
and a project. Group A students were very satisfied with the project assignment itself and the work they submitted for it, but Group B students were slightly more critical of both the assignment and their own work. Group A students said the project was “more useful,” “more fun” and “more pretty” (focus group #4A, January 2, 2014). Group B students said, “having the different genres can open your mind up to different aspects of the topic,” but some of them were upset because “I didn’t know what to do,” “it was very vague,” and “I needed a solid example” to work with (focus group #4B, January 3, 2014). For the most part, however, the responses were positive for the project.

Theme Five: The Project is a Supplement, not a Replacement, for Traditional Writing

It is important to realize that just because students do not like writing does not mean they should not be required to do it, and to do it well. Traditional writing instruction is still important, and the ability to write formally in standard written English is still a valuable skill. The digital multigenre project is intended to supplement instruction in a motivational, student-centered way (Archer, 2006). It also appeals to the needs of the Grade 11 curriculum because it incorporates persuasion, research, and citation (MA DESE, 2011). It simply does so in a different way.

Students still had to organize their ideas, find and use relevant, accurate and reliable sources, and synthesize these sources with their own ideas. They had to cite their sources in MLA format. They had to utilize the art of rhetoric in a specific and meaningful way, choosing either Aristotelian or Rogerian argumentation to convey their argument and persuade their audience.

Secondary ELA classroom teachers should still place significant value on traditional writing instruction. The Common Core Standards (MA DESE, 2011) indicate an increased focus on persuasive writing, and many high school and college courses still require, for good reason, traditional research-based essays in a variety of subjects and for a variety of purposes.
According to the Massachusetts Common Core Standards (2011), College and Career Ready (CCR) students demonstrate the following characteristics: (a) independence, (b) strong content knowledge, (c) response to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline, (d) comprehension and the ability to critique, (e) ability to see the value in evidence, (f) ability to use technology and digital media strategically and capably, and (f) understanding of other perspectives and cultures (p. 9). The only way to attain these skills fully is by reading and writing critically and frequently for a variety of purposes; however, the digital multigenre project has the potential to help students reach these goals in a more creative way and through the use of technology and digital media (ISTE, 2012).

In the final focus group discussion, some participants stated that they would prefer a combination of the two assignments, allowing them to both write and create a project: “I would rather do maybe like a combination of the two because I found that with my project I was basically writing an essay,” said one student. She was supported by another student who suggested “half and half, just throwing that out there,” and then another: “Yeah, I agree with half and half because sometimes I do like ranting on and on” (focus group #4B, January 3, 2014). Some participants also indicated that they would have preferred to do the project first and the paper second: “I personally would have rather done the project first I think, because you could write the essay based on your slides” (focus group #4B, January 3, 2014).

Others said they really enjoyed the project, more so than other assignments. As one student said, “I’d rather do this than like some of the other projects we did.” Another said she “really liked the Prezi,” and another said, “yeah I liked the multigenre thing.” She was joined by yet another student who said, “Yeah, that was a lot of fun. I had a lot of fun doing collages…” A peer interrupted her to say, “I wouldn’t call it fun, but it was better than doing essays and
posters” (focus group #4A, January 2, 2014). A participant from Group B stated, “I would like to do a project like this because I just don’t like writing essays, and this didn't feel as formal or stressful as writing an essay would be, so...I support this.” A colleague agreed, saying, “I also support it, because when you’re writing essays you can kind of just drone on and on and then you get lost in what you’re trying to say and then you’re like hey, did I already say that? But with the PowerPoint it keeps things interesting and you can put like video clips…” (focus group #4B, January 3, 2014).

These projects seem to be particularly appealing to students who struggle with writing, including Allie, who receives Special Education services for her writing skills. She truly thrived on this project and was able to convey her ideas in a way that made sense to her and her audience. She even presented her project to the class because she was so proud of it. These findings are supported by the works of DuBruin, Parecki, and Klein (2003), Nilsson (2010), and Walters (2010), which discuss the significance of digital tools and multimodality in the Special Education setting.

**Theme Six: Technology Access and Technology Quality Have Significant Impact on Student Performance, Feelings and Perceptions**

Observations of participants throughout the entire process from start to finish indicated that both the quality and the accessibility of technology have a significant impact on student performance, perceptions and emotions as they work to complete an assignment. In terms of student performance, those students from Group B who submitted late assignments claimed to have done so because of difficulty with their computers. Melissa submitted the wrong file to Turnitin.com for the traditional paper assignment and was unable to re-submit the correct file, despite the fact that the settings were supposed to allow repeat submissions up to the due date.
Lindsay had difficulty submitting both her paper and her project, citing technical difficulties as her primary reason for the late submissions.

Access to technology is incredibly important for this type of assignment. A teacher cannot reasonably expect students to complete processed papers and digital projects, and to submit them online, if the teacher does not supply all students with access to the digital tools needed to successfully complete these assignments. Some schools provide students with personal tablets or laptops, but not all schools do—and certainly not the one in which this case study was conducted. As an action researcher/classroom teacher, I was responsible for making sure that my students had the tools they needed for the assignments, so I had to sign up for the COW (laptop cart) multiple times throughout the research, paper, and project process. This required a great deal of planning and scheduling, since our school only has two COWs for the entire student body. Some of my students do not have computers at home, so I would never expect them to do this type of assignment without school-based technology. Even so, I extended the offer of a traditional scrapbook-based multigenre project for any student who did not have access to a computer at home (observation notes, December 13, 2013).

Furthermore, teachers must be properly trained in the use of technology in the classroom (Tanner-Anderson, 2009) in order to successfully use this type of project. If they are not comfortable using it, they should not expect their students to be. They are not able to help students who need assistance, nor can they properly and knowledgably assess student work without the skills and knowledge required to use and understand the technology. The ISTE (2012) provides tools for the use of technology in the classroom for both students and teachers. As LaMaster (2012) states, this must be implemented in a specific way on a small scale to start, and it requires resources and proper training.
The most significant factor for student perceptions of success and student engagement was the quality of the technology available. On several occasions, we lost a substantial amount of class time for research, writing, and project work because of issues with the computers. We had issues with students being able to log in and connect to the network to access their saved files. We had problems with battery life on the laptops; if we got the computers later in the day after other classes had used them, the batteries were too low and the computers could not be used. We also had problems with the wireless network; for some reason, whenever the students all tried to do anything online at the same time, it overloaded the network and disconnected them from the wifi. Several students became frustrated, angry and upset because they lost files they had saved; they could not access folders; they could not save files or documents because the server or wifi went down; and they could not submit their papers or projects because everyone in class was trying to do the same thing at the same time. Of course, that always happened right at the end of class as the students were panicking and the bell was about to ring (observation notes, December 16, 2013).

Summary of Results

Overall, the findings indicated an emergence of six significant themes regarding the research process, the traditional research paper, and the digital multigenre project. First, there was no significant difference in student performance between the traditional research paper and the experimental research project. Student grades were very similar on both assignments. Second, the digital multigenre project has several benefits to ELA teachers for the purpose of research instruction. Third, the digital multigenre project is effective at helping students develop 21st Century skills. Students prefer formats with which they are comfortable and which are easy to use; as a result, they chose PowerPoint or Prezi over an electronic portfolio. Fourth, the
digital multigenre project is more effective than the traditional research paper at producing tangible evidence of student interest and engagement, a factor that affects students’ perceptions of their own ability and self-worth. Students were noticeably more confident in their projects, particularly students who do not generally do well on large writing assignments. Fifth, the digital multigenre project is best used as a supplement to, rather than a replacement for, research and writing instruction. It does not replace the need for students to be able to write in standard formal written English. Finally, technology access and quality, along with teacher proficiency, at the school are important factors to consider when deciding whether or not to implement the digital multigenre project.

Findings indicate that Group A, the college prep level class, was more comfortable with the digital multigenre project throughout the process, and more pleased with their overall product, than the Group B honors students were. Group A students performed just as well as Group B, but they did not turn it in late, they did not complain, and they felt comfortable with the final product. They also were more willing to experiment and explore the digital project, working with Prezi and incorporating many different elements. Group B students were less adventurous, working with what they knew instead of experimenting with Prezi. Two of them turned the assignment in late, some of them were displeased with the final product, and many of them had complaints about the assignment and its requirements. Overall, it appears that a college prep level class might respond better to this type of project than an honors level class, who might be content to write a traditional paper.

The most significant findings are those indicating a higher level of student engagement with the digital multigenre project. Students felt as though the project was more relevant to their lives and future goals than the traditional paper. Students demonstrated higher levels of
confidence in the project than the paper, particularly those students who do not like writing and those who feel as though they are not strong writers. Technology must be accessible and plentiful in order to effectively implement this project, and schools with limited computer access would likely not benefit from implementing this type of assignment.
Chapter V: Discussion and Implications

This study focused on determining whether or not the digital multigenre research project is a valuable means of instruction and assessment in the ELA classroom. The researcher specifically sought to understand how students responded to this project, and whether they found it more valuable and engaging than a traditional research-based writing assignment. For practical purposes, the researcher also explored how this project would be implemented in a typical high school ELA classroom. The study was designed to find answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the effects of implementing digital multi-genre research projects into the ELA curriculum at Sunnydale High School on student perception of the relevance and accessibility of the content?

2. What effects do digital multi-genre research projects have on student learning and achievement in the ELA classroom?

3. How do students feel about the digital multi-genre research project in comparison to a traditional research paper?

4. How can secondary English Language Arts instructors effectively utilize digital tools in conjunction with multigenre writing projects to demonstrate student-centered learning in writing and ELA proficiency?

Chapter One presented the problem of practice and the significance of exploring student-centered learning strategies that engage students and enhance learning and motivation. Chapter Two surveyed the existing literature as it pertained to the research questions and the exploration of digital tools, 21st Century skills, and multigenre writing projects in the secondary ELA curriculum. Chapter Three outlined the data collection process and identified the methods the
The researcher employed to conduct this case study. It also identified the reasons for action research and site selection for this study and explained how data was triangulated using a variety of collection methods.

