Rewriting the Formula: Exploring Student Engagement and Meta-Awareness in the "New Literacies Narrative"

By

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in English and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Date Defended: 6 December 2016

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Literacies Narrative"

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Date approved: 6 December 2016

Abstract

This study examines students' engagement and meta-awareness of literacy in a modified literacy narrative assignment, the New Literacies Narrative. The traditional literacy narrative (a short autobiographical essay describing the author's development in reading and writing) is a staple of composition classes but has been critiqued for its tendency to produce formulaic writing and its lack of applicability to other writing contexts. The New Literacies Narrative responds to these critiques by broadening the definition of *literacy* to include knowledge of a community's traditions, values, and behavioral norms (drawing on Anne Ruggles Gere, James Paul Gee, and others). Students are allowed to write about their development in reading and writing or in an alternative literacy such as gaming, Greek life, or athletic team membership. This encourages students to question the traditional definition of *literacy* as the decontextualized skills of reading and writing and to develop a more meta-aware understanding of the cultural and contextual influences of literacy development. The freedom afforded by the New Literacies Narrative can also foster student engagement, as students (especially those who struggle with print-based literacy) can center their narrative on a literacy about which they feel confident.

The study covered eleven sections of English 101 (Introduction to Composition) over the course of a semester. Using both textual analysis and computer-assisted linguistic analysis of 111 student essays and 87 written reflections, as well as insights gained through classroom observations and participant interviews, this study demonstrates that the New Literacies Narrative unit led most students to demonstrate a critical meta-awareness of the contextual and cultural influences on literacy. Students also acknowledged the existence of multiple literacies in their written work, interviews, and classroom exchanges. Finally, most students also displayed

evidence of their cognitive (intellectual) and affective (emotional) engagement with the

assignment and course material.

Acknowledgments

This project would not have been possible without the support and influence of many people. First, I would like to thank my wonderful dissertation committee for their feedback, mentorship, and generosity throughout this process: Mary Jo Reiff, whose expert advice and reassurance have shaped this project, my teaching, and my intellectual values ever since I made an off-handed comment about literacy narratives in her Writing Knowledge Transfer seminar years ago; Peter Grund, whose guidance, calming presence, and attention to detail have been invaluable in this project and throughout my graduate career; Amy Devitt, who always pushes me to clarify my thinking and question my own assumptions; Sonya Lancaster, whose expertise in assessment has inspired both this project and my career trajectory; and Heidi Hallman, who has helped me approach this project and my teaching from a different disciplinary perspective. I'd also like to thank Frank Farmer for his advice and encouragement on an earlier version of this project.

Thank you to the English department at the University of Kansas for their support (intellectual, financial, and otherwise) during my time in the doctoral program. I've been incredibly lucky to spend the last 4.5 years among such brilliant and generous colleagues. Special thanks to Rebekah Taussig, Caroline Porter, Jennifer Pacioianu, Shayn Guillemette, Charlesia McKinney, Chelsea Murdock, Kate Nygren, Hannah Scupham, Meredith Wiggins, Casey Keel, Julie Perino, Charlene Summers, Jane Davidson, and Aaron Long for being my support system during my time in Lawrence. Thank you to Paul Schneider and Ray Slavens for inspiring me to pursue this field. I would also like to thank the English department at the University of Nebraska-Kearney for their faith in me and in this project.

Thanks to the 5 instructors (Moira, Livi, Sasha, Janet, and Erin) who participated in my study and whose fresh perspectives never failed to inspire me. Thank you also to the 111 students who allowed their work to be used in my study and the 4 students who participated in the pilot study. Special thanks to Gabriela, Leighton, Roger, Alison, and Stacey for the additional insights they provided.

Last but certainly not least, I would like to thank my family for always being my loudest cheerleaders and my most constant support system. I love you and I would not be where I am today without you.

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Chapter 1: Reframing the Literacy Narrative

…literacy means joining a specific community through understanding the issues it considers important and developing the capacity to participate in conversations about those issues.

--Anne Ruggles Gere (*Writing Groups* 120)

Scholars have identified one common feature of student literacy narratives: dominant, archetypal stories. These common stories follow conventional patterns of narration and correspond to prevailing cultural representations of literacy perpetuated through literature, film, television, and the news media. They also help organize and configure reality, thus shaping our understandings of ourselves.

--Kara Poe Alexander (609)

It was the first time I actually had to write about something relevant for me. Like, a language that I had known. And so I really had to think about what it is in my life that I actually could talk about. . . . It was pretty new to me to write about something like that. That I was the expert on.

--Gabriela,[1] English 101 student

Introduction

Is the literacy narrative "dead"? This was the subject of a 2013 debate on the WPA listserv, inspired by a book representative's comment that "no one is really doing literacy narratives anymore" (Bryant). Literacy narratives, often defined as short autobiographical

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[1] All study participants have given written consent for their work to be used. They are referred to by pseudonyms.

literary essays detailing the author's literacy development,[2] have become a staple of first-year composition. Versions of the literacy narrative can be found in many introductory composition textbooks, and perspectives on teaching the literacy narrative abound in composition journals. However, the assignment's perceived lack of applicability to other, more analytical forms of college writing has recently led some writing instructors to question its place in introductory composition. The WPA-L thread, which garnered 48 replies and inspired at least 2 side conversations, reflects some unease with a genre that some consider to be outdated.

Indeed, in a pedagogical climate that has embraced digital writing, multimodal and performative composition, and transfer studies, the traditional literacy narrative can seem like a relic of a bygone era. Anne Beaufort, who in 2007 proposed a literacy narrative as the first assignment in a transfer-focused introductory composition sequence (*College Writing and Beyond* 187-194), later eliminated the literacy narrative from her curriculum, stating that "In hindsight, I see that the major writing projects proposed in Appendix A are not the best for helping students gain analytic skills and rhetorical skills in typical academic genres" ("Five Years Later" 3). Anne-Marie Hall and Christopher Minnix similarly note that the literacy narrative is often devalued institutionally "when it is utilized in classrooms that emphasize authorized and powerful genres of analysis and argumentation" (58). The lack of transferability to other (academic and non-academic) writing contexts is one of the primary reasons the usefulness of the traditional literacy narrative is under debate. Indeed, participants in the WPA-L conversation agree that the literacy narrative is in need of a significant overhaul if it is to continue to be relevant to students.

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[2] Janet Carey Eldred and Peter Mortensen define literacy narratives as "stories . . . that foreground issues of language acquisition and literacy" (513). Though they include fictional texts such as George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* in this category, literacy narratives are typically autobiographical. Popular examples include Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger of Memory* and Gloria Anzaldúa's "How to Tame a Wild Tongue."

Several alternative literacy narratives have been proposed. Participants in the WPA-L conversation suggest several revisions to the "literacy narrative" label[3] and mode of composition.[4] Others suggest incorporating technologies such as Google Maps (Pennell) or the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives (Comer and Harker). While instructors' sustained investment in and revisions to the literacy narrative testify to its continued importance in composition, most versions discussed in the WPA-L thread focus their assignment redesign on the "narrative" aspect of the literacy narrative. These assignments still ask students to describe their development in a particular (instructor-selected) type of literacy, and alphabetic literacy dominates even when the narrative itself does not take print form. What happens, then, when we focus our attention on rethinking the "literacy" half of the literacy narrative? Here, I propose and test a redesigned literacy narrative assignment that does just that. My "New Literacies Narrative," which I designed for introductory composition, broadens the definition of *literacy* and gives the genre a much-needed update while preserving the pedagogical value of the original assignment.

The literacy narrative as traditionally conceptualized does serve important pedagogical functions. Beaufort notes that it can be a way to familiarize students with the genre of the literary essay while introducing them to college writing and "meta-cognition of writing processes, discourse community theory, and genre theory" (*College Writing and Beyond* 187). This assignment can also be used as a way to prompt students to understand "the possible connections between [their] lived literacy learning experiences" and their experiences in the university (Cheng 292). Responding to the above-referenced discussion on the WPA listserv, Gerald Nelms

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[3] Suggestions include calling it a "reflective essay" or "autoethnography."
[4] Several instructors suggest narrowing the subject matter, asking students to incorporate research, or changing the genre of the final product.

echoes the above points and adds that "the literacy narrative can be used as a 'scaffolding' device" to other forms of college writing. Indeed, if most of the participants in the listserv are any indication, the literacy narrative is still often used in composition classrooms, and building metacognition or meta-awareness of one's own writing and literacy practices[5] is often listed as one of the primary reasons for assigning it.

Common to most variations of the literacy narrative assignment is the fact that they ask students to critically engage with their literacy history in some way, thus building an understanding of literacy's relationship to issues of culture, class, and access. For instance, in J. Blake Scott's account of his own experience teaching literacy narratives, he is careful to define *literacy* as "social meaning-making through language," noting that "this simple but flexible definition assumes that literacy is context dependent as well as socially constructed and enacted" (109). In their *Writing about Writing* reader, Elizabeth Wardle and Doug Downs provide a set of questions to guide students' responses to their literacy narrative assignment. While some of these questions ask the writer to look inward ("How did you learn to write and/or read?"), others do ask students to engage with the people and contexts that have shaped their literacy development ("What are some institutions and experiences in your life that have acted as literacy sponsors?") (206).

Beaufort's "literacy autobiography" assignment asks students to make similar outward connections by "analyz[ing] their own literacy practices using discourse community and genre theories" (*College Writing and Beyond* 187). She provides an example of an in-class activity that instructors can use to prompt students to examine the conventions, genres, and literacies used by

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[5] When discussed in the context of first-year composition, this typically refers to behaviors related to reading, writing, and language use. However, the definition of "literacy practices" depends, of course, on how one defines *literacy*. Alternative definitions are discussed below.

the discourse communities to which they belong. Another activity asks students to determine and analyze the genre features of an autobiographical essay after reading several examples. Ideally, these activities would prepare students to produce successful essays that fit the genre of the literacy autobiography while incorporating original insights into the social contexts of their literate practices and their relationships to various discourse communities (188-191).

These insights into the social contexts of literacy can include awareness of the relationship between language and literacy acquisition, ethnicity, and identity. Writers from cultural, ethnic, or linguistic minority groups can use literacy narratives to articulate their often complex positions in relation to American education and culture. Mark Lyons writes about the potential transformative powers storytelling holds for immigrant populations: "Telling our stories is a process towards achieving literacy. We learn to articulate what is important in our lives, what our dreams are, the barriers we confront as immigrants. . . We define ourselves and anchor our identity by our stories" (78). Similarly, Morris Young argues that literacy narratives can provide a space for "racialized subjects" to "[resist] appropriation by a dominant American culture that imagines a unifying narrative of citizenship and culture" (35). Mary Soliday encourages students who come from stigmatized language backgrounds to use the literacy narrative as an opportunity to "explore the profound cultural force language exerts in their everyday lives" and "achieve narrative agency by discovering that their experience is, in fact, interpretable" (511-512). Clearly, the literacy narrative is still a powerful genre that has the potential to engage students despite its reputation as being outdated or "dead."

Yet, the genre's traditional focus on reading, writing, and language acquisition can potentially alienate students who do not value their experiences with traditional literacy, and this lack of engagement can lead students to produce formulaic narratives based on their

interpretation of the teacher's expectations. Recent work in the field of literacy studies has broadened the definition of *literacy* to more fully account for the social contexts of literate practices and has the potential to re-establish the literacy narrative as an important genre for first-year writing. Composition instructors need to rethink the literacy narrative in light of these developments in order to maintain the benefits of the assignment while addressing the problems associated with the genre. Taking a broader view of literacy, a view that incorporates New Literacies and multiliteracies,[6] provides opportunities for students to interpret the literacy narrative genre in ways that are meaningful to them, gaining the writing knowledge provided in the traditional literacy narrative while maintaining stronger engagement and building a critical meta-awareness of literacy. Expanding the range of possible topics for literacy narratives may also help students break free from the "dominant, archetypal stories" Alexander identifies in the epigraph of this chapter as the defining feature of literacy narratives.

In order to more fully acknowledge the diversity of practices that are now considered forms of literacy, celebrate the literacies that students bring with them to the classroom, and help students build meta-awareness of the social contexts of literate practices, I developed an alternative literacy narrative assignment that allows students to focus on a literacy that plays an important role in their lives. I wrote this assignment, which I call a "New Literacies Narrative," for introductory composition (see Appendix A). Using Gere's above-referenced definition of *literacy* as the ability to communicate with a community about its important issues, this assignment familiarizes students with the New Literacy Studies and multiliteracies, with an emphasis on framing students' pre-existing knowledge, practices, and discourse community affiliations in terms of literacy.

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[6] Discussed in the following section.

After being pleased with the level of student meta-awareness and engagement during my first semester teaching the New Literacies Narrative, I wanted to study more broadly whether the assignment encouraged meta-awareness and engagement, which were two of the goals of the unit.[7] I developed a classroom-based study (described below) to assess the degree to which the assignment achieves these goals. Through this study, I work to answer two interrelated research questions:

- Does the New Literacies Narrative unit successfully encourage students to develop a critical meta-awareness of literacy?

- Do students demonstrate engagement with the New Literacies Narrative assignment and unit?[8]

In order to understand the redesigned literacy narrative assignment, however, we must first understand how *literacy* itself has been redefined and how this redefinition frames the New Literacies Narrative. In the next section, I describe the move from traditional definitions of *literacy* to New Literacies/multiliteracies. The following section more fully discusses the traditional literacy narrative assignment's effects on student meta-awareness and engagement before outlining the move from the traditional literacy narrative to the New Literacies Narrative. I conclude with a brief description of my pilot study of the New Literacies Narrative's effects on student engagement and meta-awareness of literacy and how that informs this project.

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[7] I encouraged meta-awareness and engagement in my English 101 curriculum in order to increase the likelihood that students would develop transferable writing skills. The link between meta-awareness, engagement, and transfer is discussed later in this chapter and in Chapter Four.

[8] My research questions and methodology are described more fully in the following chapter.

What is Literacy?

Literacy narrative assignments that instruct students to simply tell the story of their

reading and writing development limit them to a definition of *literacy* that has come under

scrutiny. At their worst, student literacy narratives can reflect an autonomous model of literacy,

which emphasizes the technical skills of reading and writing over their linkage to "cultural and

power structures in society and . . . the variety of cultural practices associated with reading and

writing in different contexts" (Street 433-434). Walter J. Ong notes that contrastive judgments

of literacy (such as "people don't read like they used to") assume that the definition and cultural

connotations of *literacy* have remained constant over time. In reality, the ways *literacy* is defined

and discussed are dependent on historical context and the dominant political values of the

culture. Yet, common to most definitions of *literacy* is the fact that they are grounded in an

understanding of the term as the ability to comprehend and produce printed text. Ong, in fact,

argues that literacy (defined as the ability to read and write) is essential for linear thought and

analysis (2). Challenges to this definition emerged as early as 1963, when Jack Goody and Ian

Watt noted that some anthropologists had begun to question the distinction between "literate"

and "non-literate" societies (though they themselves concluded that the division does serve an

important purpose).

However, definitions of *literacy* that focus exclusively on printed text often

disenfranchise marginalized groups. In 1986, Linda Brodkey asserted that all definitions of

literacy are "social tropes" that work to define a "literate self" and an "illiterate other" (47).

These tropes, she explains, are dependent on what skills the society expects its adult citizens to

possess in order to function. These skills and definitions of *literacy* are often class-based. J.

Elspeth Stuckey takes this argument even further, stating that "literacy and class are fused" in

postindustrial American society as reading and writing become increasingly linked to profit (19). Brandt famously describes the relationship between literacy and economics in terms of "literacy sponsorship." She defines literacy sponsors as "any agents . . . who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way." She notes that these sponsors are often guided as much by their own profit motives as they are by altruism (166-167).

The New Literacy Studies movement, which emerged in the 1980s, emphasizes the cultural influences of literacy development and views literacy and orality as a continuum. Brian Street speaks to the value of "ideological" models of literacy in highlighting the fact "that literacy practices are aspects not only of 'culture' but also of power structures" (434). If literacy instruction is to be effective, it must be mindful of these cultural influences and power structures, as well as how they influence writing performance and attitudes towards writing. For instance, Anne Ruggles Gere describes how the literacy practices of self-sponsored writing groups that emerge independently of the school system operate differently than school-sponsored literacy:

> Workshops outside classroom walls frequently . . . succeed with those individuals deemed unsuccessful by their composition instuctors. Few of the participants in the Tenderloin Women's Writing Workshop or the Lansing, Iowa Writers' Workshop had much formal education, and many had negative experiences with schooling. They did not think of themselves as writers because teachers had taught them they could not write. Yet these individuals wrote effectively in workshops, published their writing, and gained personal and community recognition for their work ("Kitchen Tables and Rented Rooms" 78).

These writing workshops provide clear examples of how literacy practices are influenced by cultural context. Gere notes that many of these participants had histories of poverty, addiction and illness (76), factors that often position students in opposition to the academy and institutionalized literacy. However, in a supportive environment that encourages writing, revision, and performance, these authors thrived.

The New London Group[9] proposes the term "multiliteracies" to refer to the new forms of literacy that have emerged in response to globalization and the increasing diversity of those seeking education. These multiliteracies incorporate not only printed text, but "the visual, the audio, the spatial, the behavioral, and so on" (Cazden et al. 64). They distinguish multiliteracies from "mere literacy," their term for literacy that "remains centered on language only, and usually on a singular national form of language at that" (64). James Paul Gee, a member of the New London Group, later provided an alternative definition of *literacy*: ". . . literacy is always plural: *literacies* . . . But I see no gain from the addition of the phrase 'involving print,' other than to assuage the feelings of people committed (as I am not) to reading and writing as decontextualized as isolable skills" (9, emphasis in original). Rather, Gee defines *literacy* as mastery of a community's "Discourses."[10] Gee describes a Discourse as "a sort of 'identity kit' which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular role that others will recognize" (7). Gere's definition of *literacy* as the ability to communicate with a community about its key issues, quoted in the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter and on the New Literacies Narrative assignment prompt

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[9] The New London Group was a group of ten educators from around the world who met in 1994 in New London, New Hampshire to discuss strategies for adapting literacy pedagogy to changing technologies and student values.
[10] When used in this sense, *Discourse* is written with a capital *D*. Gee uses the capital letter to differentiate from *discourse* as used to indicate "connected stretches of language that make sense" (6).

(see Appendix A), similarly emphasizes the social contexts and communicative aspects of literacy.

Partly due to the ways digital technology has expanded our communicative abilities and definitions of "community," multiliteracies and New Literacies are now often associated with digital spaces. In 1996, members of the New London Group argued:

> . . . literacy pedagogy now must account for the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies. This includes understanding and competent control of representational forms that are becoming increasingly significant in the overall communications environment, such as visual images and their relationship to the written word . . . (Cazden et al. 61).

This association between multiliteracies and digital technology continues to be a strong one. In her 2004 CCCC's Chair's address, Kathleen Blake Yancey expresses fear that English departments will become "anachronistic" if they fail to acknowledge the digital literacies students practice outside the classroom ("Made Not Only in Words" 302). Cynthia L. Selfe and Gail E. Hawisher provide narratives of seventeen individuals' digital literacy acquisition in *Literate Lives in the Information Age*. A 2012 special issue of *Computers and Composition* was devoted to studies of "new literacy narratives," particularly those influenced by digital technologies (Chandler and Scenters-Zapico). Some literacy narrative assignments have adapted to fit this digital context. The Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives (DALN), curated by the Ohio State University Libraries, hosts thousands of audio, video, visual, and print literacy narratives submitted by users around the world.[11] Many of these narratives are self-sponsored, but several authors indicate that they composed and submitted their digital literacy narratives as

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[11] As of November 7, 2016, there were 6858 narratives uploaded to the Digital Archive ("Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives").

part of a class project, indicating that some classrooms are revising the literacy narrative assignment for digital contexts.

However, it is important to acknowledge that, while digital media is certainly an important component of New Literacy Studies and multiliteracies, it is not the only form of alternative literacy worth investigating. Jody Shipka expresses concern that the "emphasis placed on 'new' (meaning digital) technologies has led to a tendency to equate terms like *multimodal*, *intertextual*, *multimedia*, or still more broadly speaking, *composition* with the production and consumption of computer-based, digitized, screen-mediated texts" (7-8, emphasis in original). Shipka goes on to describe the benefits of assigning multimodal projects that are not technology-driven, providing examples of students who have composed essays on t-shirts and ballet slippers, as well as a student who performed an interpretive dance as part of a course project. Clearly, depending on the context, literacy can include many forms of knowledge and communication, some of which do not involve "language" as we typically think of it.

Gunther Kress points to the importance of "music; and the body and its movements" as important forms of communication and literacy (182). Tony Mirabelli provides a comprehensive account of the literacies involved in food service work, which include the ability to read written texts such as a restaurant menu, but also the skill of "reading" customers' facial expressions and body language cues. Elisabeth Johnson and Lalitha Vasudevan also recognize the crucial role embodiment plays in literacy, asserting that "The body is a text produced by socially circulating norms for gender, race, sexuality, class, age, and ability. Through daily, bodily repetitions ... we reproduce and reinscribe these meanings.... This leads us to conceptualize critical literacy as performed" (35). The five-year Stanford Study of Writing found that student writing, particularly when conducted outside of class, is often linked to performance, as in the case of a student who

performs his poetry in public readings (Fishman et al.). It is clear, then, that students bring with them a wide variety of literacies that largely go unnoticed in academic spaces. Assignments such as the traditional literacy narrative, though well-intentioned and often beneficial, may contribute to the silencing of these non-academic literacies.

Limitations of the Traditional Literacy Narrative

Traditionally, literacy narratives focus on the most common definition of *literacy*, the one presented first in most dictionaries: "The quality, condition, or state of being literate; the ability to read and write" (*OED*, s.v. *literacy*). For instance, the definition of "literacy narrative" provided in the textbook I use for introductory composition is "a genre of writing that tells about a writer's experience learning to read or write" (Lunsford et al. 708). As previously described, the literacy narrative assignment has pedagogical advantages. However, the traditional literacy narrative can impede critical meta-awareness of literacy by limiting students to a narrow definition of *literacy*, a definition that may not work to engage all students. Despite instructors' best efforts to get students to engage with the social contexts surrounding their literacy development in the literacy narrative, student narratives do not always reflect this engagement and meta-awareness; rather, these narratives can be formulaic and lack insight into the social embeddedness of literacy. The question, then, is how to frame the literacy narrative in a way that retains its benefits while better engaging students and encouraging them to develop a critical meta-awareness of literacy.

Potential for Meta-Awareness of Literacy in the Traditional and New Literacies Narrative

By limiting the definition of *literacy* to the technical skills of reading and writing, some literacy narrative assignments impede students' opportunities to think critically about the idea of literacy, making it difficult for students to socially contextualize their literate practices. Before exploring the limitations of the traditional literacy narrative for creating a critical meta-awareness of literacy's social contexts, though, I will clarify the relationship between the literacy narrative, meta-awareness, and transfer. Wardle points to meta-awareness of writing, language, and discourse communities as one of the most important forms of knowledge students take from first-year composition. She argues that this meta-awareness is essential if students are to be able to transfer what they learn in composition courses to other writing situations (77). Rebecca S. Nowacek disagrees, asserting that while meta-awareness often does play an important role in conscious, mindful knowledge transfer, it is not essential to all transfer (34).

While I agree that not all writing knowledge transfer requires meta-awareness of writing (a student who knows how to construct an MLA paper heading in English 101 can likely transfer that knowledge to English 102 without much critical thought), it is the conscious, mindful transfer—often called "high-road transfer"—that I hope to encourage with the New Literacies Narrative assignment. David N. Perkins and Gavriel Salomon define "high-road transfer" as "deliberate mindful abstraction of skill or knowledge from one context for application in another" ("Teaching for Transfer" 25). While composition scholars primarily engage with meta-awareness of writing strategies and processes, I believe that critical meta-awareness of the contextual nature of literacy has similar benefits as metacognition of one's writing processes and can thus encourage high-road transfer.[12] Situating one's literacy development and practices in

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[12] I define "critical meta-awareness of literacy" as the ability to define literacy as something other than the simple ability to read and write. I elaborate on this definition and what it means in the context of my study in Chapter Two.

terms of a larger discourse community could encourage high-road transfer to assignments and writing situations that require addressing particular discourse communities themselves.

Students demonstrate this meta-awareness in a variety of ways. It is perhaps easiest to see in students' self-reports. Nowacek gives the example of a student she refers to as "Data," named after the *Star Trek* character, who was able to explain his process of transferring knowledge gained in a history course to a literature paper on *Doctor Faustus* (44-45). Though Nowacek focuses on meta-awareness of one's own thinking and writing processes, I believe meta-awareness of literacy can be detected in similar ways. Participants in my study self-report meta-awareness of literacy in their interviews and end-of-unit reflections (see Appendix B for reflection prompt). Because of the personal nature of the literacy narratives, several also self-report their changing understanding of literacy in the narratives themselves.

Other demonstrations of meta-awareness are more implicit. One can observe meta-awareness in the way students take up and repurpose genre knowledge. In their study of first-year writing students at two institutions, Mary Jo Reiff and Anis Bawarshi describe the ways in which their participants relate their developing knowledge of college writing to their previous writing experiences. "Boundary guarders" are "students who [seem] to guard [genre knowledge] more tightly . . . even in the face of new and disparate tasks" (325), whereas "boundary crossers . . . engage in high-road transfer by drawing on fewer whole genres but many strategies" (327). Boundary crossing requires more critical thinking and analysis of the expectations of new writing situations, which deepens learning and leads to knowledge retention and transfer. Nowacek similarly notes that her student participants who understood genres not in terms of formal features, but in terms of rhetorical contexts and goals (a more meta-aware understanding of genre), had an easier time repurposing their genre knowledge in new writing contexts (98).

It is this critical meta-awareness of literacy that seems to be missing from teachers'
descriptions of student literacy narratives; the relationship between literacy and context
developed in student literacy narratives often lacks depth, resulting in formulaic writing.
Alexander, quoted in the epigraph to this chapter, notes that students often draw on dominant
narratives presented in the media when crafting their literacy narratives and that these narratives
oversimplify *literacy* the way textbooks oversimplify historical events (611). She identifies a
"literacy-equals-success master narrative" in student literacy narratives (620). This narrative
assumes that academic literacy is a necessary and sufficient condition for professional and social
success in all circumstances, a version of the "literacy myth" that Harvey J. Graff contends has
been part of the cultural narrative surrounding literacy at least since the 19th century (xvi). Steve
Fox notes a similar trend in student literacy narratives[13] and notes that the "connection between
literacy and success is a convention in American autobiography going back to Benjamin Franklin
. . ." (18). My own attempts at teaching the literacy narrative as outlined by Beaufort (see
Appendix C) have yielded similar results. When responding to student narratives, I identified a
specific pattern common to many students' narratives that I came to call the "literacy narrative
arc": "students provide an anecdote about their early love for reading, . . . describe a high school
teacher who extinguished their natural thirst for literacy by assigning *The Scarlet Letter*, . . .
[and] close with a general statement about the importance of literacy" (Sladek 63). While not
every narrative followed this arc, a surprising number did, right down to the specific mention of
The Scarlet Letter.

This trend toward formulaic writing in student literacy narratives has proven true in other
studies as well. Bronwyn Williams notes that when students tell stories related to their literacy

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[13] Fox refers to it as the "literacy success story" (18).

development, they often cast themselves and others in familiar, archetypal roles such as the "hero" who "[overcomes] all obstacles to succeed in reading and writing," the "rebel" who rejects the literacy of the establishment, or the "victim of bad or insensitive teaching" (Williams 342-344). Alexander, drawing on Williams, identifies six "little narratives" present in student literacy narratives: the previously mentioned hero, rebel, and victim, as well as "child prodigy," "literacy winner," and "outsider" (Alexander 615). While these little narratives tend to be more creative and sometimes even work to challenge the "literacy equals success" master narrative, the vast majority of student texts in her corpus conformed to these narrative patterns. Despite Williams's and Alexander's attempts to prompt students to critically engage with the cultural contexts surrounding their literacy acquisition, students appear to do so using the forms provided by this cultural context.