The results presented in Chapter Four indicate that digital multigenre research projects are an effective means of teaching research skills, 21st Century skills, and persuasion. They are also effective at increasing student motivation and student engagement. They are not, however, intended to replace traditional writing instruction; they are simply a means by which to supplement writing instruction in a way that motivates and engages students in a meaningful way. These findings were determined after a close analysis of the data collected from the action researcher’s personal observations in conjunction with two separate groups of participants, 17 students total, via eight focus group discussions, eight reflection journals, and four online surveys.

This chapter examines these findings and analyzes them as they pertain to the field of ELA education, 21st Century skills, and student-centered learning. The chapter then presents the implications of this study to researchers, policymakers, and practitioners and concludes with a discussion of the study’s limitations and suggestions for future research.

**Synthesis of Findings**

The case study analysis presented in Chapter Four identified six emerging themes. The first theme is based on the findings indicating that student performance was not significantly different on either the traditional paper or the experimental project. The second theme shows that the digital multigenre project is a useful tool for research instruction in the ELA classroom. The third theme demonstrates the relevance of the digital multigenre projects to 21st Century skills acquisition. It also identifies the best format for this project based on student choice and
response. The fourth theme explains how the digital multigenre project fosters student learning and engagement, and the fifth theme shows that the digital multigenre project should not replace traditional writing entirely, but should instead be used to supplement traditional writing instruction and assessment. The sixth theme identifies the challenges presented by limited access and poor quality of technology in the school setting.

The Digital Multigenre Research Project Effectively Engages Students and Promotes Student-Centered Learning

The research questions for this study sought to determine whether or not students would respond in a positive way to the digital multigenre research project. Specifically, the research questions asked what effect the project would have on student learning and achievement, as well as on engagement and perception. The theoretical frameworks supporting the research questions were based on motivational theory and narratology. The observations, reflection journals, surveys, and focus group discussions that were analyzed supported the claim that the digital multigenre research project does in fact enhance student motivation and engagement. Data also supports the claim that the digital multigenre project is effective at promoting student-centered learning. Data does not, however, indicate a significant increase in student performance on the digital multigenre project in comparison with the traditional research paper.

The Digital Multigenre Project Supports 21st Century Skills

By its very nature, the digital multigenre project encourages and aids in the development of 21st Century skills. Students are required to find and analyze a variety of web-based sources in their project. They are required to use a digital tool, either software-based (PowerPoint) or web-based (Prezi) in order to collect, format, and present their projects. The project allows students to experiment with a variety of elements—graphics, graphs, charts, statistics, quotes,
videos, sound bytes, and so on—and incorporate them into the project itself. Students became more adept at formatting their digital project and manipulating the technology to suit their needs. They also learned how to use technology to convey a message about a specific topic for a specific audience with a specific purpose.

**The Digital Multigenre Project Does Not Replace the Need for Traditional Writing Skills**

While the digital multigenre project demonstrates great promise in the realm of student engagement and motivation, it is not a replacement for traditional writing instruction or skills. The digital multigenre project, in its current form, does not allow for true formal writing instruction in standard written English. It does not produce a long, organized composition in multiple paragraphs with a clear beginning, middle, and end. It requires an introduction, a body, and a conclusion, certainly, and it requires the same amount of source interaction, integration and citation as a traditional paper, but students are not necessarily expected to present this information in a structured, formal way in the project. Students do still need to be able to write a traditional essay, and they do still need to know how to write a research paper. The multigenre project is useful for research instruction and as an engaging supplemental means of instruction and assessment, particularly for standard level classes. It does not, on its own, prepare college-bound students for the expectations of the collegiate setting ahead of them.

**The School Must Provide and Maintain Adequate, Accessible, and Functioning Technology in Order to Effectively Implement Digital Multigenre Projects into the ELA Classroom**

The number one problem identified by participants throughout this study was not the subject, the assignment, or the research process itself. It was the technology. Participants struggled throughout the entire research, writing, and project-making process because of the school’s limited technology. The classroom teacher had difficulty obtaining access to computers
for two classes regularly over the span of eight weeks in order to effectively conduct research instruction, source selection, paper writing, and project creation. With only two classroom sets of computers to serve an entire high school with over 700 students, securing computers for this study was often an arduous task. Once the computers were secured, however, the difficulties were just beginning. Students struggled with battery life, server access, wireless access, database issues, and login issues.

In order to effectively implement this type of digital project on a larger scale, even department-wide, additional digital tools would need to be available at the school. A teacher cannot reasonably assume that her entire student body has access to technology outside of school, nor can she reasonably expect her students to complete this project entirely outside of school. Teacher-led instruction is essential for students to learn the correct process and procedures for many aspects of the research project. Student-led learning must occur in the classroom setting so students can ask the teacher questions and receive assistance as the need arises.

**Outcomes of the Project Beyond the Grade**

The digital multigenre project had a distinct and definite impact on student self-perception regarding achievement and ability. Particularly with Group A, a typically lower-achieving group compared to Group B, students were observed to be more confident, more happy, and more willing to work when doing the project than when doing the paper. Group A students also indicated in survey results and reflection journals that their satisfaction with their final product was significantly higher on the project than on the paper. Participants were proud of their work and confident that they had done well on the project. This is in stark contrast to the defeated, anxious attitudes expressed upon submission of the traditional research paper. Then,
students in Group A felt like they had not done well because they are not strong writers. On the project, these same students were confident in their work to the point where they actually wanted to present it to their classmates. Regardless of the fact that participants’ grades on the paper and the project turned out to be quite similar, the students’ self-perception and confidence was markedly higher on the project, making the project a valuable tool to use for classes that do not feel that they are strong writers or successful students.

**Incorporating Research Instruction with the Digital Multigenre Project**

This project turned out to be a valuable tool that could be useful in assisting classroom teachers with research instruction. Students are often hesitant to begin a research paper because they are overwhelmed by the amount of work and the rigorous expectations placed on the writing of the paper itself. Classroom teachers would benefit from using the digital multigenre project to introduce students to research, particularly to find sources, evaluate them and incorporate them into the students’ own work. Locating and integrating a variety of sources is less intimidating in the project than in a regular paper, according to the study’s findings. Students feel more in control and more creative when they are able to use different types of sources than the ones typically used in research papers, yet they are still expected to use valid, reliable and reputable sources to support their own claims and ideas.

**Connection to Research in Writing Instruction**

As instruction and assessment continue to evolve, scholars and practitioners in the field of ELA and education must look to the future to determine the needs in the present. In the future, today’s students will be expected to be able to read and write clearly and effectively for a variety of purposes (Common Core Standards, 2011). They will also be expected to use digital tools effectively and to demonstrate a strong grasp of 21st Century skills (Partnership for 21st
Century Skills, 2013). Therefore, today’s teachers should incorporate these skills into their regular classroom instruction if they want to properly and adequately prepare today’s students for tomorrow’s world (Bittman, et al., 2011; Lasmana, 2010; McCullough, 2010; Shoffner, et al., 2010). It is evident that writing instruction in the traditional sense is still necessary and valuable. It is also evident that as the world of communication evolves, so must our means of teaching communication. Adolescents are bombarded by a vast array of media messages on television, in movies, online, on their Smartphones, and everywhere they go in person or in cyberspace. The better equipped they are to deal with and analyze these messages, the better they will be as citizens and employees in the future. The digital multigenre project is designed to incorporate not only traditional writing instruction, but also the new and varied genres available in the digital world. It is in the best interest of scholars and practitioners in the field of writing instruction to explore the possibilities presented by this type of project.

**Implications for Researchers**

The above sections identify the areas of research in which this particular study is situated: (a) digital tools, (b) writing instruction, (c) multigenre writing, and (d) 21st Century skills. This study serves to connect these seemingly disconnected fields. By connecting digital tools and 21st Century skills to writing instruction in the secondary classroom, this researcher hopes to present a useful and meaningful way of teaching writing in the new technology-drenched world while still maintaining the integrity of traditional research and writing instruction and assessment. This study, then, contributes to the growing body of research in multigenre writing, multimodality, digital tools, and writing instruction. This is particularly important in today’s generation of “digital natives” (Bittman, et al., 2011). It also contributes to the body of research in student learning, engagement, and motivation. The study suggests possibilities for researchers in the
field of writing and ELA instruction, particularly the possibility of adapting existing assessment tools like the multigenre essay into a modern, digital version of its former self.

Implications for Practitioners

Practitioners, particularly ELA teachers at the middle and high school levels, can benefit greatly from the findings in this study. Teaching research skills has always been a difficult task, particularly with reluctant learners. There are so many small details in formatting and citation that students are often overwhelmed, making them resistant to the instruction and the task at hand. Particularly since the inception of the Internet, finding valid, reliable sources that are credible and useful has become increasingly challenging because of the sheer volume of information available on the web. Students definitely need guidance and instruction on how to evaluate these sources and determine their validity. They then need to learn how to use these sources in a meaningful way to supplement their own ideas.

The digital multigenre project provides the ELA teacher with a fun, engaging, digital tool for students to use while learning how to do all of these things. Students do not necessarily like writing to begin with, and they dislike research even more, so when these two elements are combined, it can often spell disaster for the typical classroom teacher—and failure for some students. Multigenre projects offer an engaging and creative way to incorporate multimodal communication methods while developing multiliteracies (Allen, 2001; Allen & Swistak, 2004; Romano, 2000). If students get to experiment with non-written sources, such as graphs, charts, videos, songs, and pictures, they are more likely to be willing to work with the assignment and still learn the same valuable skills in the process.

Other practitioners may also benefit from what the digital multigenre project has to offer. Classroom teachers in core subjects such as science or social studies, as well as in elective
courses like business, journalism, statistics, and foreign language, to name a few, can also find useful ways to incorporate the digital multigenre project into their curriculum. For example, a science teacher might assign such a project in an environmental studies class. Students could choose an environmental issue to discuss and research, then collect and present their findings in a digital multigenre project to present to the class. The project could include statistics, interviews, newspaper findings, scholarly articles, pictures, and videos about the subject. A history teacher might ask students to explore the Vietnam War from the perspective of the Vietnamese people, collecting primary source statements, newspaper articles, images, sound bytes, first-person accounts documented in writing, and other sources to convey the war from a specific perspective. These are just two examples of the possibilities afforded by the digital multigenre project in non-ELA classrooms, but the options are practically limitless.