It has been argued that composition instructors can use the literacy narrative assignment as a way to prompt students to critically interrogate the link between literacy, profit, and oppression. Susan DeRosa describes how she uses literacy narratives to "provide a space for [students] to rewrite versions of their literacy experiences and events—narratives that move beyond myths" that reinforce literacy as a static construct (2). However, even when the assignment prompt calls for students to contextualize their literacy experiences, the narratives produced can reflect an autonomous model of literacy. One can see this in student narratives that reproduce dominant cultural narratives of literacy or those that simply catalog the facts relating to the author's literacy development, such as the age at which they learned to read, the types of writing they enjoy, etc. Though recounting one's own experiences with literacy almost always entails detailing interactions with other people, institutions, and/or some larger context, these interactions are not always interrogated and rarely (at least in my experience) lead to an

examination of "cultural and power structures in society." When I taught the traditional literacy narrative, students almost always failed to (or chose not to) engage with the potential profit motives of their literacy sponsors or consider literacy as anything other than reading and writing, thus failing to achieve a critical meta-awareness of literacy.

The Traditional Literacy Narrative and Student Engagement

The challenge, then, is in getting students to critically engage with the social and cultural influences of their own literacy development—to move from the autonomous model of literacy to something more complex and nuanced. It is difficult for students to achieve this meta-awareness of literacy if they are not engaged in the assignment, as is often the case with the traditional literacy narrative. Before exploring the traditional literacy narrative's limited potential for student engagement, it is necessary to explain the relevance of engagement to student learning. Susan C. Jarratt et al. point out that the writing knowledge students take from their classes is partly dependent on their dispositions toward the course and instructor, and students who view their courses negatively or apathetically are often unmotivated to put in the intellectual work required to reap the full benefits of instruction. Urie Bronfenbrenner and Pamela A. Morris explain that a person's disposition can be either "developmentally generative" (leading to learning and growth) or "developmentally disruptive" (inhibiting knowledge and growth) (810). Students with negative dispositions toward a writing task may therefore be less able (or less willing) to put forth the necessary effort to think critically and complete a writing task successfully.

This is nicely summarized in the "expectancy-value theory of motivation," which states that students' performance and motivation are directly related to the value they place on a task

(Wigfield and Eccles). Similarly, Chris Thaiss and Terry Myers Zawacki assert that "good writing, whether it adheres to established conventions or takes risks with form and structure, grows out of a writer's sense that the work he or she is doing matters . . ." (136). Though they focus specifically on student writing in discipline-specific courses, the same can be said about writing in general education courses. All of these sources point to the importance of students valuing the work they produce, and for students who don't value their experiences with alphabetic literacy, the traditional literacy narrative may inhibit their engagement. My study will explore whether allowing students to choose a form of literacy that they care about helps them value the assignment and their work, thereby increasing engagement and motivation.

Engagement, like meta-awareness, has been shown to lead to a greater likelihood of writing knowledge transfer. In order for high road transfer to occur, students need to "[detect] a potential relationship with prior learning, [elect] to pursue it, and [work] out a fruitful connection" between the current situation and a previous learning experience (Perkins and Salomon, "Knowledge to Go" 248). Conversely, students can also detect a relationship between a lesson or assignment and a possible *future* writing situation, abstracting their current knowledge to possible future contexts. Perkins and Salomon refer to this process as "forward-reaching high road transfer" ("Teaching for Transfer" 26). However, for a connection to occur, students need to be invested in what they are learning. They must *elect* to pursue the opportunities for transfer, and this demands "extended cognitive effort and hence require[s] significant motivational or dispositional drivers" ("Knowledge to Go" 251). Writing in itself takes work, and putting in the "extended cognitive effort" necessary for high road transfer takes even more work. If students do not think this assignment is relevant to their lives, it is perhaps easier to write a generic, formulaic literacy narrative based on what they think the teacher wants.

However, engagement can be difficult to pin down. Michael A. Lawson and Hal A. Lawson delineate three types of student engagement: affective engagement, cognitive engagement, and behavioral engagement. Affective engagement refers to "students' social, emotional, and psychological attachments to school" (435). This includes emotional responses such as enjoyment, anger, or boredom; it also includes feelings of identification and belonging. Cognitive engagement refers to "the ways in which students think deeply about ideas and concepts, how they make meaning of the material presented to them, and how they use self-regulating and metacognitive strategies to master academic content and tasks" (436). Behavioral engagement refers to factors such as absenteeism, amount of time spent on school work, and compliance with school rules (436-437). [14]

Again, the traditional literacy narrative may not be the most effective genre to engage all students; in fact, many students may be ambivalent or even resistant to the genre. When one limits the definition of *literacy* to facility with printed texts, a variety of complex literate practices can remain unseen, ignored, or discounted. Students whose literacy practices have been devalued in their previous schooling may have internalized the belief that they are "illiterate" and may thus be resistant to writing a literacy narrative that forces them to engage with painful experiences (if they feel equipped to write a literacy narrative at all). For instance, working-class students may see their alphabetic literacy as secondary to the cultural and oral literacies that characterized their upbringing. Julie Lindquist, in analyzing the ideological assumptions that undergird writing instructors' attempts to instill academic values of inquiry into our working-class students, writes that "academic discourse is so problematically linked to class identification [which] does, of course, mean that working-class students have more to gain, and more to lose,

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[14] Because I cannot easily speak to the behavioral engagement demonstrated by students enrolled in other instructors' classes, I focus my analysis on affective and cognitive engagement.

in buying stock in the rhetorical capital of an academic institution" (245). Students from working-class backgrounds or other backgrounds that have traditionally been stigmatized by the academy are therefore more likely to experience negative emotions and less likely to fully engage in an assignment that asks them to define *literacy* in the manner of the academy, whereas an assignment that allows students to celebrate the literacies that play significant roles in their lives could potentially create stronger affective engagement.

The literacies involved in seemingly "unskilled" professions often go similarly unnoticed. Mirabelli's previously referenced study of food service workers powerfully contradicts assumptions that restaurant servers are "unskilled," a label advanced by both the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the National Skills Labor Board (Mirabelli 144). In *The Mind at Work*, Mike Rose similarly describes the literacies that go unseen in professions such as hairstyling, carpentry, and plumbing. Reflecting on *The Mind at Work* a decade later, Rose notes: "Collectively, these men and women form a massive web of skill that makes our country function, that maintains and comforts and, at times, rescues us. They are so present, their mental and manual abilities so woven into our daily lives that their skills are taken for granted, and at times slip out of sight" ("Ten Years After" 8). One can see this sentiment in public debates regarding minimum wage in the United States—perspectives that advocate a lower wage for food service workers, manual laborers, and others in "blue collar" professions rest on the assumption that such work does not involve skill or literacy. Students who hold these jobs while they are enrolled in school or whose friends and family perform this kind of work may not know they can draw on these experiences for their literacy narratives. They may not see themselves in discussions of academic literacy and may therefore feel that their experiences are not valued by

the academy, resulting in a lack of affective engagement in the manner described in the previous paragraph.

Rose explores the consequences of students' alternative literacy practices being devalued by the school system in *Lives on the Boundary*. This now-classic text traces how school systems' literacy assessment practices affect "educationally underprepared" students at all levels. He presents the disheartening case of a young student named Harold, whose thick case file demonstrates how a series of teachers "had increasingly misread his tics and twitches as signs of organic damage, how they had gradually despaired of helping him, how he was progressively defined by the school as the outsider his mother felt him—and herself—to be" (120). However, despite Harold's many diagnoses, he did possess significant knowledge (cognitive engagement) about football and outdoor activities such as camping and fishing. Rose establishes a connection to Harold through these literacies, and after a month of working with him, Harold's reading and writing skills improve markedly. The New Literacies Narrative unit and assignment can establish a similar connection to students, addressing the shortcomings of the traditional literacy narrative and giving students space to write about their own areas of (academic or nonacademic) expertise. This assignment acknowledges that these literacies are valuable and worthy of academic discussion.

An exclusive focus on academic literacy can also blind educators to the complex literacies embedded in other communities and networks. Susan L. Lytle describes the diverse literacy abilities of learners in an adult literacy program. Though mainstream education often portrays these adults as the "illiterate" products of failed schooling, Lytle notes that they often engage in collaborative literacy practices involving extensive social networks and complex written tasks (379). Jabari Mahiri and Soraya Sablo explore the non-academic literacy practices

of African American youth, observing that many students who were reluctant to participate in English class were prolific writers of rap verses, poetry, and other forms of writing. Students' out-of-school writing "helped them make sense of both their lives and social worlds, and provided them with a partial refuge from the harsh realities of their everyday experiences" (174). If teachers focus only on academic literacy (as is often the case with the traditional literacy narrative assignment), this sophisticated self-sponsored writing goes unnoticed and the students who produce it may be labelled "illiterate." Shirley Brice Heath famously notes that the alphabetic literacy skills valued by the school system disadvantage the literacies practiced by the community of "Trackton," a predominantly Black working-class neighborhood that values oral language performance. Though more than 30 years have passed since Heath's *Ways with Words*, school systems still overwhelmingly favor print literacy, often to the disadvantage of students.

By telling students that their experiences with printed text are the only experiences worth discussing in their personal essays, we may be imposing an oppressive value system onto their lived experiences, thus negatively affecting engagement. Jeff Smith writes that we as instructors are quick to impose our own values on students, and that we often misinterpret their lack of resistance (as manifested in, say, writing a formulaic literacy narrative based on what they think the teacher wants) as tacit agreement with our ideologies (317). Non-classroom writers compose literacy narratives because reading, writing, and language have been driving forces in their lives, and by assigning this genre to students, we are essentially telling them that reading and writing should be driving forces in their lives, too. Brandt cautions us against this assumption, urging that "as we assist and study individuals in pursuit of literacy, we also recognize how literacy is in pursuit of them. When this process stirs ambivalence, on their part or on ours, we need to be understanding" (183). Rather than force students to conform to our definition of *literacy*, which

can limit engagement and, as a consequence, learning, we should celebrate the literacies they already possess and recognize their sometimes conflicting relationships with these literacies.

The New Literacies Narrative

Embracing a perspective that includes New Literacies and multiliteracies, I argue, allows students to celebrate and demonstrate the literacies they bring with them to the classroom and to use these literacies as a path to academic literacy. There is some evidence that this change is already underway. For instance, in the glossary of *Writing about Writing*, Wardle and Downs point to the changing definition(s) of *literacy*: "*Literacy* denotes fluency in a given practice. In its original use, *literacy* referred to *alphabetic* literacy . . . Over time, however, in academic circles, the meaning of *literacy* and *literate* has broadened to encompass fluency in other areas; most academics therefore now use the term *literacies* (plural) . . ." (798, emphasis in original). In addition to reading-focused literacy narratives and readings about academic literacy practices, their reader includes pieces that critique and broaden the definition of *literacy*, including the previously referenced pieces by Mirabelli and Mahiri and Sablo.

This comprehensive focus on alternative meanings of *literacy* is not standard in first-year writing textbooks, especially those without a specific "writing about writing" focus. Yet, an understanding of New Literacies and multiliteracies benefits students even if they are not enrolled in a class with a specific focus on literacy studies. The New Literacies Narrative that I have constructed recognizes the legitimacy of alternative literacies while allowing students to use them as a bridge to academic literacy. The unit and assignment introduce students to a broader definition of *literacy*, including digital, oral, performative, and embodied literacies. For instance, students are given the option to:

. . . explore an alternative literacy (like Mirabelli). Think about how you learned the 'unwritten rules' of a certain community, subculture, skill, or activity (technology, workplaces, athletics, Greek organizations, religious organizations, special interest clubs, and countless others). What verbal language or written communication is used?[15] If you choose this option, your paper should explain why your topic can be considered a type of literacy and what role this literacy has played in your life (New Literacies Narrative assignment prompt, see Appendix A).

Though students are also given the option to write a more traditional narrative based on reading and writing, the prompt instructs all students to "examine [themselves] as a reader and writer of texts (written or otherwise) in multiple contexts . . . [and] deepen [their] understanding of how [they] have been a member of, or influenced by, various communities and contexts." A successful essay, then, not only describes the author's literacy development in a narratively compelling way—it must also relate this literacy to the larger social context and/or discourse communities in which it developed.

The New Literacies Narrative, Meta-Awareness, and Engagement

Expanding the definition of *literacy* in the literacy narrative may help to remedy the above-mentioned challenges of the traditional literacy narrative, namely its perceived lack of usefulness in promoting critical thinking about literacy and fostering student engagement. Allowing students to frame a skill, practice, or community affiliation they possess in terms of New Literacies forces them to think creatively and critically about the nature of literacy. The fact

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[15] I mention verbal and written language in the assignment prompt to give students an early foothold in New Literacy Studies. We broaden our discussion to include multimodal literacies later in the unit, and they are encouraged to write about literacy in whatever form they choose.

that student literacy narratives do not always meet the goals set forth by instructors may be partially due to the fact that in their primary and secondary education, students are overwhelmingly taught the autonomous model of literacy. They are secure in their knowledge that *literacy* refers to the ability to read and write and that literacy is a uniformly positive, empowering force. In my experience, this belief is often so entrenched that it can be difficult to interrogate, particularly for first-year students. By complicating what *literacy* can refer to and situating it within the context of specific self-selected discourse communities, the New Literacies Narrative can break students out of their comfort zones and inspire more critical, creative thinking.

I found in my summer 2014 pilot study that giving students the option to self-select a literacy to discuss in their narratives seemed to promote engagement and meta-awareness of literacy, particularly in students who had previously been labeled "illiterate" or felt disenfranchised from the academy. In an article for *Writing on the Edge*, I describe two students' experiences with the New Literacies Narrative unit. One student, Brandon, had consistently done poorly in English classes and came to my summer course after an unsuccessful initial attempt at English 101, taught by a different instructor. He was assigned a traditional literacy narrative (based on Beaufort's assignment) during his first attempt at 101. Brandon did not feel a connection to that assignment and chose to write his New Literacies Narrative about his experiences learning to play basketball. Brandon identified three components to being literate in basketball: practicing hard to develop skill, learning the communicative strategies involved with the game (such as hand signals and jargon), and knowing the duties of the other positions (Sladek 69-70). Despite his concerns about his project, Brandon did demonstrate his meta-

awareness of the nuanced meaning of *literacy* both as embodied literacy and literacy as knowledge of the values and communication of a community.