**Implications for Policymakers**

With the recent introduction in 2011 of the new Common Core Standards to replace the former Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, the ELA curriculum has a new emphasis on persuasive writing and non-fiction reading. The digital multigenre project has the ability to help teachers integrate technology, persuasive writing, and non-fiction into the curriculum in a meaningful and accessible way. In order for this to happen, however, policymakers need to do two things: (1) promote concepts like the digital multigenre project on their website and with their documents explaining and suggesting ways of incorporating these elements into the curriculum, and (2) provide districts and schools with sufficient funding to reasonably incorporate technology and digital tools into the typical classroom on a regular basis. Policymakers must recognize the need for adequate computers and wireless access in schools before projects like this can be introduced on a large scale.
Limitations

The limitations of the research design and sample selection were discussed in Chapter Three. The research design, a case study, creates a limitation based on the size and scope of the findings. According to Yin (2009), the case study design limits the ability to generalize and transfer findings to other populations. This study was conducted on a small group of participants, 17 total, from two classes in the same grade at the same high school in the same year. Participants volunteered to participate in the research study, but were chosen based simply on their enrollment in a Grade 11 English class with the action researcher as the classroom instructor. A different group of participants in a different grade, or at a different school, or with a different teacher, might produce very different results. This is why it would be useful for future researchers to conduct similar studies in order to validate or qualify the findings presented in this one.

Another limitation to the findings of this study relates to the availability of digital tools to complete a project that is, for all intents and purposes, an online project. While the researcher and the participants in this study had some difficulty with technology throughout the process, they had at least limited access to technology. It would be unreasonable and unfair to expect students in a low-income or underfunded school district to be able to complete a project like the one presented in this study. Students with no access to technology at home would struggle to complete this project, and they would likely be ill equipped with the skills necessary to format a PowerPoint or a Prezi. Teachers in schools without adequate or regular access to technology would not likely be able to teach students online research skills, nor would they be able to provide students with class time to work on their projects. As a result, there is a relatively large
demographic that would not benefit from incorporating this type of project into the curriculum. In fact, this project would likely do more harm than good in certain settings.

Suggestions for Future Research

This case study provides an explanation of and a model for the digital multigenre research project prototype. While teachers have been using products like Prezi and PowerPoint presentations as assessment tools in the classroom for several years, and while several ELA teachers have adopted the multigenre essay as a form of assessment, this particular case study is likely the first published attempt to combine the two concepts into one cohesive project. As a result, future researchers have many possible options to explore the assignment, its content, its effectiveness, and students’ performances on and perceptions of it.

Future research might revolve around an alternative way of teaching this project, or a different way of setting up the assignment itself. Other action research case studies could streamline the process and/or the assignment and make it more accessible and effective for both teachers and students. Alternatively, researchers might consider creating a similar assignment, but on a different topic, with a different purpose, or for a different course subject. These variables could alter the findings, or they could serve to further support the findings of this study.

Future research might also serve to further evaluate the effectiveness of the assignment itself. Do students in other schools, grades, classes, cities, or states produce similar results? Or are they completely different? Do students from other samples react well to this assignment? Do they do well on it? Are they more or less engaged in the learning process and motivated to complete the project? Are they satisfied and confident in the final product? These questions merit further exploration. Other studies should also include quantitative data, either as a fully quantitative study or as a mixed-methods study. This case study presented only qualitative data,
which is in itself a limitation. Finally, further research should be conducted to determine the significance of the findings in this study, particularly the findings demonstrating the differences between the honors class and the college prep class. These results may or may not be consistent across multiple studies.

Conclusion

Educators are constantly striving to find new and engaging ways to teach their students. As the world around us changes, the way we teach must change with it. This researcher embraced the omnipresence of digital tools in today’s society and adapted an unconventional but established writing assignment, the multigenre project, to meet the digital demands of today’s world. Students generally enjoy the multigenre project in its original paper format, and students generally enjoy using technology in school, so combining these two concepts was a logical idea. The question was really about how students would react to the project, whether it would appeal to them more than a regular paper, and how it could be effectively implemented in the ELA curriculum. As an action researcher, I based my qualitative case study in the theoretical frameworks of narratology and motivational theory to evaluate the effectiveness of the digital multigenre project in comparison with a traditional paper.

After a thorough analysis of several sources of data, including focus group discussions, reflection journals, surveys, and teacher observations, six themes emerged. These themes were established based on the codes that developed in NVivo, and they are supported with triangulated data from the variety of sources mentioned above. The findings are predominantly positive, in favor of the digital multigenre project as a useful tool in research and writing instruction in the secondary ELA classroom. In fact, it is quite possible that the project could be easily adapted for use in the middle school classroom as well as in multiple disciplines and courses across the
grades. The project is especially useful in teaching research instruction and 21st Century skills, as well as in meeting the requirements of College and Career Readiness standards and Common Core Standards. Furthermore, the project is very effective at increasing student engagement and motivation, particularly in a college prep level class and with students who lack confidence in their writing ability. In order for this project to be successfully and meaningfully implemented, the school must provide its students and teachers with adequate and functional digital tools for all students participating in the project itself; otherwise, students are being set up for failure, especially marginalized students with limited or no access to technology at home.

While this research is limited for several reasons, it also demonstrates a great deal of positive implications for the field of education and writing instruction. The study is limited because it is a qualitative case study with a small sample in a small town in a single school, and more research is needed to determine the overall effectiveness of the digital multigenre project on a larger scale for a variety of classes and populations. Mixed method and quantitative research studies, along with additional qualitative case studies, would be beneficial to support the existing findings and add to this pool of research. Even with these limitations, however, the study’s implications are valuable to the field of both ELA and education. The digital multigenre project has some distinct benefits, not the least of which includes applicability to Common Core Standards and 21st Century skills. The ability to synthesize information from a variety of sources and media, in conjunction with the ability to use digital tools effectively and communicate complex ideas clearly and with evidence, is undeniably important to the overall wellbeing of future informed and productive citizens of the world.
References


Bailey, N.M. & Carroll, K.M. (2010). Motivating students' research skills and interests through a multimodal, multigenre research project. English Journal, 99(6), 78-85.


doi:10.1080/01596300500200011.


Appendix A
IRB Approval

NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION

Date: September 27, 2013
IRB #: CPS13-09-03
Principal Investigator(s): Kristal Clemens
Wendy Malone Rockne
Department:
Doctor of Education Program
College of Professional Studies
Address:
20 Belvidere
Northeastern University
Title of Project:
A Fresh Look at Writing Instruction: Multigenre E-Portfolios in the Secondary English Language Arts Classroom
Participating Sites:
School District Superintendent's Permission Letter on file
DHHS Review Category: Expedited #6, #7
Informed Consents:
One (1) signed parent/guardian consent and child assent form

This project is approved under 45CFR46.404 which applies to children as research subjects and involves research not involving greater than minimal risk. Adequate provisions are made for soliciting the assent of the children and the permission of their parents or guardians, as set forth in 45CFR46.408.

Monitoring Interval: 12 months

APPROVAL EXPIRATION DATE: SEPTEMBER 26, 2014

Investigator's Responsibilities:
1. The informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when recruiting participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month prior to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any other university approvals that may be necessary.

C. Randall Calvin, Ph.D., Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Northeastern University FWA #4630

Human Subject Research Protection
9fco Renaissance Park
9fco Huntington Avenue
Boston, MA 02115
617-373-7570
617-373-4596
northeastern.edu/hsrp
September 22, 2013

Dear Student and Parent/Guardian,

I am pleased to announce that I am currently in the process of writing my doctoral thesis for the Doctor of Education program in the College of Professional Studies at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts. In order to complete this thesis, I must conduct a research study I designed over the course of the doctoral program. The title of my research study is, *A Fresh Look at Writing Instruction: Multigenre E-Portfolios in the Secondary ELA Classroom*. This study, which has been approved by Dr. Joseph Baeza, Superintendent of Schools, and Mrs. Megan Lafayette, High School Principal, was designed as part of a comprehensive effort to enhance and modernize writing instruction in the high school English Language Arts classroom.

I began incorporating the multi-genre writing project into my classroom instruction in 2008, after taking a graduate level course entitled *Teaching Multigenre Writing* at Bridgewater State College as part of the requirements for my Master’s degree in English. I have used the project for a variety of purposes and in a variety of classes over the past five years, and students generally respond positively to it. The project allows students to be creative and original in their expression of ideas about a particular work of literature or topic. Because of this positive student response, I began looking into how this type of project might enhance and/or improve current writing instruction techniques. When I began researching 21st Century skills and digital literacy, I realized that an electronic portfolio, or e-portfolio, format would help make the existing multigenre project both more relevant to students and more closely aligned with the Common Core Standards.

I am writing to you in hopes that you will consider participating in my research study. Because the multigenre project is already an established part of my curriculum, I am confident in its implementation for all of my Grade 11 students. The "research study" portion in which I am requesting your participation has more to do with how students feel about and respond to the two components of the project: (a) the multigenre project and (b) the electronic portfolio format. Participating students will simply be asked to respond to a series of questions about traditional writing assignments and the multigenre e-portfolio assignment. The questions will take the form of (a) anonymous online surveys, (b) anonymous reflection journals, and (c) focus group discussions (names will be changed for confidentiality). All research data will be collected during regular class time, during regular class assignments, so participants need not worry about expending additional time or effort in this study.

In order to ensure that this study authentically represents the population of the school, I would ideally like to recruit a variety of students with a variety of interests. I genuinely hope to involve students who like to write as well as students who do not enjoy writing, because this is an opportunity for students to express their thoughts and opinions on two different forms of classroom assessment. I hope students will consider participation as an opportunity to have a voice in how they are instructed and assessed in the ELA classroom both now and in the future. As a scholar-practitioner in the ever-changing field of education, I truly wish to make the writing experience meaningful and thought-provoking for my students. I believe that encouraging students to express themselves constructively, productively and creatively is essential to preparing them for success in college and in the workforce.

Please consider participating in this important research study. The Q & A section of the "Informed Consent" form provides more specific information about the nature of the study and the expectations for participants. I would be happy to respond to any additional questions or concerns via email or telephone. I look forward to hearing from you! Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Wendy Malone Rockne
English Teacher, Norton High School
Rockne.w@husky.neu.edu
508.285.0160 x5204
Dear Parent,

We are inviting your child to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you in the attached letter. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep. Below, please find a list of questions and answers regarding the research study. Please sign and return the attached Informed Consent form if you would like your child to participate in this research study.

**Why is my child being asked to take part in this research study?**

Your child is being asked to participate in this research study because he/she is enrolled in Mrs. Rockne’s Grade 11 English class. Mrs. Rockne is enrolled in the Doctor of Education program at Northeastern University in Boston, MA, and is conducting this research study as part of her doctoral thesis. The researcher is collecting data from students in an effort to determine best practices in the field of English Language Arts (ELA) instruction, curriculum, and assessment.

**Why is this research study being done?**

The purpose of this research is to determine the effectiveness of a non-traditional writing project known as the “Multi-genre E-Portfolio.” More information about this project is provided in the attached letter from the researcher.

**What will my child be asked to do?**

If you and your child decide your child will take part in this study, we will ask him/her to provide feedback about the writing experience in the following ways:

a) Participate in three 10-minute online surveys about writing and literacy (responses will be anonymous)

b) Participate in three 30-minute focus group discussions about the writing process (pseudonyms will be used, and sessions will be audio recorded)

c) Participate in six 10-minute reflection journals to express personal feelings about traditional writing assignments and the multigenre E-portfolio (responses will be anonymous)

All of the above listed study-specific activities will be done in English class, during regular class time. Your child should expect to spend a total of 4.5 hours conducting study-specific activities in class between September and December of 2013.

The writing assignments, both traditional and experimental, will be given to and completed by all students in the class, regardless of the students’ participation in the research study. These

---

The Northeastern University Human Subject Research Protection.
Northeastern University
950 Renaissance Park
Northeastern University
Boston, MA 02115-5000
Tel: 617.373.7570, Fax: 617.373.5495

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Dear Parent,

We are inviting your child to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you in the attached letter. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep. Below, please find a list of questions and answers regarding the research study. Please sign and return the attached Informed Consent form if you would like your child to participate in this research study.

**Why is my child being asked to take part in this research study?**

Your child is being asked to participate in this research study because he/she is enrolled in Mrs. Rockne’s Grade 11 English class. Mrs. Rockne is enrolled in the Doctor of Education program at Northeastern University in Boston, MA, and is conducting this research study as part of her doctoral thesis. The researcher is collecting data from students in an effort to determine best practices in the field of English Language Arts (ELA) instruction, curriculum, and assessment.

**Why is this research study being done?**

The purpose of this research is to determine the effectiveness of a non-traditional writing project known as the “Multi-genre E-Portfolio.” More information about this project is provided in the attached letter from the researcher.

**What will my child be asked to do?**

If you and your child decide your child will take part in this study, we will ask him/her to provide feedback about the writing experience in the following ways:

a) Participate in three 10-minute online surveys about writing and literacy (responses will be anonymous)

b) Participate in three 30-minute focus group discussions about the writing process (pseudonyms will be used, and sessions will be audio recorded)

c) Participate in six 10-minute reflection journals to express personal feelings about traditional writing assignments and the multigenre E-portfolio (responses will be anonymous)

All of the above listed study-specific activities will be done in English class, during regular class time. Your child should expect to spend a total of 4.5 hours conducting study-specific activities in class between September and December of 2013.

The writing assignments, both traditional and experimental, will be given to and completed by all students in the class, regardless of the students’ participation in the research study. These activities are integral to Mrs. Rockne’s course and will be completed by all students, including those who have not signed the Informed Consent form.
assignments will be given in October and December, and will be completed partly in class and partly as homework. Both assignments will occur over a 2-3 week span.

**Data will only be collected from participants who have submitted the signed “Informed Consent” form.** Students who choose not to participate in the study will be working on similar, relevant work that will not be included in the study.

**Will there be any risk or discomfort to my child?**

Your child should not expect any risks, physical, academic, social, psychological, or otherwise. Precautions will be taken to ensure the confidentiality of your child’s personal information, including the use of pseudonyms, numerical student identifiers, anonymous questionnaires, and password-protected document and recording files. Existing research on multigenre projects and electronic portfolios support the academic merit of the experimental assignment; the purpose of this study is simply to assess students’ reactions to and feelings about the assignment. Regardless of participation in the study, and regardless of the students’ responses to the study’s questions, your child’s grade will not be impacted by the research study itself. The writing assignments will be graded according to the rubrics provided, and no study-specific data will be included in that grade.

**Will my child benefit from being in this research?**

There are no direct benefits for participation. However, your child may benefit from participating in this study on a personal level. This study gives students an opportunity to share their feelings on the existing ELA curriculum, reflect on existing practices, and make suggestions for positive changes in the future. They have an opportunity to participate in a new type of writing that engages 21st Century skills and digital literacy in conjunction with creativity and originality.

**Who will see the information about my child?**

Your child’s part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers on this study will see the information about your child. No reports or publications will use information that can identify your child in any way or any individual as being of this project.

Survey responses will be anonymous. Reflection journals will be assigned numbers rather than names so your child will receive credit for having done the classwork, but the actual journal entries will be anonymous. Recorded data will be stored on the researcher’s personal computer, which is password-protected. Students will conduct all recordings through the use of pseudonyms. All recorded data will be destroyed upon publication of the dissertation, and all informed consent forms will be destroyed after three years.

**If I do not wish for my child to participate in this study, what choices do I have?**

All students in the class will be expected to complete both the traditional writing assignment in September/October and the experimental writing assignment in November/December. The students’ grades for each writing assignment will be based solely on the final product as determined by the rubric, not by the research study itself.

Students who choose not to participate in the research study will be expected to complete the
following work in lieu of the study-specific work:

Focus Group Discussions will be conducted in tandem with Small Group Discussions and/or Writing Workshops for non-participants.

Reflection Journals will be written during the regular journal-writing period in class. Study participants will answer study-specific questions, while non-participating students will respond to the journal prompt provided on their class syllabus.

Can I stop my child’s participation in this study?

Yes. Your child’s participation in this research is completely voluntary. Your child does not have to participate if you do not want him/her to, and your child can refuse to answer any question. Even if your child begins the study, he/she may quit at any time. If your child does not participate or decides to quit, he/she will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that he/she would otherwise have as a student of Norton High School.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Mrs. Wendy Rockne at Rockne.w@husky.neu.edu or 508-285-0160 x5204.

You can also contact Dr. Kristal Moore Clemons, the Principal Investigator, at K.Clemons@neu.edu.

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

Will I be paid for my participation?

No, participants receive no financial reward in this study.

Will it cost me anything to participate?

No, participation in this study should not result in any cost to the participant.

Is there anything else I need to know?

Please inform Mrs. Rockne if your child has limited home access to computers, the internet, or other online or digital tools. Your child may still participate in the research study in this case. The teacher will simply make accommodations for your child to use technology more during class time and complete non-technology assignments at home.
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

For the Parent/Guardian:

I agree to have my child take part in this research.

Signed: ______________________________ Date: __________________

Signature of parent/guardian agreeing to take part

________________________________________

Printed name of person above

For the Researcher:

Signed: ______________________________ Date: __________________

Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent

________________________________________

Printed name of person above

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies

Name of Investigator(s): Kristal Moore Clemons, PhD, Principal Investigator; Wendy Malone Rockne, Student Researcher

Title of Project: A Fresh Look at Writing Instruction: Multigenre E-Portfolios in the Secondary ELA Classroom
Appendix B
Research Site Approval Letters

August 17, 2013

Human Subject Research Protection
Northeastern University
960 Renaissance Park
360 Huntington Ave.
Boston, MA 02115-5000

Dear Human Subjects Committee:

Wendy Malone Rockne, a student at Northeastern University and an employee of Norton High School, has provided the school with a thorough outline of her proposed research project, entitled, *Multigenre E-Portfolios in the English Language Arts Classroom*. It is understood that this study will ask eleventh grade students in her classes to complete pre- and post-intervention on-line surveys about their experiences with multigenre e-portfolios. Participants will engage in focus group discussions and reflection journals as part of the study. It is estimated that 25 students will meet the criteria for inclusion.

We further understand that, pending IRB approval, Wendy Malone Rockne will administer the 10-minute surveys, 10-minute reflection journals and 30-minute focus groups to students at a convenient time during the current school year.

Wendy Malone Rockne has further informed us that she will only include participants who assent to the study and whose parents/guardians provide written consent for their child’s participation in the study. Before the study begins, participants’ parents will receive written study details with directions on how they may easily withdraw permission for their child’s participation. Furthermore, students may personally opt out at the time of the survey administration. Whether a student participates or not will have no bearing on that student’s grades.

In conclusion, Wendy Malone Rockne is granted permission, for up to one year, to collect the required data and conduce her study at Norton High School. Wendy Malone Rockne has agreed to inform us of significant alterations to the study, such as changes in the methodology or participant group. Please contact me at (508) 285-0101 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Joseph F. Baeta, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
Norton Public Schools
64 West Main St
Norton, MA 02766
jbaeta@norton.k12.ma.us
August 17, 2013
Dear Human Subjects Committee:

Wendy Malone Rockne, a student at Northeastern University and an employee of Norton High School, has provided the school with a thorough outline of her proposed research project, entitled, *Multigenre E-Portfolios in the English Language Arts Classroom*. It is understood that this study will ask eleventh grade students in her classes to complete pre- and post-intervention on-line surveys about their experiences with multigenre e-portfolios. Participants will engage in focus group discussions and reflection journals as part of the study. It is estimated that 25 students will meet the criteria for inclusion.

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Sincerely,

Megan Lafayette, Principal
Norton High School
66 West Main St
Norton, MA 02766
mlafayette@norton.k12.ma.us
Appendix C
Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Dear Parent,

We are inviting your child to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you in the attached letter. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep. Below, please find a list of questions and answers regarding the research study. Please sign and return the attached Informed Consent form if you would like your child to participate in this research study.

**Why is my child being asked to take part in this research study?**

Your child is being asked to participate in this research study because he/she is enrolled in Mrs. Rockne’s Grade 11 English class. Mrs. Rockne is enrolled in the Doctor of Education program at Northeastern University in Boston, MA, and is conducting this research study as part of her doctoral thesis. The researcher is collecting data from students in an effort to determine best practices in the field of English Language Arts (ELA) instruction, curriculum, and assessment.