Being able to write about basketball, a topic about which he felt confident, allowed Brandon to engage more deeply with the assignment. He stated in his end-of-unit reflection that he "enjoyed learning what literacy really is" and that he is, in fact, literate (70-71). Other students who completed the assignment that semester also reported that they were engaged with the assignment, which had not been the case when I assigned the traditional literacy narrative two years prior. In encouraging students to self-select their topics, I wanted to send the message that their values and passions have a place in the academic world. For students who typically lack confidence in writing classrooms, it allowed them to convey their expertise in an area that I often lacked knowledge about. This seemed to increase their engagement and therefore their motivation to succeed in the assignment, enabling deeper thinking and meta-awareness of literacy. This led me to develop a more thorough and detailed study of the New Literacies Narrative's effects on student engagement and meta-awareness of literacy, described below.

The Current Study

The present study explores students' understanding of and engagement with multiliteracies and New Literacies in the New Literacies Narrative assignment. This study took place during the fall 2015 semester at a large public university in the Midwest.[16] Through my analysis, I respond to the above-mentioned critiques of the literacy narrative assignment and provide a rationale for why composition instructors should continue to assign the literacy

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[16] The study and all modifications have been approved by the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB ID: STUDY00001052) and the English department's writing program administration.

narrative in the updated form of the New Literacies Narrative. In doing so, I argue that the New Literacies Narrative can achieve the pedagogical goals of the original literacy narrative assignment while inspiring critical meta-awareness of literacy and engaging all students (not only those who are passionate about reading and writing).

Through my analysis of student texts (111 literacy narratives and 87 written reflections), classroom observations, and interviews with students and instructors, I demonstrate the value of the New Literacies Narrative in motivating students' engagement and critical meta-awareness of literacy in ways the traditional literacy narrative generally does not do. Chapter Two further describes the New Literacies Narrative assignment and unit, along with my study methodology and participants. Chapter Three analyzes the results of my study. The final chapter, Chapter Four, summarizes my findings, discusses some implications of my study for both research and pedagogy, and identifies directions for future study.

Chapter 2: Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

As noted in the previous chapter, I began my teaching career by assigning a traditional literacy narrative inspired by the one presented in Beaufort's *College Writing and Beyond*.[17] While I admired (and still admire) the assignment's focus on prompting students to contextualize their literacy development and reflect on how literacy affects their lives, I found when I was responding to student work that many students did not do this, opting instead to stick to a standard "literacy narrative arc" (Sladek 63). While I specified in the prompt that I wanted students to engage with the contexts that influenced their literacy development, I admittedly did not provide much guidance in how to do so, prioritizing other concerns such as development, organization, and the genre conventions of the personal essay. While the unit went fairly well and many students seemed to appreciate the opportunity to write about themselves, I sensed that there was potential for greater critical thought that wasn't being realized.

I originally developed the New Literacies Narrative assignment for my Fall 2013 sections of English 101, Introduction to Composition. In designing it, I decided to retain the most effective aspects of the original literacy narrative assignment (such as encouraging students to engage with the individuals and discourse communities who were instrumental to their literacy development) while broadening the way we discussed literacy in the class. I did not redesign the assignment with the intention of incorporating the project itself into my scholarly work; rather, I did so to prompt students to think more critically about the definition of *literacy* and inspire those who struggle with print-based literacy to honor the literacies they do feel they possess. However, when responding to my students' New Literacies Narratives, I noticed that their work

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[17] See Appendix C.

overall was less formulaic and incorporated more original insights about literacy than previous student literacy narratives.

I then decided to study the assignment more formally beyond the context of a single class, completing a pilot study in Summer 2014 and the full study in Fall 2015. In this chapter, I discuss my New Literacies Narrative unit and study methodology more specifically. I begin by providing more detail about the research questions driving the present study. I then describe the study participants and explain how the unit was taught, including information about course readings, use of in-class time, and daily homework before detailing my study methodology and analytical approach. I conclude by looking forward to Chapter Three, wherein I discuss the results of my analysis.

Research Questions

As noted in the previous chapter, the present study works to answer two related research questions:

- Does the New Literacies Narrative unit successfully encourage students to develop a critical meta-awareness of literacy?
- Do students demonstrate engagement with the New Literacies Narrative assignment and unit?

Below, I define my key terms and how I will arrive at answers to the above questions.

Defining and Assessing "Critical Meta-Awareness of Literacy"

My study explores how New Literacies complicate and challenge students' previous understandings of literacy in a way that more traditionalist conceptions of literacy do not,

hopefully priming students to develop a critical meta-awareness of literacy. Crystal VanKooten points out that, despite frequent discussion of "metacognition" and "meta-awareness" in composition research, the precise meanings of these terms can be difficult to pin down. I define "critical meta-awareness of literacy" as the ability to define *literacy* as something other than the decontextualized skills of reading and writing. This can take many forms, including:

- Demonstrating awareness that the definition of *literacy* varies with time and place or that there are multiple definitions of *literacy* (as in the case of one student, Juan, who writes: "It is well known how hard it is to define literacy as it is used in many different ways and at many different contexts").

- Questioning, contradicting, or adding to the definition of *literacy* as the mere ability to read and write (as in the case of another student, Hamid, who writes: ". . . literacy is not just the ability to read and write. It is much more than that. Literacy is mostly about having control of something or having enough knowledge that makes you participate in issues that a certain community considers them significant").

- Contextualizing the definition of *literacy* within a particular community or practice (like Gabriela, quoted in the epigraph to Chapter One, who centers her literacy narrative on her experiences with learning to play softball).

- Using the words "literacy" or "literate" when describing their increasing participation in or familiarization with a community or practice (like Leighton, who writes about developing literacy in a soccer fan community: "This was how I became literate, dissecting what I saw into a tweet and then describing how that could affect a game").

Essentially, what I am looking for when I assess critical meta-awareness of literacy in students' written work and interviews is some awareness that the meaning of *literacy* is variable or dependent on context.

Students can also demonstrate meta-awareness of literacy in the way they take up the genre of the literacy narrative. While all instructors in the study took time to teach the genre conventions of the literacy narrative (and several reported in interviews that one of their primary goals in English 101 was to facilitate genre awareness), broadening the range of topics has the potential to complicate students' understanding of the genre and allow for more experimentation. Students who repurpose their genre knowledge for the modified New Literacies Narrative, "question[ing] their genre knowledge and . . . break[ing] this knowledge down into useful strategies" (Reiff and Bawarshi 314), could be demonstrating greater meta-awareness of literacy and the literacy narrative genre.

Defining and Assessing "Engagement"

In looking for evidence of student engagement, I draw upon Lawson and Lawson's definitions of affective and cognitive engagement cited in Chapter One:

- *Affective engagement* refers to students' emotional attachments and reactions to school, homework assignments, etc.
- *Cognitive engagement* refers to the amount of mental effort and self-regulation students expend in thinking about course content and completing academic tasks (435-436).

Lawson and Lawson view engagement on a sort of continuum. Students who experience negative emotions in relation to school are not (or minimally) affectively engaged, with more positive emotions indicating a greater degree of affective engagement. Cognitive engagement can be

assessed in the same way: a great degree of mental effort signals a high degree of cognitive engagement, while minimal mental effort indicates low engagement. While I follow this convention in considering cognitive engagement, I believe students who express negative emotions about the New Literacies Narrative unit or assignment do demonstrate emotional engagement, as a complete lack of emotional engagement would more likely lead to apathy than negative emotions. Affective engagement as I conceptualize it can thus be detected in phrases where students discuss aspects of the unit or assignment that they enjoyed (positive affective engagement) or disliked (negative affective engagement).

I rely primarily on students' self-reports when looking for evidence of this engagement, which can be found mostly in their reflections and interviews. For instance, in her interview, Stacey describes her experience with the literacy narrative unit:

> I thought that was the most interesting unit because then it was talking about a more personal aspect of our lives, and so we were learning about how we learned to learn the English language, which is a really complicated process when you think about it. And so I actually found it really enjoyable because, um, it was just really interesting, I thought.

Cognitive engagement can be found in sections where students discuss aspects of the assignment or unit they struggled with, provided that there is some indication that they attempted to rise to this challenge. For example, in her written reflection, Stacey indicated that it was difficult to "[include] literacy as the subject of the paper instead of a side note." However, her narrative itself strongly ties her experiences working as a barista to literacy, and she is able to explain these connections well in her interview. This suggests that, despite her initial difficulty, Stacey engaged in the level of thinking necessary to be successful. Her instructor agreed with this

assessment in her interview, noting that most students (including Stacey) seemed both affectively and cognitively engaged in the unit.

However, students do not need to be successful in their papers to demonstrate cognitive engagement. Again, the key factor is that they executed or attempted to execute some sort of critical, high-level thinking in their narrative. This is observable in self-report, most typically seen in students' reflections. For example, Amir writes that the "most challenging part of the essay was definitely the organization and coming up with ideas about your literacy and how it is a literacy." Though the organization of his narrative is occasionally muddled and his explanation of the literacy of sneaker collecting could be more developed, his statement implies that he engaged in critical thought about literacy whether or not it is reflected in his narrative.

Study Participants

Solicitation of Participants

In July 2015, after receiving approval from the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the English department, I sent an email over the department listserv soliciting instructors to teach my New Literacies Narrative unit as part of my study. In this email, I offered to provide the assignment prompt,[18] a daily unit schedule, daily homework assignments, and lesson plans to instructors in exchange for their participation in the study.[19] Six instructors responded, though one withdrew after being reassigned to teach a poetry workshop. The other five completed the study. Four of the instructors taught two sections of English 101 in Fall 2015;

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[18] See Appendix A.

[19] I specified in the email that the study was only open to instructors teaching English 101 in Fall 2015 and that each participating instructor had to have at least one year's experience teaching in the English department, as first-year instructors teach from an assignment sequence provided by the department.

the remaining instructor taught one section of 101 in addition to an upper-level fiction workshop.[20] Including my two sections of English 101, eleven sections participated in the study.

I visited each participating classroom at the beginning of the New Literacies Narrative unit to explain the study, answer questions, and distribute consent forms to student participants. Every student enrolled in a participating section of English 101 was given the opportunity to participate in the study, and every student who signed the consent forms and submitted a New Literacies Narrative was included. I also provided students with my contact information so they could reach me with questions or if they decided to withdraw from the study.

Participating Students

My final corpus of student work included 111 New Literacies Narratives. I did not collect demographic information from student participants, as it was beyond the scope of the study to account for a variety of complex social factors. However, personal experience suggests that most students who take English 101 are first-year students: during the Fall 2015 semester, all but one of my forty-three students were enrolled in their first semester of college (a pattern typical of my Fall English 101 enrollments).[21] Because most students enroll at the university shortly after completing high school, it is reasonable to assume that most student participants were young adults.[22] I did not attempt to control for age, gender, ethnicity, or other demographic factors, instead opting for as large a sample as possible. Though it would be interesting to consider these

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[20] The workshop was not included as part of the study.

[21] English Language Learners often take English 101 during their second semester or second year after completing ELL-specific coursework. I did not ask students to identify the languages they most often speak or grew up speaking, though several students indicated in their narratives or reflections that they speak English as a second language.

[22] One participant indicated in his narrative that he was in his forties; no other participants included information that suggested they were older than their early twenties.

variables in future work, it is beyond the scope of the present study to provide a study balanced for these factors.

Participating Instructors

Of the five additional instructors who completed the study, one was a lecturer with her Ph.D. and four were Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs).[23] Three instructors (Janet, Moira, and Erin) specialized in Creative Writing, and three (Sasha, Livi, and myself) were pursuing graduate degrees in Rhetoric and Composition. I tried to allow the instructors as much freedom as possible, encouraging them to use, discard, and adapt my instructional materials as they saw fit to meet their needs and goals. Though each instructor made minor changes to the daily homework or in-class activities (described below), the participating instructors did not make any major changes to the focus or goals of the unit or assignment. I did ask instructors to check with me before altering the New Literacies Narrative prompt itself; other than two instructors adjusting the length minimum, nobody did. I discuss how each instructor's goals and strategies affected student work in Chapter Four.

Teaching the Unit

In this section, I describe the unit structure and materials used by all participants, as well as the minor changes individual instructors made to the unit.

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[23] Though four participating English 101 instructors were graduate students at the time of the study, I refer to them as "instructors" to avoid confusion with the undergraduate student participants. I use "students" to refer to undergraduates enrolled in English 101 at the time of the study.

Unit Structure

Because I taught the New Literacies Narrative as the first unit, I began the unit with discussion of writing processes, including invention strategies, drafting, adapting to different audiences, and conducting meaningful revision.[24] From there, the focus moved to a discussion of the genre features of the personal narrative and literacy narratives specifically. Students received the New Literacies Narrative prompt when they began their discussion of New Literacies. The course then shifted to focus on students' narratives specifically, and students spent class time thinking about, discussing, and drafting their narratives. Each instructor canceled one week of class meetings to conduct one-on-one student conferences toward the end of the unit. These conferences were an opportunity for students to share concerns, receive feedback on drafts or outlines, and talk through any confusion they may have been experiencing. It was also an opportunity to pinpoint any problems they might need help working through in their understanding of literacy. The unit concluded with a day devoted to peer review, using a worksheet students developed collaboratively in class (see Appendix D for the peer review guide developed by my Fall 2015 students). Students' projects were due on either the last day of the unit or the first day of the following unit. See Appendix E for my full New Literacies Narrative unit schedule.

Readings and Homework

All but one instructor used Andrea Lunsford et al.'s *Everyone's an Author* as their primary course textbook. One instructor, Sasha, used Wysocki et al.'s *Compose, Design,*

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[24] The instructors who opted not to teach the New Literacies Narrative as the first unit substituted these readings for additional work with New Literacies and multiliteracies (see "Readings and Homework" section below).

Advocate.[25] Each instructor also used a handbook or online resources for support in writing and grammar instruction; those who used a handbook used either Lunsford's *Writing in Action* or Elaine Maimon et al.'s *A Writer's Resource*.[26] In addition to these course texts, each instructor selected supplemental readings (most often, examples of literacy narratives) to be distributed to students via the University's online course management system. For Fall 2015, I selected four supplemental texts to include with the unit, all of which were also assigned by the other instructors:

- Sherman Alexie's "The Joy of Reading and Writing: Superman and Me," a literacy narrative describing Alexie's experiences learning to read and working as a famous author. Instructors used this text to introduce the genre features of a literacy narrative and inspire discussion of how to craft a compelling personal narrative.