**Why is this research study being done?**

The purpose of this research is to determine the effectiveness of a non-traditional writing project known as the “Multi-genre E-Portfolio.” More information about this project is provided in the attached letter from the researcher.

**What will my child be asked to do?**

If you and your child decide your child will take part in this study, we will ask him/her to provide feedback about the writing experience in the following ways:

a) Participate in three 10-minute online surveys about writing and literacy (responses will be anonymous)

b) Participate in three 30-minute focus group discussions about the writing process (pseudonyms will be used, and sessions will be audio recorded)

c) Participate in six 10-minute reflection journals to express personal feelings about traditional writing assignments and the multigenre E-portfolio (responses will be anonymous)

All of the above listed study-specific activities will be done in English class, during regular class
time. Your child should expect to spend a total of 4.5 hours conducting study-specific activities in class between September and December of 2013.

The writing assignments, both traditional and experimental, will be given to and completed by all students in the class, regardless of the students’ participation in the research study. These assignments will be given in October and December, and will be completed partly in class and partly as homework. Both assignments will occur over a 2-3 week span.

Data will only be collected from participants who have submitted the signed “Informed Consent” form. Students who choose not to participate in the study will be working on similar, relevant work that will not be included in the study.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to my child?

Your child should not expect any risks, physical, academic, social, psychological, or otherwise. Precautions will be taken to ensure the confidentiality of your child’s personal information, including the use of pseudonyms, numerical student identifiers, anonymous questionnaires, and password-protected document and recording files. Existing research on multigenre projects and electronic portfolios support the academic merit of the experimental assignment; the purpose of this study is simply to assess students’ reactions to and feelings about the assignment. Regardless of participation in the study, and regardless of the students’ responses to the study’s questions, your child’s grade will not be impacted by the research study itself. The writing assignments will be graded according to the rubrics provided, and no study-specific data will be included in that grade.

Will my child benefit from being in this research?

Although there are no monetary or academic incentives to participate in this study, your child will benefit from participating in this study on a personal level. This study gives students an opportunity to share their feelings on the existing ELA curriculum, reflect on existing practices, and make suggestions for positive changes in the future. They have an opportunity to participate in a new type of writing that engages 21st Century skills and digital literacy in conjunction with creativity and originality.

Who will see the information about my child?

Your child’s part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers on this study will see the information about your child. No reports or publications will use information that can identify your child in any way or any individual as being of this project.

Survey responses will be anonymous. Reflection journals will be assigned numbers rather than names so your child will receive credit for having done the classwork, but the actual journal entries will be anonymous. Recorded data will be stored on the researcher’s personal computer, which is password-protected. Students will conduct all recordings through the use of pseudonyms. All recorded data will be destroyed upon publication of the dissertation, and all informed consent forms will be destroyed after three years.

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All students in the class will be expected to complete both the traditional writing assignment in September/October and the experimental writing assignment in November/December. The students’
grades for each writing assignment will be based solely on the final product as determined by the rubric, not by the research study itself.

Students who choose not to participate in the research study will be expected to complete the following work in lieu of the study-specific work:

- **Focus Group Discussions** will be conducted in tandem with Small Group Discussions and/or Writing Workshops for non-participants.

- **Reflection Journals** will be written during the regular journal-writing period in class. Study participants will answer study-specific questions, while non-participating students will respond to the journal prompt provided on their class syllabus.

**Can I stop my child’s participation in this study?**

Yes. Your child’s participation in this research is completely voluntary. Your child does not have to participate if you do not want him/her to, and your child can refuse to answer any question. Even if your child begins the study, he/she may quit at any time. If your child does not participate or decides to quit, he/she will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that he/she would otherwise have as a student of Norton High School.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Mrs. Wendy Rockne at wmalone@norton.k12.ma.us or 508-285-0160.

You can also contact Dr. Kristal Moore Clemons, the Principal Investigator, at K.Clemons@neu.edu.

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**Will I be paid for my participation?**

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**Will it cost me anything to participate?**

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**Is there anything else I need to know?**

Please inform Mrs. Rockne if your child has limited home access to computers, the internet, or other online or digital tools. Your child may still participate in the research study in this case. The teacher will simply make accommodations for your child to use technology more during class time and complete non-technology assignments at home.
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Student Name: ________________________________

For the Parent/Guardian:

I agree to have my child take part in this research.

Signed: ____________________________________ Date: ________________

Signature of parent/guardian agreeing to take part

____________________________________________
Printed name of person above

For the Researcher:

Signed: ____________________________________ Date: ________________

Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent

____________________________________________
Printed name of person above

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies

Name of Investigator(s): Kristal Moore Clemons, PhD, Principal Investigator; Wendy Malone Rockne, Student Researcher

Title of Project: Multigenre E-Portfolios in the Secondary ELA Classroom
Appendix D
Traditional Writing Assignment and Rubric

Mrs. Malone-Rockne
English III

**Persuasive Research Essay Assignment**

**Due Date:** TBA  
**Grading:** 100 points Test Grade

**Assignment:** You will write a persuasive essay of 5 paragraphs on the topic of your choice. You will need to form an opinion and narrow your focus to a specific element of the topic you choose. Your goal is to persuade the reader to agree with your point of view on a specific issue based on your accurate and appropriate research, knowledge and experience.

**Step 1: Thesis Statement and Graphic Organizer**  
- Create a clear, specific, and provable thesis statement about your topic  
- Complete the Graphic Organizer handout for the supporting ideas of your essay  
- Be sure to address both sides of your issue, convincing your reader that your side is better and explaining why.

**Step 2: Find Support**  
- Using Google Scholar or the NHS Library database, find at least 3 scholarly articles that support your position on this topic and at least 1 scholarly article that supports the opposing argument. Total minimum sources= 4.  
- Use at least 2 quotes per supporting paragraph.  
- Document sources in MLA format, both in-text and on Works Cited page.

**Step 3: Handwritten Draft**  
- Write a full introduction for your essay in the format of your choice, but it must be at least 6 sentences long.  
- Write at least 4 body paragraphs, 1 for each main idea, consisting of at least 8 sentences for each paragraph. Each paragraph must have at least 2 quotes.  
- Write an original, interesting conclusion of at least 6 sentences. This should not simply restate your introduction. It should provide some final insights into your topic.

**Step 4: Typed Final Draft**  
- digital copy submitted to [www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com) by 11:59pm on due date  
- Must be edited, proofread, and formatted appropriately  
- Must include a Works Cited page!
# Persuasive Essay Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL OF ACHIEVEMENT</th>
<th>Deficient</th>
<th>Limited</th>
<th>Acceptable</th>
<th>Exemplary</th>
<th>TOTALS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Presentation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>xxx1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Follows format</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>xxx1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>xxx1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Thesis is clear, specific and provable</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>xxx1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Topic sentences support thesis</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>xxx1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ All information is relevant to your thesis</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>xxx1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cohesion</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>xxx2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Clear and logical organization</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>xxx2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Smooth and accurate transitions between and within paragraphs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>xxx2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Documentation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>xxx2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Documentation of all in-text citations (paraphrases and quotations) in MLA Format</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>xxx2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Works Cited page follows MLA format</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>xxx2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>xxx2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Convincing evidence for thesis and topic sentences</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>xxx2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Credible sources</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>xxx2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Integrates quotes properly and effectively</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>xxx2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ At least 2 citations per body paragraph</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>xxx2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Strong analysis and commentary of quotes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>xxx2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Strong analysis of topic (avoids plot summary)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>xxx2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Editing</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>xxx1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Avoids personal pronouns, slang, and cliché (formal language used throughout)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>xxx1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Uses correct punctuation, spelling, usage, and grammar</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>xxx1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ varies sentence structure; sentences flow smoothly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>xxx1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Name:** ________________________________  **Total:**

__________/100pts
Appendix E
Digital Multigenre Project Research Assignment and Rubric

Mrs. Malone-Rockne
Junior English

Multigenre Research Project Assignment—E-Portfolio

This project will be worth 100 points (test grade).

Objective:
The goal of this assignment is to create a unique, insightful, cohesive and persuasive portfolio about a controversial contemporary issue of your choice. You will be expected to form an opinion, formulate a research question, conduct research to answer the question, and synthesize the research with your own ideas. You will compile your findings into one e-portfolio as a final product, utilizing a variety of genres and sources to persuade your audience.

What is a multigenre essay???
It is a work which incorporates different types of writing (genres) into one paper, ties them together with a common theme and organizes them effectively. “Each piece in the paper utilizes a different genre, reveals one facet of the topic, and makes its own point...The paper is a collage of writing and artistic expression with an overarching theme” (Allen 2).

Types of Genres—original works created by you, the author
Poems—found poems, double voice poems, original poems, etc.
Narratives—short work of fiction told from the perspective of one character
Dialogue—conversation between 2 or more characters
Monologue—speech given from 1 character directly to audience
Journal or diary entries, letters, newspaper articles
Interviews
Advertisements
Song lyrics (may be already published as long as you cite properly)
Graphics—cartoons, drawings, clip art
Video clips
Sound bytes
Note: This is only a partial list! Many other genres are available for you to use!

Assignment:
Create a multigenre research project via an electronic portfolio (Foliospaces.org) about a contemporary controversial issue. Your project should persuade your audience to feel, think, or act a certain way based on the information you provide.