- Gloria Anzaldúa's "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," a personal essay describing how each of Anzaldúa's languages affects her identity and her relationship with the world. Students discussed this as an example of a language-centered literacy narrative and used it as a springboard to discuss the connections between literacy, identity, and societal issues such as language and gender discrimination.

- A portion of Tony Mirabelli's "Learning to Serve" (discussed in Chapter One), an ethnographic account of the literacies involved in food service work. This jumpstarted students' discussion of New Literacies and helped them to begin framing their own skills and community affiliations in terms of New Literacies.

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[25] Though she generally liked *Compose, Design, Advocate*, Sasha felt that it did not adequately support the New Literacies Narrative unit and therefore added several readings from *Everyone's an Author* to her syllabus.
[26] I used *A Writer's Resource* as my handbook in Fall 2015. Because no instructors reported using the handbook as a major source of instruction in the New Literacies Narrative unit, I do not consider handbook selection to be a significant variable in my study.

- The first episode of the BBC mini-series *Stephen Fry in America*, in which Fry explores various subcultures in each state. The first episode, which covers the Northeast, profiles communities such as crab fishers in Maine, blackjack dealers in Atlantic City, and others. The classes used this video to frame their discussion of literacy as communication (broadly defined) between members of a community and knowing the "unwritten rules" (or Discourses) of a subculture. Students completed a reflective "mini-paper" over this episode (see Appendix F) to help them generate thoughts and ideas for their New Literacies Narratives.

A full list of my assigned readings is incorporated into the Fall 2015 Unit One schedule in Appendix E.

In addition to their assigned readings, students were asked to write a short journal response in preparation for almost every class period. For each journal, students responded to a specific prompt that asked them to think critically about the assigned readings, practice writing strategies discussed in the textbook or in class, or look forward to their own projects. See Appendix G for the list of journal prompts I assigned and distributed to participating instructors.

Several of the other participating instructors added their own readings:

- Janet added an excerpt from Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger of Memory* as an additional example of a literacy narrative. She also added an excerpt from Eric Smith's *The Geek's Guide to Dating*, a dating guide written in the style of a video game manual, as a creative exploration of a non-print-based literacy. Finally, she added the *Norton Field Guide*'s online guide to writing a literacy narrative.

- Two instructors added essays by David Sedaris. Sasha assigned "Six to Eight Black Men," in which Sedaris compares a Dutch fan's description of Christmas traditions in the

Netherlands to his own experiences with holiday traditions, to start a discussion of what it means to be culturally literate. Moira had students read "Me Talk Pretty One Day," an essay about Sedaris's experiences learning French as an adult, because of its accessibility and the way it frames connections between literacy and power.

- Sasha also had students watch an episode of *Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations* focused on the Ozark region. This video served to reinforce and continue the discussion of cultural literacy inspired by the *Stephen Fry in America* episode, moving students to understand how a culture's values and literacies are reflected in its food.

- Livi used online memes to inspire discussions of visual literacy and prepare students for her following unit, a rhetorical analysis of visual images.

The instructors reported in their interviews that these additional texts generally helped students' understanding of literacy and that they reinforced the knowledge presented in the other readings and course materials. As previously indicated, it was important to me to preserve each instructor's pedagogical autonomy and to trust their approaches, even if it resulted in slight differences in instructional materials. I discuss the implications of this in the final section of this chapter and explore what it means for student work in Chapter Four.

Defining Literacy

Helping students understand the central tenets of the New Literacy Studies and multiliteracies can be a daunting task. Students have often been taught a simplified definition of *literacy* as the decontextualized ability to read and write (the autonomous model), and they have typically been conditioned to believe in some version of the literacy myth, viewing literacy as uniformly positive and necessary for social mobility. Students thus begin the unit by analyzing

and critiquing examples of print- and language-focused literacy narratives, including some written by professional writers as well as several written by previous students (used with the students' permission) or uploaded to the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives. This helps students begin the process of considering other people's experiences with literacy and how literacies are influenced by cultural context.

To help them understand the literacies embedded in particular communities, one lesson plan begins by asking students to identify the printed texts used in the restaurant featured in Mirabelli's "Learning to Serve." Students are generally quick to identify the diner's menu and wine list as texts. From there, they can make the leap to identifying written texts used in their own discourse communities (play books for football teams, sorority or fraternity bylaws, religious texts, etc.). Students are given the New Literacies Narrative assignment prompt when the class moves from discussing printed texts specifically to broadening what the definition of *literacy* can entail.

Using Gere's definition of *literacy* as communication about important issues within communities,[27] students then discuss the forms of verbal communication and body language used in particular communities, as well as any "unwritten rules" regarding values, dress, or conduct that one would need to know to be a literate member of a community. For instance, students who are active in Greek life often identify knowledge of the "rush week" recruitment process, the ability to participate competently in meetings, respect for organizational hierarchy, and wearing clothing featuring the sorority's/fraternity's letters as essential for being literate members of the Greek community. Many students use the idea of communication to frame their literacy narratives, focusing their narratives on their experiences learning the jargon and other forms of

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[27] As mentioned in the previous chapter, this definition was featured on the New Literacies Narrative assignment prompt and therefore framed each instructor's discussion of literacy.

communication used in their form of literacy. While some students choose to explicitly define *literacy* in their narratives, others leave it more implicit, relying on their anecdotes and explanations to define what it means to be literate in their chosen topic.

Assignment Prompt

The New Literacies Narrative assignment prompt[28] gives students the option to write a literacy narrative focused on reading and writing development or to write a narrative about their acquisition of some alternative literacy. Because all students are exposed to the same pedagogy that challenges traditional conceptions of literacy, student work often blends the two options. Narratives that center on an alternative literacy often discuss the reading and writing associated with that literacy, while narratives that focus on reading and writing often incorporate the social contexts in which that literacy takes place. In many ways, then, even the seemingly more conventional narratives focused on reading and writing serve as New Literacies Narratives in the way they tie literacy development to social context. For the purposes of this study, I am interested in studying the assignment and students' responses to the assignment, regardless of the option they chose, as it is taught and contextualized within the broader unit previously described.

Study Design

Below, I describe in detail the pilot study conducted prior to the present project; the research questions driving my project; and my study design, methodology, and analytical frameworks.

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[28] See Appendix A.

Pilot Study

After a positive experience teaching the New Literacies Narrative in Fall 2013, I applied for and received approval from the University's IRB and the English department to conduct a pilot study with students enrolled in my Summer 2014 section of English 101. The pilot study centered on the same research questions as the current project (see above), but I took a case study approach due to the small number of students enrolled in the class.[29] Through a close reading of students' work and my own classroom notes, I found that the four students who participated in the study (all of whom chose to write about a topic other than reading and writing) showed an understanding of how literacy is affected by context and were able to explain a variety of practices using a literacy-centered framework. They also reported that they enjoyed writing about their chosen topics and that the assignment challenged the ways they had previously thought about literacy. Both observations led to my current project and helped shape my research questions. After these promising results, I expanded the project design to include other instructors' classes. I also incorporated interviews and classroom observations (described below) as sources of information. All changes were approved by the University's IRB and the English department.

Data Collection

As previously noted, I rely on three data sources for this project: student texts, classroom observations, and student and instructor interviews.

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[29] There were eleven students enrolled at the beginning of the semester, and the number dropped to eight by the end. Four students gave me permission to use their work.

Student Texts

Every student who signed the necessary consent forms and submitted a New Literacies Narrative was included in the corpus.[30] In all, I collected 111 student narratives written in response to the New Literacies Narrative assignment prompt: thirty from Sasha, twenty-four from Janet, twenty from Livi, fourteen from Moira, thirteen from Erin, and ten from my own sections of English 101. Eighty-seven of these narratives were accompanied by written reflections, which responded to the reflection prompt presented in Appendix B.[31] All instructors submitted their students' narratives to me electronically via email or the university's online course management system.

Classroom Observations

I observed each instructor's class once during the New Literacies Narrative unit. I asked each instructor to identify a day that would give me some insight into how their classroom typically operates (meaning students wouldn't be watching a video, conducting peer review, etc.). These observations all took place after I explained my study and distributed consent forms to students, so they knew who I was and my purpose for being in the classroom. During these observations, I tried to make myself as inconspicuous as possible, selecting a seat near the back of the room. Because I was trying to get a sense of each instructor's teaching style and rapport with students as well as establish context for my analysis of student work, I did not focus my observations on anything in particular. Rather, I took notes on everything I observed, being careful not to record information about students who did not give permission for their work to be

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[30] I excluded two narratives from Janet's sections because the files could not be opened.

[31] The discrepancy between the number of narratives and reflections and its implication for the study are discussed in the "Study Limitations" section at the end of this chapter.

used. I made note of everything the instructor and participating students said, as well as the

presence or absence of side conversations or other potentially distracting behavior and the

number of students who actively participated or took notes.

Interviews

I conducted instructor and student interviews in February 2016, shortly after the

beginning of the spring semester. All five participating instructors agreed to be interviewed as

part of the study. These interviews focused on their experiences teaching the unit, how the unit

fit into their larger goals and curricula, student reactions to the unit and assignment, and their

impressions of student work. Each instructor interview lasted approximately one hour. Using a

random number generator, I selected five participating students from each of the eleven English

101 sections to be contacted for an interview. I notified them via their University email addresses

that they had been randomly selected to participate in an optional interview that would last no

more than an hour.[32] I sent a follow-up email to students who did not respond after two weeks. In

all, five students were interviewed,[33] and interviews ranged from approximately forty to seventy

minutes. Student interviews focused on students' experiences with the assignment and unit, how

(or if) their thoughts about literacy changed throughout the unit, what they learned from the unit,

and the rhetorical choices they made in their papers. I provided students with printed copies of

their papers at their interviews so they could refer to and comment on their work. See Appendix

H for interview protocols.

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[32] In order to avoid any effects my presence would have, a colleague emailed the selected students from my own sections. Had any of my own students agreed to be interviewed, she would have interviewed them as well.

[33] I interviewed two students from Moira's classes and one student each from Janet's, Livi's, and Sasha's. The low response rate is discussed in the final section of this chapter.

The structure of the interview protocol gives the impression that the interviews were more formal than they actually were. I made the protocol as comprehensive as possible so the University's IRB would have an idea of the range of topics I would cover and the depth with which I intended to cover them. In reality, the interviews were much more conversational, and I attempted to follow interviewees' lines of thought as much as possible. I do not believe my presence in the interviews significantly affected interviewees' responses. I have good working relationships with all participating instructors, all of whom understood that any conclusions I drew from their interviews depended on their honest responses. Though most instructors reported that they were generally pleased with the unit, they were also forthright in expressing frustrations with or suggesting changes to the unit or assignment (as discussed in the following chapters). I believe the student interviewees' responses were affected less by my presence (as I was not their instructor) than by the low response rate. None of Erin's students agreed to be interviewed, nor were any of my students interviewed.[34] I attempted to mitigate the effect of my presence in the interviews by assuring students that their responses would not be associated with their real names and encouraging them to be honest about their experiences. Potential problems with the low response rate and other factors associated with the interviews are discussed in the final section.

Data Analysis

My data analysis consisted of multiple steps, which included both manual inspection (close reading) and automatic retrieval (computerized analysis). This multi-stage analysis

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[34] Two of my students responded to the initial email indicating they were interested in completing an interview, but neither actually completed one.

enabled me to approach my research questions from several different perspectives, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Each step is described in detail below.

Analysis of Content

Meta-Awareness of Literacy

STAGE ONE: NARRATIVE THEMES

I began my analysis by classifying each narrative according to theme. I initially attempted to classify the narratives simply on the basis of whether or not they focused on reading, writing, and/or language development (whether they focused on Option A or Option B in the assignment prompt). However, this proved problematic, as many narratives resisted this classification for the reasons described above. Many narratives that focused on the literacy involved in a certain community, for instance, incorporated extensive discussion of the terminology or written texts used in that community. Similarly, narratives that initially seemed to focus on reading and writing independently of context later transitioned into larger discussions involving cultural context or anecdotes that did not focus on reading or writing. Thus, even texts that focused primarily on reading and writing often approached literacy in similar ways as those focused on alternative literacies. While this is good from a pedagogical standpoint and indicates that students are situating their literacy development in its larger context, it made classification difficult. Because of this, I decided to approach all texts in the same way, applying a more nuanced classification system to the entire corpus.

I based this classification system on students' topic selection. In an initial pass through the corpus, I made note of commonly occurring topics. Using NVivo analysis software, I created

categories for each topic and tagged each narrative according to its theme.[35] Those that did not fit

a topic category were first tagged as *other*. I then repeated this process with only the *other*

category, creating a separate category for any topic that occurred five times or more. Each

narrative was assigned only one category to allow for comparative analysis across thematic

categories.[36] Eight central categories emerged, described in table 1 below. The frequency of

occurrence for each topic is discussed in the following chapter.

Table 1

Topic Categories in New Literacies Narratives

Topic Category	Description
LITERACY OF SPORT[37]	Describes the literacies involved in playing a sport, most often as part of a high school or college team. Common topics of discussion include knowing the positions of the various players, understanding team jargon, and knowing the values of that particular sport.
READING, WRITING, AND ACADEMIC LITERACY	Corresponds most closely to the "traditional" literacy narrative option (Option A) in the assignment prompt (see Appendix A). [38] Describes the author's experience learning to read and/or write and often focus on school experiences.
RELATIONSHIP LITERACY	Describes the author's experience learning the literacies involved in maintaining interpersonal relationships, including romantic relationships, friendships, and relationships with society in general.
LITERACY OF A SUBCULTURE	Relates the author's literacy development in a particular subculture, such as a fan community, Greek organization, or religious community. Much like narratives in the *literacy of sport* category, these narratives often describe the terminology and values of the community in question.

[35] I did this by creating "nodes" for each theme. Nodes allow the researcher to tag entire sources or discrete passages according to common themes.
[36] Difficulties involved in this process are discussed below.
[37] Though most of these narratives could arguably be classified under *literacy of a subculture* (below), I chose to isolate the sports-related literacy narratives due to the topic's popularity among student participants.
[38] When I first taught the New Literacies Narrative, I asked students to identify which option (A or B) they chose to respond to. However, I did not ask them to identify their choice in subsequent semesters after several students either noted that their narratives combined both options or indicated that they felt constrained by having to limit their narrative to one option.

OCCUPATIONAL LITERACY	Describes the author's experience learning the literacies involved in a job they've held. These narratives often show the influence of Mirabelli's "Learning to Serve."
LANGUAGE AND CULTURE	Centers on either the process of learning a new language and/or culture (often, international students moving to the United States or U.S.-born students travelling abroad) or the process of learning slang terms or specialized terminology in one's native language. [39]
ARTISTIC LITERACY	Includes narratives that describe the author's development in an artistic pursuit such as music or graphic design.
LITERACY OF A NEW SCHOOL	Describes the author's experience learning the values and "unwritten rules" of a new school. Unlike academic literacy narratives, which also focus on school experiences, these narratives center on the social dimensions of adjusting to a new school.
OTHER	Narratives that did not have a clear theme or centered on a theme found in fewer than five narratives were classified as *other*. Narratives that did not have an apparent connection to literacy were also placed in this category. [40]

This system also presented challenges. Again, some narratives resisted classification. Some, for instance, focused on subjects that could have arguably been placed in multiple categories, such as *occupational literacy* and *literacy of a subculture*. In these instances, I placed the narrative in the one category it fit best rather than placing it in multiple categories to avoid confusion and enable comparative analysis.[41] Other narratives shifted focus partway through. Again, rather than placing the narrative in multiple categories, I placed it in the one category that best fit, as the inclusion of a new category splintered the data to the point where it was difficult to generate meaningful results. If I could not make a case for its inclusion in one of the categories, I classified the narrative as *other*. Though this categorization system is not perfect, it did provide insight into the literacies that serve as driving forces in students' lives. This

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[39] These narratives can be distinguished from those categorized as *literacy of a subculture* by their exclusive focus on language and/or the lack of a clearly defined subculture.

[40] These tended to be general autobiographical essays. I discuss these narratives further in the following chapters.

[41] For example, several students wrote literacy narratives about their military service. Though the military is certainly a unique subculture, I classified these as examples of *occupational literacy* if they were paid positions. Malcolm, who wrote his narrative about JROTC, was classified under *literacy of a subculture*, as it was not a paid position.

classification accomplished two things: it allowed me to see how many students chose to write about reading, writing, and school-based literacies compared to those who focused on non-academic experiences, and it provided a fuller picture of the diverse range of practices and literacies that matter most to students.

STAGE TWO: DEFINITIONS OF *LITERACY*

In the second stage of my content-based analysis, I examined the literacy narratives, reflections, and student interviews for places where the student authors offered definitions of *literacy*, acknowledged that there can be multiple definitions, or provided criteria by which one could be considered literate in a particular community or practice. I also examined transcripts of the instructor interviews to isolate instances where the instructors defined *literacy* or described what they thought the New Literacies Narrative assignment asked students to do.

First, I used NVivo to manually sort the literacy narratives according to whether or not they offered an explicit definition of *literacy*.[42] At this point, I did not attempt to classify these definitions according to content; I was only concerned with whether or not some clearly stated definition was present and/or if they acknowledged somehow that the definition of *literacy* can vary according to context. Looking specifically at the narratives that did attempt to offer a definition of *literacy*, I then sorted the definitions according to content. Unlike the previous stage, where each text was assigned only one label, in this stage I placed passages into multiple categories where appropriate.[43] This allowed for comprehensiveness and easy reference. The following categories emerged:

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[42] I did this by creating distinct "cases" according to whether or not *literacy* was defined within the narrative. Cases operate much like nodes, but are sorted separately.
[43] I did this by creating nodes for each category.

- *Literacy as reading and writing*: Literacy is defined as the ability to read and write and is not placed in any community or cultural context. This may be the only definition presented, or it may be positioned as the one "true" definition of literacy in opposition to alternative definitions.

- *Literacy as "reading and writing plus"*: Literacy is defined as the ability to read and write, plus some other definition or restriction. Examples include Hamid, referenced earlier in this chapter,[44] and Juan, who writes: "I would define [literacy] as: the capability of reading any kind or specific subject and fully understand it to the point of being able to give an opinion or feedback about it. By this, the literate should also be able to put himself in a side or another of whatever the issue is he is going into."[45]

- *Literacy as communication*: In these definitions, students emphasize the communicative aspects of literacy. Variations of the words "communication" and "communicate" are often used, and these definitions often (but not always) reference a community. Many are reminiscent of Gere's definition, quoted on the top of the New Literacies Narrative assignment prompt. An example of this can be found in Zach's confident assertion, "Having a greater understanding of reading, writing, interpretation, and communication. There are hundreds of different definitions for literacy, but this is the correct one. Most definitions will just give one of those four terms in their choice of words. The first sentence of this paragraph summarizes everything being literate has to offer."[46]

- *Literacy as Community Practice*: These definitions of *literacy* take one of two forms:

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[44] ". . . literacy is not just the ability to read and write. It is much more than that. Literacy is mostly about having control of something or having enough knowledge that makes you participate in issues that a certain community considers them significant."

[45] This definition was also included in *literacy as communication* (see below) due to its emphasis on the ability to provide an opinion on the issue.

[46] This definition was also included in *reading and writing plus*.

- o Some provide a general definition of *literacy* that specify that it must be considered within a specific community. For example, Ben writes: "Being literate can be anything that takes understanding beyond what is on the surface. This can mean literacy is something that only people in the specified community would understand, which is part being in the community."

- o Other passages attempt to define *literacy* within the context of a particular community, as when Ben goes on to define "soccer literacy": "It is the type of game that to be literate you must not only know the mental side and language of the game, but also have a good understanding of the physical requirements needed to play the sport as well."

I also isolated instances where students generally point to the fact that there are multiple definitions of *literacy* without providing specific examples of these definitions. For instance, Hamid writes in his reflection that he would advise future students completing the assignment to "Be aware of the meaning of literacy, do not think of it just as the ability to read and write." The frequency with which these definition types occurred is presented with my results in Chapter Three.

Finally, I isolated passages where students provide criteria by which to assess the literacy of members of a particular community or subculture. Most students provided examples of what one needs to know or be able to do in order to be literate in their chosen topic, whether or not they provided an explicit definition of *literacy* within the narrative. For instance, Caroline's narrative, "The Complicated Etiquette of Softball," does not explicitly offer a definition of what *literacy* means either in terms of softball or more generally. However, she does note what a player needs to do to be considered fully literate in softball: understand the terminology and

signs used, be able to encourage one's teammates, play with a "team mindset," and practice humility. By making note of these passages, it is possible to capture more implicit definitions of *literacy* that are embedded throughout the narrative. I labeled this definitional category *implicit definition of literacy*. Finally, as I isolated passages where students offer their thoughts on the definition of *literacy* (either within their chosen topic or in general), I made note of frequently occurring words in these passages in preparation for the linguistic portion of the analysis (see "linguistic analysis" section below).

STAGE THREE: CULTURAL NARRATIVES

In this stage, I wanted to determine the degree to which students enacted the cultural narratives Alexander identifies in her corpus of student literacy narratives (referenced in Chapter One). Looking at the presence or absence of these cultural narratives (particularly the *literacy equals success* narrative) can provide insight into how students are conforming to or pushing back against the genre conventions of the literacy narrative and/or the dominant cultural narratives used by society to advance an understanding of literacy as necessary for advancement. Substituting these narratives for (or complementing them with) more nuanced, original takes on one's own literacy development can reflect a critical meta-awareness of literacy or lack thereof.

Again using NVivo, I replicated Alexander's methodology with my own corpus (narratives only), dividing each narrative into "episodes" and placing them into Alexander's categories of *hero*, *rebel*, *victim*, *child prodigy*, *literacy winner*, *outsider*, and *other* (615). However, because Alexander focused specifically on narratives describing students' developments in academic literacies, I found that her definitions did not perfectly capture the common cultural narratives students in my corpus deployed in their essays. For instance, in

defining her *child prodigy* category, Alexander notes that the narrator "excels at reading and writing from an early age" and that these narratives relate early experiences with printed texts (615). Though several narratives in my corpus do describe an early aptitude for the author's chosen literacy and would therefore be reasonably classified as "child prodigy," Alexander's reading-and-writing-focused definition does not fit neatly onto these narratives. Thus, I modified several of her narrative category descriptions to more fully reflect the variety of topics chosen by students in my corpus. These differences are presented in table 2 below.

Table 2

Cultural Narratives (identified by Alexander) Found in New Literacies Narratives

Cultural Narrative	Alexander	New Literacies Narrative
SUCCESS	"Equates literacy acquisition with success, liberation, development, progression, and upward mobility; emphasizes *literacy*, rather than the *individual* . . . invokes optimistic and future-looking rhetoric; views literacy as utilitarian and useful, a means to economic, cultural, social, and political success."	Equates their literacy with success; "invokes optimistic and future-looking rhetoric"; views literacy as a means to personal or professional success.
HERO	"Equates literacy acquisition with success, liberation, development, progression, and upward mobility; emphasizes *individual*, rather than *literacy*, perseverance, self-reliance, and determination . . ."	Same; takes this role in relation to their chosen literacy or literacy in general.
CHILD PRODIGY	"Excels at reading and writing from an early age and is put on display for others to see his or her brilliance and intellectual acumen; includes tales of prolific reading, trips to the library or bookstore, abundant exposure to literate texts, and being read to by parents."	Shows an early interest in or aptitude for the literacy the paper focuses on.
LITERACY WINNER	"Includes accounts of winning extrinsic awards, rewards, and prizes for literacy . . . is a successful consumer of literacy who amasses 'academic currency' by winning extrinsic rewards, awards, and prizes for literacy."	Same; takes this role in relation to their chosen literacy or literacy in general.

VICTIM	"Is a victim of negative literacy experiences, in or out of school; casts blame for negative literacy experiences; discusses how someone *took the fun* out of reading and writing."	Same; takes this role in relation to their chosen literacy or literacy in general.
OUTSIDER	"Portrays self as an outsider in relation to something else in the story, such as literacy, pedagogy, other students, the school system, etc. . . . displays a negative, apathetic, or hopeless attitude toward literacy; does not assign blame."	"Portrays self as an outsider in relation to something else in the story;" may or may not display a negative attitude.[47]
REBEL	"Does not necessarily dislike writing or reading but attacks and rebels against established beliefs and institutions . . . includes tales of resistance, subversion, and transgression of what is typical and conventional; talks about how he or she has been misunderstood . . ."	Same; takes this role in relation to their chosen literacy or literacy in general.
OTHER	"Does not fit any of the other seven cultural narrative categories."	Same.

I then looked specifically at the *other* category to determine whether or not there were any new cultural narratives that were commonly found in students' New Literacies Narratives. In looking at the narratives I initially classified as *other*, I identified six additional episode types that occurred five or more times in the texts. While some fit Alexander's definition of a "cultural narrative," another type of episode emerged that seems to be a product of the New Literacies Narrative prompt. Namely, students' need to explain the literacies involved in their topics led many students to devote entire paragraph units (and, in some cases, episodes spanning multiple paragraphs) to defining or explaining their versions of literacy, arguing that their topic can be considered a form of literacy, or elaborating on another aspect of their chosen topic. While they sometimes supported their explanations with anecdotes, this did not happen consistently, resulting in sections of many narratives that read more like expository papers.[48] As such, I

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[47] Episodes classified as *outsider* were further sub-classified according to whether or not they displayed a negative attitude toward literacy. I discuss this further in Chapter Three.
[48] This is discussed further in Chapters Three and Four.

classified the new emerging types of narratives as "New Cultural Narratives" (episodes relating

the author's literacy development according to a commonly-used narrative theme) and

"Rhetorical Modes" (episodes devoted primarily to some sort of explanation or argument). These

narratives and rhetorical modes are described below, and their frequencies of occurrence are

discussed in the following chapter.

New Cultural Narratives

Three new cultural narratives emerged in my analysis of students' New Literacies

Narratives:

- *Insider*: This category serves the opposite function of Alexander's *outsider* category.

  Rather than students positioning themselves outside something in their story (the school

  system, classmates, etc.), they use these episodes to describe a feeling of belonging in a

  community. For instance, Colin describes how his participation in his high school's

  Competitive Speech and Debate team helped him overcome his depression: "I found a

  home at this place I used to consider a terrifying hellscape . . . This class and the people

  surrounding it made me feel that acceptance I had been longing for, that pure joy of

  feeling loved by other people and the empowerment at being truly good at something you

  love."

- *Lesson Learned*: These episodes, which often appear towards the end of the narrative,

  state the lesson the author learned from their experiences or the message they want the

  reader to take from the narrative. Unlike Alexander's *literacy equals success* master

  narrative, these narratives do not refer to economic or material success and may not look

  toward the future. For instance, Bradley, who chose to write a more traditional school-

based literacy narrative, describes how studying Shakespeare in high school helped him as a writer: ". . . Shakespeare taught me to have pride in work, and to strive to add vividness, imagery, and purpose. Reading literatures such as *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet* gave me a deeper understanding as well as a deeper sense of respect for literature and the English language as a whole."

- *Positive Emotions*: In these narratives, students express excitement, happiness, or enthusiasm for their chosen topic. Unlike the other types of episodes, which often include expressions of positive emotion (*child prodigy*, *hero*, *literacy winner*, *success*, and *insider*), these episodes are exclusively devoted to describing the author's enthusiasm about the topic. As with the previous category, these episodes generally do not relate events or advance the story. For example, Edward writes: "Video games are amazing. For me they have always been great escapes from reality . . . It is [in] games such as these that my form of literacy takes its place."

Rhetorical Modes

In addition to the above-mentioned cultural narratives, I identified three rhetorical modes present in students' work:

- *Definition of Literacy*: These paragraph units are exclusively devoted to providing either a general definition of *literacy* or defining what it means to be literate in the author's chosen topic. These can be either the students' original definitions or quotations/paraphrases from other sources. For instance, Hamid begins his narrative with a paragraph presenting the definition of *literacy* as "the ability to read and write," paraphrasing Gere's definition, and stating that knowledge of soccer is a form of literacy.