Criteria:
Your essay must include a total of 10 pieces. This must include:
- A cover page
- A Table of Contents
- At least 7 persuasive pieces written by you
- At least 4 outside sources (note that you may work these into your own pieces, just like you would use quotes in an essay) that are valid, reliable, relevant, and convincing
- A Works Cited page in MLA format
- 5 pieces of your choice. All of these pieces must clearly relate to your chosen topic, and demonstrate insight, originality, and organization. You are welcome to create more than 8.
## Multigenre E-Portfolio Rubric—Junior English 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>1 Deficient</th>
<th>2 Limited</th>
<th>3 Acceptable</th>
<th>4 Exemplary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clarity/Coherence of Overall Project</td>
<td>*Pieces seem unrelated and/or disorganized</td>
<td>*Most pieces seem to relate to a common theme</td>
<td>*All pieces are united by a common theme</td>
<td>*All pieces are united by a common theme that is evident to the reader at all times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*Project lacks coherence</td>
<td>*Organization is evident</td>
<td>*Project is organized/arranged in an interesting way that makes sense to the reader</td>
<td>*Project is organized/arranged in an interesting way that makes sense to the reader and ties the entire project together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insight and Originality</td>
<td>*Lacks insight and/or originality</td>
<td>*Occasionally demonstrates insight and originality</td>
<td>*Demonstrates critical thinking, insight and originality</td>
<td>*Consistently demonstrates significant critical thinking, insight and originality throughout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*Does not demonstrate a true understanding of one or more of the works of literature we have read this year</td>
<td>*Shows a basic understanding of the works</td>
<td>*Shows an understanding of the central themes and important messages for each work</td>
<td>*Shows a thorough understanding of the central themes and important messages for each work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection of Pieces</td>
<td>Less than 10 pieces, OR</td>
<td>Genres selected are unoriginal, repetitive, or do not support theme as well as others could have</td>
<td>Genres selected are varied and original and usually support theme</td>
<td>Genres selected are varied and original and clearly support theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did not complete required genres OR</td>
<td>Needs to be proofread more effectively</td>
<td>Mostly edited with minor errors, well-written, formatted coherently</td>
<td>Clearly edited, proofread, well-written, and formatted in a way that makes sense to reader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Genres selected do not work for theme</td>
<td>Formatting is not effective for the nature of the paper</td>
<td>*Includes cover page</td>
<td>*Includes cover page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not proofread, contains significant errors in writing and/or formatting</td>
<td>Missing cover page OR Table of Contents OR Page headings</td>
<td>*Includes table of contents</td>
<td>*Includes table of contents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Missing multiple components such as cover page, table of contents, headings, page numbers, titles</td>
<td></td>
<td>*Pages are numbered and labeled appropriately</td>
<td>*Pages are numbered and labeled appropriately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editing and Formatting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support and Documentation</td>
<td>Some claims are supported with evidence</td>
<td>Most claims are supported by evidence but may lack reliability or relevance</td>
<td>All claims are supported by evidence</td>
<td>All claims are supported with convincing, relevant and reliable evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some sources are cited</td>
<td>Sources are documented in text and on Works Cited page with an attempt at proper MLA format</td>
<td>All quotes and paraphrases are documented appropriately in text and on Works Cited</td>
<td>All quotes and paraphrases from sources are documented according to MLA format in-text and on Works Cited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Works Cited page is evident but may be lacking some sources or proper formatting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Presentation, Effort and Creativity</td>
<td>More time and effort should have been devoted to this project.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More aesthetic creativity required</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visual presentation does not represent theme effectively</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Name: ___________________________________________ Total: __________________________/100
Appendix F
Survey Questions

Survey 1: Traditional Essay Pre-Writing

1. I like English as a course.
   Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly Agree

2. I like to read books for school.
   Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly Agree

3. I like to read books outside of school.
   Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly Agree

4. I like writing short stories or fiction.
   Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly Agree

5. I like to write non-fiction pieces like memoirs, articles, etc.
   Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly Agree

6. I like writing essays and papers for school.
   Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly Agree

7. I consider myself to be a good writer.
   Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly Agree

8. How many hours per week do you spend doing homework, on average?
   A. 0-1 hours
   B. 2-3 hours
   C. 4-5 hours
   D. 6-7 hours
   E. More than 8 hours
9. In general, when I have an English essay to write, I:

A. Turn it in early
B. Turn it in on time
C. Turn it in one day late
D. Turn it in 2 or more days late
E. Don't turn it in

10. In general, when I have an English paper to write, I (check all that apply):

A. Use a graphic organizer or other prewriting activity
B. Use peer editing or ask a parent or teacher to look at my draft
C. Proofread carefully
D. Check the assignment sheet and/or rubric to make sure I meet all the requirements
E. Write multiple drafts and revise them

Survey 2: Traditional Essay Post-Writing

1. The persuasive essay we just finished in English class was:
   a. Very easy
   b. Somewhat easy
   c. Challenging
   d. Very difficult
   e. Did not do it

2. I turned my persuasive essay in:
   a. Early
   b. On time
   c. 1 day late
   d. 2 or more days late
   e. not at all

3. For the persuasive essay, I (check all that apply):
   a. Used a graphic organizer to pre-write
   b. Asked a peer, family member, or teacher to review my essay
   c. Wrote multiple drafts and revised them
   d. Used the assignment sheet and rubric as a guideline
   e. Proofread my essay and/or used Grammar Check and/or Spell Check on my final draft
4. I found the following aspect of the essay to be the most difficult:
   a. Finding a topic
   b. Organization
   c. The introduction
   d. The conclusion
   e. The supporting paragraphs

5. I found the following aspect of the essay to be the easiest:
   a. Finding a topic
   b. Organization
   c. The introduction
   d. The conclusion
   e. The supporting paragraphs

6. I was able to find a topic to write about that I liked, cared about, and was interested in.
   Strongly Disagree       Disagree       Agree       Strongly Agree

7. I enjoyed writing a persuasive essay.
   Strongly Disagree       Disagree       Agree       Strongly Agree

8. I liked writing a persuasive essay more than I like writing essays about books we read in class.
   Strongly Disagree       Disagree       Agree       Strongly Agree

9. This was the first persuasive essay I remember writing for high school.
   True                      False

10. I think I wrote a good essay.
    Strongly Disagree       Disagree       Agree       Strongly Agree

**Survey 3: Multigenre Essay Pre-Writing**

1. How many hours per week do you spend watching television, on average?
   A. 0-1 hour
   B. 2-3 hours
   C. 4-5 hours
   D. 6-7 hours
   E. 8+ hours

2. How many hours, per week, do you spend online (computers, tablets, Smartphones, etc.)?
   A. 0-1 hour
   B. 2-3 hours
   C. 4-5 hours
   D. 6-7 hours
E. 8+ hours

3. I like to read and/or write poetry.
   Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree
   
4. I feel comfortable finding information online.
   Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree
   
5. I use video clips (Youtube, etc.) to find information and/or learn how to do things.
   Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree
   
6. I am proficient in using Microsoft Word or similar program.
   Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree
   
7. I am proficient in using Microsoft PowerPoint or similar program.
   Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree
   
8. I have used Prezi before.
   Yes No
   
9. I have used an online portfolio program such as foliospaces.
   Yes No
   
10. I have or have had a blog.
    Yes No

**Survey 4: Multigenre Essay Post-Writing**

1. The multigenre essay we just finished in English class was:
   a. Very easy
   b. Somewhat easy
   c. Challenging
   d. Very difficult
   e. Did not do it

2. I turned my multigenre essay in:
   a. Early
   b. On time
   c. 1 day late
   d. 2 or more days late
e. not at all

3. For the multigenre essay, I (check all that apply):
   a. Used a graphic organizer to pre-write
   b. Asked a peer, family member, or teacher to review my work
   c. Wrote multiple drafts and revised them
   d. Used the assignment sheet and rubric as a guideline
   e. Proofread my project and/or used Grammar Check and/or Spell Check on my final draft

4. I found the following aspect of the essay to be the most difficult:
   a. Finding a topic
   b. Organizing and/or formatting my pieces
   c. Finding sources to use
   d. Writing the pieces
   e. Citing the sources

5. I found the following aspect of the essay to be the easiest:
   a. Finding a topic
   b. Organizing and/or formatting my pieces
   c. Finding sources to use
   d. Writing the pieces
   e. Citing the sources

6. I was able to find a topic to write about that I liked, cared about, and was interested in.
   Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

7. I enjoyed working on this project.
   Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

8. I liked writing a multigenre project more than I like writing essays about books we read in class.
   Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

9. I liked writing the multigenre project more than I liked writing the persuasive essay.
   True False

10. I am proud of my project.
    Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree
Appendix G
Focus Group Discussion Questions

For these questions, students will sit in groups of 3-5 participants to discuss their responses. The discussions will be managed by a group leader who will read the questions to the group, and the conversations will be recorded.

Focus Group Discussion #1—Traditional Essay Pre-Writing

Q1: What kinds of essays are you used to writing for English class? Describe them.

Q2: Why do you think you are asked to write these essays? Be truthful!

Q3: What do you like about writing? Why?

Q4: What do you dislike about writing? Why?

Q5: What about English class in general do you like the most? Why?

Q6: What about English class in general do you like the least? Why?

Focus Group Discussion #2—Traditional Essay Post-Writing

Q1: What, if anything, did you learn while writing this essay?

Q2: What prior knowledge were you able to draw upon to write this essay?

Q3: Do you think this essay was more meaningful or less meaningful than the literature-based essays you usually write in English class? Explain your answer.

Q4: Do you think the skills you demonstrated in writing this essay can be transferred to other classes in high school? Why or why not?

Q5: Which of the skills you demonstrated in writing this essay can be used in college? Explain your response.

Q6: Which of the skills you demonstrated in writing this essay can be used in the workforce or real life? Explain your response.

Q7: Did you find useful resources to support your claims? What was your strategy to find the resources? How did you use your sources?

Q8: Do you think you needed to find research to support your own ideas? Why or why not? What purpose did the research serve in your essay?
Focus Group Discussion #3—Multigenre Essay Pre-Writing

Q1: How do you feel about using technology like PowerPoint, Prezi, or foliospaces in an English project? Support your answer.

Q2: Do you think this project will be easier or more difficult than the persuasive essay we did? Why do you think so?


Q4: Do you think you will like doing this more or less than a regular essay? Why?

Q5: What questions do you have about this project before you get started?

Focus Group Discussion #4—Multigenre Essay Post-Writing

Q1: What, if anything, did you learn while writing this essay?

Q2: What prior knowledge were you able to draw upon to write this essay?

Q3: Do you think this essay was more meaningful or less meaningful than the literature-based essays you usually write in English class? What about the persuasive essay you wrote for this class? Explain your answer.

Q4: Do you think the skills you demonstrated in writing this essay can be transferred to other classes in high school? Why or why not?

Q5: Which of the skills you demonstrated in writing this essay can be used in college? Explain your response.

Q6: Which of the skills you demonstrated in writing this essay can be used in the workforce or real life? Explain your response.

Q7: Did you find useful resources to support your claims? What was your strategy to find the resources? How did you use your sources?

Q8: Would you want to do another project like this one? Why or why not?