- *Explanation*: In these episodes, the author explains some aspect of their literacy or something a person needs to know to be considered literate (terminology, sports plays, etc.). This explanation may be integrated with a brief anecdote/statement about how they learned this. This can be distinguished from the *definition of literacy* category because it elaborates on one particular aspect of the topic rather than providing a comprehensive definition of *literacy*. For example, Layana devotes one paragraph to an extensive paraphrase of her boss at a phone repair shop teaching her how to repair an iPhone and explaining the terminology involved.

- *Description*: This category encompasses vivid descriptions of anything other than the student's chosen literacy (including people, settings, books, etc.). These episodes generally do not relate events or advance the story. They sometimes attempt to place the reader "in the moment" or in the role of the narrator, as in the case of Gabriela, who opens her narrative with the following description: "Imagine that you open your eyes and see thin metal bars going horizontally in front of your face with only a little gap around your eyes. You have to squint in order to see what's in front of you because the sun is shining down too brightly. You can feel the heat of the sun beating down your back. . . ." These episodes are devoted to the craft and performance of the narrative genre.

The frequencies with which these narratives occurred are presented with my results in Chapter Three. Narratives that still did not fit into a category remained in the "other" category.

Indicators of Engagement

In the final stage of my content-based analysis, I examined the reflections and student and instructor interviews for indicators of affective or cognitive engagement. I approached both

types of texts the same way, relying mostly on self-reports. For students, I isolated passages where students indicated their own level of engagement. In the instructor interviews, I looked for their assessments of students' general levels of engagement with the assignment and unit, as well as areas where students struggled. I decided to exclude students' New Literacies Narratives from this portion of the analysis, as I did not notice instances of students expressing engagement (other than in relation to their chosen topic) in the narratives during my first three passes through the corpus.[49] Using NVivo, I isolated these passages in the reflections and interviews, classifying them as either "affective" or "cognitive."

Isolating instances of affective engagement was a relatively straightforward process. I counted any statement where the speaker or writer expressed any sort of feeling about the unit or assignment as an example of affective engagement. Many of these were general statements about liking or not liking the unit. I separated expressions of affective engagement based on whether they expressed positive or negative emotions. For example, Hamid wrote in response to the final reflection question ("Anything else you would like to say?"): "[It] was a great unit. I really enjoyed it. Now we are done with unit one, but the information we got from it will not be forgotten." This is a clear example of positive affective engagement. Students also frequently pointed to particular aspects of the unit they liked or disliked, as in the case of Ingrid, who wrote in her reflection, "My favorite part of this unit was writing the last paper. I loved the freedom that we got and how we were able to make it our own. It made it easier to write when I chose my own topic and made me own guidelines because it kept me interested the whole time." Others compared the unit favorably or unfavorably to other units, as with Linus, who wrote in his reflection: "It was harder than unit 1. I really did not enjoy writing this paper."

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[49] I did include the narratives in the "Indicators of Engagement" portion of my linguistic analysis (described below) to ensure that I didn't miss anything.

Cognitive engagement proved to be a bit more challenging to isolate. I looked for indications that students worked hard or overcame difficulties when writing their narratives. Though students frequently wrote about what they learned in the unit (often in response to the question "What did you learn about writing in this unit?"), I only counted these statements as examples of cognitive engagement if there was some evidence of original thought or if they described the process of grappling with a particular idea or aspect of the assignment. By making this distinction, I hoped to exclude statements that simply summarized the unit ("I learned that literacy can refer to many things") or repeated information found in the course materials (various paraphrases of the Gere quote included with the assignment prompt). Though this type of learning is certainly valuable, these types of statements do not provide sufficient evidence to determine whether or not the student was cognitively engaged in the lessons.

As an example of cognitive engagement, Dean writes: "The most challenging part for me during this assignment was going into the literacy part of my narrative. I just never thought about being a part of a team or community as any form of literacy, so it just took me more thought to actually figure out how being a cardinals fan was a form of literacy. I believe that I got my thoughts onto the paper in a adequate way though." With this statement, he states that he thought critically about how to frame his topic as a form of literacy and indicates that he put in the intellectual work necessary to overcome this challenge. Many students also indicated that they put significant critical thought into their organization, such as Paris, who notes: "The most challenging part of this assignment for me was organizing my thoughts and placing them in the correct spot. Also picking what to write about and how to apply the instructions to it." Both of these statements demonstrate the hard cognitive work that these students put into their papers.

In analyzing the written reflections, I also separated indicators of engagement based on whether or not the reflection question itself prompted this type of response. For instance, question one, which asks students to specifically identify the difficulties they overcame in completing the assignment, encourages them to express cognitive engagement. Similarly, the second question asking them to identify their favorite part of the unit encourages expressions of affective engagement.[50] Though I have no reason to believe students were dishonest in their responses to these questions (indeed, several students opted out of answering one or both of these questions, and several more responded in ways that did not indicate engagement), it is important to consider the effects that the reflection questions themselves have on students' responses. I wrote these reflection questions before developing my study, meaning they were tailored to fit my pedagogical goals rather than my research goals. Following Yancey's advice, I designed the reflection questions to foster engagement and encourage students to articulate the thinking behind their writing processes and rhetorical choices in the hope that this would increase student performance and transferable writing skills (*Reflection* 56-57, 146). Because several of the reflection questions specifically encourage engagement and meta-awareness, it is possible that the levels of engagement and meta-awareness are higher in the reflections than they would be otherwise. However, because the New Literacies Narrative unit was also designed with these goals in mind, the same can be said of all the course materials. By separately considering responses to questions that specifically encourage engagement and meta-awareness, I hope to provide a more balanced view of the ways students express these phenomena in their reflections.

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[50] See Appendix B.

Linguistic Analysis

Looking at student work on a linguistic level enriches the analysis by providing more concrete information about how often students relate their experiences to New Literacies, as well as the relative frequencies with which they discuss positive and negative experiences with the New Literacies Narrative unit and assignment. I was also able to gain further insight into recurring themes found in student work by looking at word frequencies. I performed this portion of my analysis using WordSmith lexical analysis software. As a first step, I retrieved a list of every word used in the corpus and sorted the words according to frequency of occurrence. I then eliminated all function words,[51] linking verbs, and students' and instructors' names (often used in paper headings).[52] I chose to include only the students' New Literacies Narratives and reflections in this portion of my analysis. I excluded the interview transcripts because I was able to easily isolate students' and instructors' definitions of *literacy* and indicators of engagement in my qualitative analysis, and I chose to exclude my classroom observation notes because they consisted mostly of paraphrases rather than exact quotes (meaning I would essentially be analyzing students' and instructors' ideas filtered through my language). I present my results and analysis in the following chapter.

Associations with *Literacy*

In order to determine what words and ideas students were associating with *literacy*, I used WordSmith to extract concordances and collocation information with the words *literacy*,

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[51] For reference, I consulted the list of English function words compiled by Leah Gilner and Franc Morales and distributed through Sequence Publishing. In the cases of words that act as function words only in certain contexts (such as "like," "may," and "certain"), I looked at the word's concordance file and only eliminated it if it occurred primarily as a function word.

[52] I removed students' and instructors' names from the word list to preserve anonymity. I did not remove names that are also English words (for example, "Bill"). See Appendix I for a list of the 250 most frequently used words.

literacies, and *literate*. In doing so, I hoped to determine not only how often students explicitly discussed literacy in their written work, but what they were associating with literacy. By looking at the results (presented in the following chapter), it is possible to see if students are discussing literacy simply as the ability to read and write or if they are contextualizing their definitions at all. Again, this ensured that I did not miss anything when I looked for definitions of *literacy* in my qualitative analysis and gave me the ability to discuss and compare the ways students wrote about literacy.[53]

Indicators of Engagement

Using the list of the most frequently used words as a starting point, I looked for words that could indicate cognitive engagement as defined by Lawson and Lawson in the previous chapter, such as *think*, *believe*, and *consider*. However, looking at the frequencies of these words and the contexts in which they occurred did not reveal any insight I did not also gain in my qualitative analysis of student texts. I then isolated words that could indicate positive and negative attitudes, such as *favorite*, *enjoy*, and *dislike*. From there, I compared frequencies of positive and negative words. I also extracted concordances with these words to determine whether they were expressing their feelings about the assignment, unit or literacy or if they were expressing feelings about some other factor (a person mentioned in the narrative, for instance). This ensured that I did not miss any indicators of engagement in my qualitative analysis and allowed me to more easily assess and compare attitudes toward and levels of engagement with

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[53] Though my qualitative analysis suggested that the words *define*, *think* and *believe* were also frequently used in students' definitions and explicit discussions of literacy, repeating the process with these words did not produce relevant examples that did not also appear in the analysis of *literacy*.

the New Literacies Narrative. Again, though, this process did not reveal anything that was not analyzed in more detail in my close reading of student texts.

Study Limitations

The setting and scale of the present study created several limitations. As previously noted, the study took place at a large public university in the Midwest. The student population of this university is roughly 74% white, and most are full-time, residential students. Therefore, I cannot know how the study's results would generalize to other student populations. Additionally, because most of my participants were enrolled in sections taught by other instructors, I cannot speculate about gender, ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, or other potentially significant demographic factors.[54] I did not attempt to control for these factors in my solicitation of participants, opting instead for a larger corpus of texts. Therefore, I do not know how representative my participants are of the university population.

The scale of my study also affected the degree to which I could standardize instruction. As previously noted, it was important for me that the New Literacies Narrative unit supported each instructor's larger curricular goals. I thus allowed them as much latitude as possible, providing resources while encouraging them to adapt these resources to fit their own goals and needs. While no instructors deviated from the central goals of the unit or assignment, their instructional approaches, of course, varied. This meant that not all student participants completed the same activities, read the same sample narratives, or heard the same lectures and explanations. While this lack of standardization is perhaps less than ideal from a research study standpoint, I

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[54] Several student participants volunteered this information in their narratives or interviews, but I did not feel comfortable asking them directly, as these factors are beyond the scope of the present study.

believe the benefit of the teachers being able to integrate the unit easily and coherently into their curriculum outweighs the cost. This decision benefited the student participants and allowed them to experience an intellectually coherent, properly scaffolded course sequence in English 101. Additionally, it demonstrates that the New Literacies Narrative can be integrated into a variety of instructional approaches, from Janet's personal narrative-focused approach to Livi's language-centered curriculum. I discuss some of these variable factors and their effects on student understanding in the final chapter.

Unfortunately, due to time constraints and scheduling, I was only able to observe a single class session for each participating instructor. While this allowed me a brief window into each individual's classroom dynamic and general teaching style, such limited observation does not allow me to make strong claims regarding the instructors' teaching or the level of student understanding and in-class participation based on the observations alone. Though I was able to make up for this somewhat by asking about these issues in my interviews with instructors, the instructors were forced to recall their experiences with the unit after several months' time. It is also possible that students in the class altered their behavior in light of being observed, as I did not have the opportunity to become a regular presence in the classroom. Because I did not intend to use my observation notes as a major source of information during the study but rather as context for my descriptions of each instructor's classroom, I decided to devote my time primarily to preparing and conducting the interviews and textual analysis rather than performing additional classroom observations.

Though the interviews provided me with fascinating insights into instructors' and students' experiences with the New Literacies Narrative unit, I was disappointed in the response rate for interviews. As previously stated, I contacted five randomly selected participating

students from each section to participate in an optional interview. I hoped to get a response rate

of two to three students per section, totaling twenty-two to thirty-three interviews. However,

state laws regarding compensation for study participants and a lack of funding for the study

prevented me from offering any monetary or other compensation for participating in an

interview. Thus, students did not have an external incentive to sacrifice an hour of their time to

be interviewed. Only five students completed interviews, and only four instructors (Moira, Janet,

Sasha, and Livi) were represented by these interviews. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the students who

agreed to be interviewed generally had good experiences with English 101, their instructors, and

the New Literacies Narrative unit, meaning they likely do not represent an accurate range of

attitudes toward the assignment. Because of this, I decided to use the interviews to supplement

the overall findings presented in the following chapter rather than as a main source of data.

Additionally, the interviews took place during February 2016, roughly two months after the end

of the Fall 2015 semester. Depending on the timing of the New Literacies Narrative unit, some

students were interviewed up to five months after submitting and receiving feedback on their

New Literacies Narratives. I attempted to compensate for this by providing them with copies of

their narratives to consult and comment on during the interview.

The final set of limitations has to do with the corpus itself. As previously noted, the

corpus included 111 New Literacies Narratives and 87 reflections. While each student was

required to submit a reflection with their narrative, not all of them did. At least two participating

instructors admitted to losing several narratives or returning them to students before submitting

copies to me. Though not every narrative has an accompanying reflection, I decided to include

the reflections in the corpus because they contained virtually all self-reports of engagement level

and some of the richest examples of students self-reporting their changing understandings of

literacy (and I considered all thoughts and reflections on literacy and/or engagement to be significant).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I've further explained the research questions driving the present study, the context in which the New Literacies Narrative was developed and taught, my research design, and my analytical process. The following chapter presents the results of my analysis. I discuss general insights gained through my interviews, observations, and close reading of student texts, illustrating my findings with passages and quotes from students who interestingly exemplify (or do not exemplify) the patterns revealed by the analysis. The final chapter then discusses the implications of my findings and directions for further research.

Chapter 3: Reclaiming Literacy: Student Work and the New Literacies Narrative

Introduction

In this chapter, I present the results of my analysis of student work, instructor and student interviews, and classroom observations. Through this analysis, I work toward answering the research questions presented in Chapter One:

- Does the New Literacies Narrative unit successfully encourage students to develop a critical meta-awareness of literacy?

- Do students demonstrate engagement with the New Literacies Narrative assignment and unit?

I begin with a discussion of student meta-awareness of the contextual nature of literacy in the assignment and unit, presenting my observations from both my rhetorical and linguistic analyses. I then move on to a discussion of students' affective and cognitive engagement with the New Literacies Narrative, again integrating my observations from multiple stages of analysis, before looking ahead to my final chapter. Throughout, I illustrate my findings with extended examples from students' New Literacies Narratives, reflections, and interviews.

The New Literacies Narrative and Critical Meta-Awareness of Literacy

In this section, I discuss students' critical meta-awareness of literacy (understood as knowledge of the cultural influences on and variable nature of literacy)[55] in the New Literacies Narrative Unit and assignment. First, I discuss students' topic selection and how that might point

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[55] See Chapter Two for a more detailed discussion of critical meta-awareness of literacy.

to a developing meta-awareness of literacy. I then discuss how students define and describe *literacy* in their narratives. Next, I expand on the cultural narratives students enact in their New Literacies Narratives before presenting instructors' and students' perspectives on the development of critical meta-awareness in the New Literacies Narrative unit.