Q9: Was this project easier, more difficult, or about the same as the persuasive essay? Explain.

Q10: What did you like most and least about this project?
Appendix H
Reflection Journal Questions

Traditional Essay Pre-Writing Prompt:
Reflect on your overall writing experience. What are your strengths as a writer? What are your weaknesses?

Traditional Essay Process Prompts:
Prompt 1: Why did you choose the topic you wrote about? Do you like the topic you chose? What is the most valuable thing you are learning during the writing process?
Prompt 2: What aspect of this assignment are you struggling with and why? What part are you comfortable with and why?
Prompt 3: What are you enjoying about writing the essay? What do you dislike about writing the essay?
Prompt 4: Do you think this essay assignment is meaningful to your life outside of this class? Why or why not?
Prompt 5: What tools could you have at this point that would make your writing process easier or more meaningful? How would that work? What can you do to make sure you do well on this assignment?

Traditional Essay Post-Writing Prompt:
A) Were you satisfied with the overall product you submitted? Why or why not?
B) What suggestions do you have for the researcher in terms of how this assignment can be more effective in the future? Think about the assignment sheet, the rubric, the process, the format, etc.
C) Did you like writing the persuasive essay? Why or why not?

Multigenre Project Pre-Writing Prompt:
Do you think this project will be easier or more difficult than the persuasive essay? Why? What do you think you will do well with on this assignment, and what will you struggle with?

Multigenre Project Process Prompts:
Prompt 1: Why did you choose the topic you wrote about? What is the most valuable thing you are learning during the writing process?
Prompt 2: What aspect of this assignment are you struggling with and why? What part are you comfortable with and why?
Prompt 3: What are you enjoying about writing the essay? What do you dislike about writing the essay?
Prompt 4: Do you think this essay assignment is meaningful to your life outside of this class? Why or why not?
Prompt 5: What tools could you have at this point that would make your writing process easier or more meaningful? How would that work? What can you do to make sure you do well on this assignment?

Multigenre Project Post-Writing Prompt:
A) Were you satisfied with the overall product you submitted? Why or why not?
B) What suggestions do you have for the researcher in terms of how this assignment can be more effective in the future? Think about the assignment sheet, the rubric, the process, the format, etc.
C) Did you like writing the multigenre project? Why or why not?
Appendix I

Student Work Exemplars Group A

Table of Contents
1. Collage: Against Junk Food
2. And the ban begins (outside? Source)
3. Supporters or banning junk food
4. How to stop? How you buy
5. Ban junk food
6. The benefit of junk food
7. Would the amount change?
8. What is the point?
9. Keep the junk
10. Decisions, decisions
11. Works cited

And it begins

- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=igixoCXTwA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=igixoCXTwA) This video shows what parents, students, and the school think of the change and the benefit of worrying away from junk food.
- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bOUI5Fl_Meq](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bOUI5Fl_Meq) This shows how much the parents, kids, and the schools job to regulate the food hold in schools and the nutritional value of the snacks offered. While for the other hand, the school feels the parent should know what their kids are spending money on.

---
Supporters of the ban

- “Parents and schools work hard to give our youngsters the opportunity to grow up healthy and strong, and providing healthy options throughout school cafeterias, vending machines, and snack bars will support their great efforts.”
  
  - Michelle Campana

- “According to an online poll at About.com, more than 40% of American parents state that their children do not eat breakfast in a regular basis.”
  
  - Jean Ford

How often do you buy?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Soda</th>
<th>Candy</th>
<th>Chips or other snacks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Once a day or more often</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few times a week</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few times a month</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three statistics show how often students aged 13-17 buy any type of junk at school such as chips, soda and candy in 2014. The stats show that the most students buy these products a few times a week.

Ban junk food

YES

America is facing a crisis because of our eating habits. Nine million adults (by percent of the population) are obese. Nearly 60% of people die each year from obesity-related diseases such as heart disease or cancer. Poor eating habits developed at an early age lead to a lifetime of ill health consequences. School is where children spend most of their time, and it is where we can help them develop healthy habits. That is why New Jersey is the first state to adopt a comprehensive school nutrition policy that bans candy, soda, and other junk food.

If you go to school in New Jersey, your vending machines and school stores, along with the la carte line in your cafeteria, will no longer be able to sell something that is high in fat and loaded with sugar. There will be limits as to how much will be allowed and students will consume no more than eight grams of total fat and no more than two grams of saturated fat.

Soda and junk food will be replaced with more nutritious alternatives. You will still have choices, but instead of Candy or chips, you may have to decide between as apples or carrot sticks.

It has always been the role of government to help solve problems, including lifestyle and unhealthy habits. Obesity is a health epidemic across our country, and we have a responsibility as a government and a society to do all we can to promote good nutrition and healthy eating so we can reverse this alarming trend.

New Jersey is proud to be the first in the nation to adopt a statewide junk food ban, and we hope other states follow our lead.

- Richard J. Codey
  
  Acting Governor of New Jersey (has junk food in schools)

The benefits count

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gr2R8w4XgQ

This video explains why junk food has stayed in schools as long as it has. He explains both sides while backing up more how its beneficial to the school to keep it in the system.
**Would the amount change?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This graph is used to measure whether schools should ban junk food.

*We doctors constantly lament how difficult it is to get our patients to change their behavior.*

- Danielle Ofili

**What’s the point?**

“If schools serve healthy lunches, that does not necessarily mean that kids will eat them. Some kids bring their own junk food with them from home.”

John Dively, Executive Director

By eliminating the opportunity to make good or bad choices, critics argue, students are not learning to eat healthy food they are simply being temporarily kept from unhealthy food.

**Keep the junk**

**Decisions, decisions**

- Ban Junk Food
  - Teach healthy habits
  - Eliminate health issues for future
- Keep Junk Food
  - Freedom of choice
  - Money for school for manufactures

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CVoqot9OEF

This video shows both sides of the argument explaining how the kids should have options but they shouldn’t be junk. Also shows how the parents and board members feel on the topic. On the other hand it explains how getting rid of the junk could harm the school profits. Both sides have its own pros and cons.

This contradicting topic has been talked about for quiet some time since both sides can be defended. The schools pick what they believe will be most beneficial and either way there will be an unhappy party.

**Works cited**

- [Title](https://example.com)
- [Another Title](https://example.com)
- [Some More Titles](https://example.com)
- [List of other articles](https://example.com)
- [List of books](https://example.com)
- [List of websites](https://example.com)
Same%Sex'Marriage'Should'be'Legal!
KRISTA (Group A)
Project
December 19, 2013

Table of Contents
- Introduction
- Public Service announcements
- Support is changing
- Songs about same-sex marriage
- World wide gay rights
- Progression of same-sex marriage
- Gay or lesbian famous people
- Same-sex couples with children
- Same-sex parenting is beneficial
0. For same-sex marriage vs. against same-sex marriage
1. Why being against same-sex marriage is wrong

Introduction
Same-sex marriage has been a controversial topic for many years but it’s time for same-sex couples to be given their rightful rights.

“The 14th Amendment of the US constitution clearly affords all US citizens equal protection under the law, and the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) unfairly denies gay and lesbian couples equal protection” (Morinnett. The DOMA makes it impossible for gays and lesbians to have the same rights as heterosexual couples. “Research suggests that gays and lesbians are more likely than heterosexuals to adopt older, special-needs and minority children” (Pappas. Same-sex families adopt the kids that are most likely not going to get adopted at all or adopted by heterosexual couples. “Having a shoulder to lean on during difficult times, a partner contributing income and effort to sustaining the household, legal protections of your relationship, and a person to help multiply the joys of life has many health benefits” (Mustanski). With same-sex marriage fully legal in every state, same-sex couples will be able to help each other out emotionally, financially, and health wise to their full potential.

Public Service Announcements
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TVscCQ8mMkA Hilary Duff talks about that people have to think before they speak because they can hurt some without even knowing.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4iRQsVjIA Wanda Sykes calls out boys for calling something gay.
Support is Growing

“Wanda Sykes put it best: ‘It’s real simple. If you do believe in same-sex marriage, don’t marry someone of the same sex.’” (Mustakim) You can believe what you want to but you don’t have to do what you believe. Support for same-sex marriage has been growing and will continue to grow.

Songs About Same-sex Marriage


Top 5 songs about gay marriage.

MARRIAGE by ARRO VERSE
EVERYBODY WANTS TO BE A BOY by TOWN AND COUNTRY
NOTHIN’ BUT LOVE by BRENDAN JAMES
SAME LOVE by MACKLEMORE AND RYAN LEWIS
SHADES OF PURPLE by BYE JUNE

World Wide Gay Rights

Progression of Same-sex Marriage

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/09/gay-marriage-usa-progress_n_3248415.html#slide=2404853

Map of the USA, which shows the progress of states allowing or banning same-sex marriage. (Second map)
Same-sex couples% make great parents. They provide these children with a loving environment and a great home to grow up in. They are no different when straight parents.

Same-sex parenting is beneficial.
Against Same-sex Marriage

“Relationships with both sexes early in life make it easier for a child to relate to both sexes later in life” (Hansen). Kids are still exposed to both sexes at a young age even if they have same-sex parents. These kids still have aunts, uncles, grandparents, grandfathers, cousins, and their parent-friends for an opposite sex relationship.

Same-sex marriage would lead to a decline in birth rates, “The likely long-term result would be that fewer such relationships would be formed; fewer such couples would choose to procreate, and fewer babies would be born...” (Sprigg). This is not true at all. There are still plenty of heterosexual couples that can reproduce. Lesbians can still have kids by getting inseminated.

Works Cited


Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide: The Fight For Legalization
ALEXA
GROUP B

What are euthanasia and assisted suicide? An Introduction
- Euthanasia and assisted suicide are often considered synonyms. They essentially accomplish the same end goal, but their means for doing so are different.
- Euthanasia is defined as “the painless killing of a patient suffering from an incurable and painful or in an irreversible coma. The practice is legal in most countries.”
- Assisted suicide is defined as “the suicide of a patient suffering from an incurable disease, effected by the taking of lethal drugs provided by a doctor for this purpose.”
- In simpler terms euthanasia is when the doctor physically injects the lethal dose into the patient whereas assisted suicide is when the doctor provides the lethal dose but the patient self-administers it.
Why Would Someone be Against Euthanasia? Arguments against its legalization

- Humans don’t have the right to play God.
- Euthanasia contradicts many worldly religions. They believe that God gives life and therefore only God can determine when life should end. Legalization of euthanasia would refute religion.
- God should be the only one allowed to take lives and “carrying out any of these would be against God’s orders, and would be an attack on the sovereignty of God.” (bbc.co.uk)
- Euthanasia is a cry for help. People who seek euthanasia as the solution may be trying to resolve an issue that could be resolved in other, less permanent ways.
- Euthanasia is murder; there’s no way around it.
- Legalizing euthanasia will lead to a slippery slope in which patients would be killed against their will and unnecessarily. Because care for elderly is growing increasingly expensive, people may be pushed into a choice they're not comfortable with.
- Euthanasia is completely immoral.
- All lives are priceless, regardless of quality. Euthanasia places a value on life by determining that one is more worthy of living than another.
- Euthanasia is unnatural and therefore useless.
- Because euthanasia ends life before nature would, it is not a form of medicine whose purpose is to heal. By giving physicians the power to kill patients, they are getting away with murder, not helping anyone.
Arguments For Euthanasia

- We all have the right to live the way we want. We should all have the right to die the way we want.
- Euthanasia has been practiced on animals for thousands of years and is commonly viewed as a humane and caring practice for those in intense suffering.
- A loss of control over one’s body is essentially the end of their life.
- If someone has no control over what happens to them, like an illness taking over, they’re not living their life anymore; they’re living a life that has been forced in front of them.
- A loss of control causes a loss of dignity. Euthanasia provides suffering individuals with a way to control the most important part of life—death—and allows them to die happily and with dignity, the most important things at the time.

Arguments For Euthanasia

- Medical “treatments” that simply prolong the suffering do more harm than good.
- Extraordinary medical care for the terminally ill or those suffering from an inescapable disease cause the patient physical and mental distress.
- “Extraordinary treatment is any medical treatment that is a serious burden on the patient either physically, psychologically, emotionally, or even financially.” [McHannan]
- When a patient’s entire state of being is dependent on a machine or medical aid, their life is no longer natural.
- Excessive procedure and medication are harmful and extremely taxing on a fragile human body and mind.

Arguments in Favor of Euthanasia

- Excessive medical treatments can amount to hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt.
- As a terminally ill patient under treatment that won’t cure the problem, but simply prolong death, euthanasia would be a source of relief for the individual and their family.
- The immense debt of not-curing medical practices on the patient would be left to the insuring family and behind.
- After a long battle with a terminal disease, a patient’s will to live and mental health become compromised. They are aware that once they lose their hope, the physical death is just a formality.
- Physically, the patient has endured more suffering than seems humanly possible and permanently relief is openly welcomed.

“Many people think that each person has the right to control his or her own body and life and so should be able to determine at what time, in what way and by whose hand he or she will die” (Pro-euthanasia arguments, bbc.co.uk)
Arguments for euthanasia

- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XDOzT3_HfwI
- This short video clip is from a much longer documentary. It does a good job of showing what euthanasia stands for.
- As seen in the documentary clip, euthanasia, as long as its handled properly, can provide relief and peace for those suffering. It is in no way immoral or inhuman.
- Knowing that that loved one died happily and with dignity will help the family with the mourning process.

Who Would be Eligible and How Would it Work?

Those with terminal illnesses, incurable diseases, or in an irreversible coma should be eligible for euthanasia.

For those who are unable to communicate their wishes, such as a patient in an irreversible coma, the immediate family would speak on their behalf unless a living will with such desired stated is present.

For those able to communicate their wishes, only assisted suicide and active euthanasia would be legal.

For patients who are under 18, parents would have the right to choose euthanasia for their children if they meet the eligibility of being euthanized.

Each case would be reviewed by a committee to ensure the individual is eligible and is committed to it, not doing it on a whim or out of depression.

Why the benefits outweigh the concerns:

- As long as the law is carefully drafted, euthanasia would be a completely voluntary practice. It’s completely voluntary; no one would die against their will and no one would die unnecessarily.
- Only the patients suffering know what is best for them. Why should the doctors be the one thing they want most relieved?
- The vast majority of people will not be faced with such a decision but for those who are, euthanasia is a welcome option.
- Not all who are eligible would be forced into euthanasia but for those who meet the requirements and are interested, euthanasia is the solution to years of suffering.

Woks Cited

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Diet’s Affect on Health
LORI
GROUP B
Multi Genre Project

1. Cancer?
2. Heart Disease?
3. Longevity?
4. Happiness?
5. Diabetes?
6. Obesity?
7. Early Death?
### Leading Causes of Death in the US

- Diseases of the Heart: 710,940
- Cancer (Malignant Neoplasms): 553,015
- Medical Care: 225,400
- Stroke (Cerebrovascular Disease): 167,661
- Chronic Lower Respiratory Diseases: 122,099
- Accidents: 97,906
- Diabetes Mellitus: 65,301
- Influenza and Pneumonia: 65,113
- Alzheimer's Disease: 49,558

### Common Health Myths Debunked

- “Synthetic chemicals in the environment and in your food, as problematic as they may be, are not the main cause of cancer.”
- “The genes you inherit from your parents are not the most important factors in determining whether you fall prey to any of the ten leading causes of death.”
- “The hope that genetic research will eventually lead to drugs for disease ignores the most powerful solutions that can be employed today.”
- “ObesityApiControllering your intake of any one nutrient, such as carbohydrates, fat, cholesterol, or omega-3s, will not result in long-term health.”
- “Vitamins and nutrient supplements do not give you long-term protection against disease.”
- “Drugs and surgery don’t cure the diseases that kill most Americans.”
- “Your doctor probably does not know what you need to do to be the healthiest you can be.”

### Some Findings Published in Reputable Scientific Journals

- “Dietary change can enable diabetic patients to go off their medication.”
- “Heart disease can be reversed with diet alone.”
- “Breast cancer is linked to the levels of female hormones in the blood, which are determined by the food we eat.”
- “Consuming dairy foods can increase the risk of prostate cancer.”
- “Antioxidants, found in fruits and vegetables, are linked to better mental performance in old age.”
- “Kidney stones can be prevented by a healthy diet.”
- “Type 1 diabetes, one of the most devastating diseases that can befall a child, is convincingly linked to infant feeding practices” (Campbell 3).

![Graph showing results of experiments](Campbell 57)

This graph illustrates the results of experiments carried out by Table Youngman. This particular experiment was studying the effect of dietary protein on cell development. It shows the dramatic increase in cell development with increases in dietary protein begins at 10%.

*Foil are precursor clusters of cells that grow into tumors. Although most cells do not become full-blown tumor cells, they are predictive of tumor development.*
This graph illustrates the effect that protein intake along with carcinogen dosage has on foci response. The experiment was performed on lab rats, and the carcinogen used was aflatoxin. This graph shows that high exposure to the carcinogen has little affect on foci response when paired with a diet low in protein. On the other hand, low exposure to the carcinogen led to high foci response when paired with a high protein diet.

(Campbell 35)

Clips From Food Inc.

A sad truth about the food industry is this: “from 1995 to 2000, the price of carbonated soft drinks... dropped 23 percent. Fries and sodas... dropped 16 percent... vegans dropped 7 percent. Meanwhile, the real costs of fruits and vegetables rose nearly 40 percent” (Walls). 

http://www.foodinc.com/work/d/D/D/F

This clip describes the struggles of a family who cannot afford to eat well, and it’s effect on the father’s diabetes.

In an article regarding industrialized agriculture, it’s been noted that, “the American farm was transformed from a fairly self-sufficient entity that produced a variety of different foods into a specialized factory that produces one or maybe two ‘products’... reliant on the intensive use of off-farm resources” (Walls).

http://www.foodinc.com/work/d/D/D/F

This clip focuses on Monsanto and how they’ve gone against nature to short our food supply.

Robert “Big Rob” Jones


By Laramie Bridge

This past Sunday, the Jones family suffered a tragic loss. Their beloved Robert passed away suddenly of a heart attack at age 26. His friends often called him Big Rob since he worked out everyday of the week, and it showed. Friends and family say he was very conscientious, that he exercised, ate healthy, and took care of himself. The Jones family described him as a hard worker and a devoted student. Samantha, 10-month-old daughter of Samantha, who is a detective, said, “Booby loved going to the gym and working out, and I often worried about his health. Ever since he started working out in college, I began experiencing a lot of protein. I often warned him of the risks too much protein could cause, but he would argue that it was healthy. He would have changed his habits and still be here today.”

“Rob” (I just want my best friend back.” A funeral for Robert will be held on December 21st at 3 pm. The Jones family would like to thank the community for their support during this tough time; Robert will be greatly missed.

[“Obituary”]

Court Case:

John Smith vs. Got Milk?

John Smith read the Got Milk? Campaign for endorsement and misleading of public. The defense plead not guilty. Upon further trial, Got Milk? Defense attorney, George Stephenson, claimed that nothing about the Got Milk? Campaign is misleading. In fact, the campaign shines a light on all the benefits milk has to offer, such as calcium to support healthy bones. Milk helps kids grow big and strong, and its protein makes a great post-work out drink for athletes. Stephenson also makes the argument that the milk is healthy, in fact, humans are the only species to drink another species’ milk. Cow’s milk is full of nutrients meant to help calves quickly grow big and strong, not humans. Smith argues that humans weren’t designed to drink cow’s milk; in fact, humans are the only species to drink another species’ milk. Cow’s milk is full of nutrients meant to help calves quickly grow big and strong, not humans. Smith also argues that the main protein in milk, casein, is the protein most responsible for cancer development in humans (Campbell). The judge declined that while milk is detrimental to human health, it would be nearly impossible to ban it from the nation. He believes it is up to the consumer to decide the fate of dairy products and take the fate of their health into their own hands.
"Milk products were an important part of my daily diet. I often used to have stomach upset and would catch cold frequently too. A friend suggested that stopping dairy products will help. And so I did." (Volschtal)

"Every time you eat or drink, you are either feeding disease or fighting it." – Heather Morgan

"When fact is wrong medicine is of no use, When diet is correct medicine is of no need." – Ayurveda Proverb

Works Cited