Topic Selection

As noted in the previous chapter, students chose a variety of topics for their New Literacies Narratives, many of which did not center on school or print-based literacy. These topics can be sorted into the broader themes described in the previous chapter. The frequency of occurrence of each thematic category is presented below in table 3.

Table 3

New Literacies Narrative Student Topic Selection

Theme	Number of Papers	Percentage of Corpus
LITERACY OF SPORT	25	22.5%
READING, WRITING, ACADEMIC LITERACY	19	17.1%
RELATIONSHIP LITERACY	16	14.4%
LITERACY OF A SUBCULTURE	13	11.7%
OCCUPATIONAL LITERACY	11	10%
LANGUAGE AND CULTURE	9	8%
ARTISTIC LITERACY	6	5.4%
LITERACY OF A NEW SCHOOL	5	4.5%
OTHER	7	6.3%
TOTAL	111	100%

Though "reading, writing, and academic literacy" is the second most popular single topic, when we combine the non-school-focused topics (separating the topics based on whether or not they

focus on academic literacy), we see that 92 of the 111 New Literacies Narratives (roughly 83%) do not center on experiences with academic literacy.[56] Even if you combine the "language and culture" category with the academic literacy category, you find that eighty-three narratives (roughly 75%) do not place primary focus on reading, writing, or language use.

This variety in topic selection could point to a developing meta-awareness of literacy based on an understanding of alternative literacies. At the very least, it indicates that most students were aware of the diversity of topics available to them. In my close reading of student narratives, I found that most New Literacies Narratives, regardless of topic, showed clear connections to literacy in a broad sense (often by explicitly describing how the topic can be considered as a literacy). In fact, only four narratives (all of which were classified as "other") did not show a visible attempt to situate the topic in terms of literacy or describe the events related in the narrative in terms of literacy development.[57] This indicates that, at the most basic level, students who completed the New Literacies Narrative unit in Fall 2015 were aware of the fact that *literacy* does not simply refer to the decontextualized skills of reading and writing.

Defining Literacy

The second factor I looked for in determining the degree to which students were developing a critical meta-awareness of literacy was how they chose to define the term in their narratives, reflections, and interviews. As noted in Chapter One, one way students can show meta-awareness of the contextually bound nature of literacy is by defining the term as something

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[56] None of the narratives classified as *other* focused on academic literacy.

[57] Two students used their papers to chronicle a series of school-related experiences, but the experiences were not united under a common theme and did not trace the authors' development in a particular literacy. One narrative was essentially an extended description of the author's high school graduation ceremony. The fourth was written by Alison, who despite writing about verbal communication, did not highlight or understand her narrative's connection to literacy. Alison's paper is further discussed later in this chapter and in Chapter Four.

other than the technical skills of reading, writing, and language use. This most often involved acknowledging the fact that *literacy* can be defined in multiple ways. Students who only discuss one form of literacy can also demonstrate a meta-awareness of literacy by pointing to the social contexts surrounding literacy, whether it be a specific context (defining the literacies involved in a particular sport or school organization, for instance) or some more general sense of social context (as in Anne Ruggles Gere's definition of *literacy* as the ability to communicate with a community about its important issues, quoted on the New Literacies Narrative assignment prompt).[58]

The fact that the majority of students chose topics that were not explicitly related to school-based literacy points to an awareness that *literacy* can be defined in particular communities. Further insight can be gained by looking for instances where students acknowledge multiliteracies and alternative literacies in their written work. For instance, it is interesting to note that only two students used the plural form *literacies* in their writing. While this may seem discouraging at first, a more thorough look at the words students associate with *literacy* in their texts reveals that students are, in fact, acknowledging the existence of multiple literacies even when they use the singular form. By examining which words are frequently collocated with *literacy*, we can focus in on what might be useful to analyze, patterns that might otherwise be overlooked in close reading of the essays. In this case, the collocation information related to *literacy* indicates that students' preference for the singular form may be due to phrasing rather than a lack of meta-awareness. The twenty words[59] most frequently collocated with *literacy* in the corpus of student work are presented in table 4 below.

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[58] See Appendix A.
[59] The WordSmith-generated list includes 257 words. While not all of this information is helpful, I list twenty words in the table in order to provide a somewhat comprehensive idea of which words students associated with *literacy* while still ensuring that the table is easily readable.

Table 4

Twenty Words Most Frequently Collocated with *Literacy*[60]

Word	Texts	Total	Total Left	Total Right	L5	L4	L3	L2	L1	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5
THE	34	96	48	48	9	11	4	8	16	4	22	6	11	5
OF	29	90	61	29	6	6	4	12	33	16	1	3	4	5
TO	30	74	44	30	6	7	15	14	2	2	4	5	11	8
IS	31	68	21	47	9	2	5	4	1	29	4	6	6	2
A	23	63	45	18	4	13	6	2	20	1	4	7	2	4
I	28	61	27	34	8	6	9	3	1	7	13	4	6	4
AND	23	44	18	26	5	2	4	4	3	8	4	3	7	4
THAT	19	36	13	23	0	1	3	2	7	9	2	3	5	4
IN	21	36	12	24	4	1	2	4	1	12	1	2	2	7
MY	20	35	23	12	0	6	10	0	7	0	7	1	1	3
YOU	17	33	7	26	4	2	0	1	0	3	4	3	10	6
NARRATIVE	23	31	3	28	1	0	0	0	2	28	0	0	0	0
IT	15	27	11	16	4	4	1	1	1	2	3	2	3	6
AS	14	24	9	15	2	3	0	4	0	6	2	1	2	4
WAS	12	22	6	16	3	1	1	1	0	3	3	6	2	2
DIFFERENT	10	19	12	7	0	3	7	0	2	0	1	4	0	2
BE	10	18	8	10	3	3	1	0	1	0	4	2	3	1
CAN	11	18	6	12	3	1	0	2	0	6	1	2	2	1
ABOUT	9	17	12	5	2	2	2	3	3	0	2	2	0	1
WHAT	6	16	8	8	0	0	2	5	1	0	6	1	1	0

As we can see, the articles *the* and *a* are frequently collocated with *literacy*. When these articles are collocated with *literacy*, they frequently appear in the L1 position (the most common position of *a* and the second-most-common position of *the*). The use of articles in the phrases "a literacy" and "the literacy" could imply that *literacy* can be defined in more than one way.

Because *literacy* is an abstract noun, it is not typically used with an article, particularly when referencing the commonly accepted definition of *literacy* as the ability to read and write. The indefinite article *a* clearly implies that the literacy under discussion is one of multiple. For

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[60] The abbreviations refer to the position of the word in relation to the word *literacy*. For instance, "the" occurs nine times in the L5 position, meaning it appears five words to the left of *literacy* nine times in the corpus. It occurs four times in the R1 position, indicating that it appears directly to the right of *literacy* four times.

example, Jane begins the last paragraph of her narrative about soccer literacy with this sentence: "A literacy can change a person in various of ways, and being a literate member can help develop an individual in becoming successful and even more knowledge about doings in one's literacy." Had Jane left out the indefinite article and begun the sentence with "literacy can change a person," the sentence would have taken on a different meaning, perhaps one that aligns with the *literacy equals success* master narrative Kara Poe Alexander identifies in her taxonomy of cultural narratives students employ in their literacy narratives. By including the article, Jane instead broadens her meaning to include literacy in any number of practices—it is not just print-based literacy that can lead to success; literacy in soccer or another practice holds similar benefits.

Even the definite article *the* could indicate that the author is aware of multiliteracies because *literacy*, as an abstract noun, is typically not used with an article. For example, take the following sentence from Walter J. Ong's "Literacy and Orality in Our Times": "Even more importantly, the aims of literacy in the past were not quite the same as now" (1). In this case, it would seem unusual or even incorrect if Ong had written about "the aims of the literacy in the past." When students use the phrase "the literacy" in their papers, the definite article marks a specific form of literacy (one of many literacies). A concordance analysis of the phrase "the literacy" confirms this: of the sixteen occurrences of the phrase, twelve occur as part of the longer phrase "the literacy of" (discussed below); three occur in the context of introducing some alternative literacy that serves as the author's topic (in phrases such as "the literacy I will discuss"), and one is from Kim, an English Language Learner from Vietnam, who uses the article in error. Fiona demonstrates how the usage of *the* can indicate an awareness of multiliteracies when she introduces her narrative with the following sentence: "The literacy I will

discuss in my paper is the difference in the literacy of my families cultural between my summer home of Alexandria Minnesota, and my year-round home of Hutchinson Kansas." Here, the definite article indicates the likelihood of a restrictive element (in this case, the restrictive modifier "I will discuss in my paper"). Rather than discussing literacy as a general, unquestioned construct, students are specifying particular literacies in their narratives.

The relative positions of several other words frequently collocated with *literacy* also reveal the ways that students may be defining the term within their narratives. For instance, the word *of* is found most frequently in the L1 position (thirty-three occurrences), meaning that it appears most frequently directly to the left of *literacy*. The phrasal construction "of literacy," in which "literacy" is positioned as the object of the preposition "of," can indicate areas where students are relating literacy to other ideas, practices, or entities mentioned in the sentence. Of the thirty-three occurrences of the phrase "of literacy," four appear as part of the longer phrase "definition of literacy."[61] Twelve occur in the construction "form/s of literacy" and six in the construction "type/s of literacy," constructions that imply that literacy can take many forms and can therefore be defined in multiple ways. For example, Eve writes: "Different types of literacy hold different learning curves." In this sentence, she acknowledges the existence of multiple literacies, all with their own acquisition processes. Lucy, who writes ". . . music is its own form of literacy," is similarly positioning her chosen literacy as one of many.

This is supported by looking at the second-most-common position of *of*. As shown in table 4 above, *of* appears in the R1 position sixteen times. This points to another frequently occurring construction: "literacy of." This suggests that students are situating the definition of *literacy* within specific communities or practices. Indeed, all sixteen instances of this phrase

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[61] I discuss the ways in which students define *literacy* below.

"literacy of" refer to the literacy involved in the student's chosen topic: the social rules of a particular high school (eight occurrences, all from the same paper), dance (two occurrences, same paper), sports (two occurrences, different papers), Boy Scouts (one), family roles (one), the United States Army (one), and reading (one). This is perhaps not surprising, given the variety of topics students chose for their narratives. However, it points to the possibility that some students are choosing to define (or redefine) *literacy* explicitly in their narratives.

Interestingly, the words *read*, *reading*, *write*, and *writing* are not strongly associated with *literacy* in the student texts, as illustrated in table 5 below. The first four rows reflect the rankings for the individual words and the bottom two reflect the rankings for the combined word forms.

Table 5

Read, *Reading*, *Write*, and *Writing* Collocated with *Literacy*

Rank	Word	Total	Total Left	Total Right	L5	L4	L3	L2	L1	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5
87	WRITING	5	1	4	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	1	0	1
89	READ	5	2	3	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
92	READING	5	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	2
141	WRITE	3	3	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
------	--------------	------	-------	-------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
32	READING /READ	10	2	8	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	5
46	WRITING /WRITE	8	4	4	0	0	0	4	0	2	0	1	0	1

The words *written* and *wrote* did not occur in the WordSmith-generated collocation range, which includes 253 words. This may suggest that when students discuss literacy, they do not always ground their explanations in printed text. It could also indicate that when students do mention reading and writing in relation to literacy, there is enough development and discussion (indicated

by a greater distance between *literacy* and words related to reading/writing) that the definition of *literacy* is not conflated with reading and writing.

Several words associated with alternative literacies are mentioned almost as often as words related to reading and writing even when *read/reading* and *write/writing* are considered together. *Soccer* occurs ten times, tying *reading/read*. *Game* occurs seven times, nearly as often as *write/writing*. This is significant, especially considering the fact that *soccer* and *game* are both related to sports, one of many alternative literacies students wrote about. *Non-traditional* is collocated with *literacy* as often as *writing*, with five total occurrences. This could indicate that, while reading and writing are associated with literacy in student texts, they are two of many practices associated with literacy. This could point to students' meta-awareness of the variable definitions and contexts of *literacy*.

The frequencies of occurrence of several words collocated with *literate* offer further insight into the ways in which students discuss literacy in their narratives, as reflected in table 6 below.

Table 6

Twenty Words Most Frequently Collocated with *Literate*

Word	Texts	Total	Total Left	Total Right	L5	L4	L3	L2	L1	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5
IN	27	62	8	54	4	2	1	1	0	50	4	0	0	0
BE	17	28	26	2	0	2	3	3	18	0	1	1	0	0
AND	15	25	13	12	5	2	3	3	0	5	0	4	0	3
BEING	15	24	21	3	0	1	0	2	18	0	1	0	0	2
OF	16	24	5	19	2	1	0	2	0	0	3	1	11	4
IS	12	19	10	9	4	2	1	0	3	2	2	1	1	3
BECOME	12	19	19	0	0	0	0	3	16	0	0	0	0	0
YOU	11	18	10	8	1	1	3	5	0	1	0	3	3	1
THAT	9	15	8	7	2	0	5	1	0	0	0	2	2	3
IT	6	12	6	6	0	6	0	0	0	1	1	1	3	0
SOCCER	4	12	4	8	1	0	3	0	0	0	4	3	0	1

HOW	9	12	11	1	1	1	9	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
BECAME	9	10	10	0	0	0	0	5	5	0	0	0	0	0
AM	8	10	9	1	0	1	1	0	7	0	0	0	0	1
BECOMING	9	9	9	0	0	0	0	4	5	0	0	0	0	0
HAVE	8	9	4	5	0	1	0	3	0	1	0	0	2	2
ARE	6	9	6	3	1	0	0	2	3	0	0	2	1	0
THIS	7	9	4	5	3	0	0	1	0	0	3	1	1	0
CAN	6	9	5	4	1	0	0	4	0	2	1	0	0	1
GAME	4	8	2	6	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	6	0	0

The first word in the list, *in*, occurs fifty times in the L1 position, in the phrase "literate in." The use of this phrase suggests a meta-awareness of literacy, as students are discussing literacy in the context of particular communities or practices. It is not enough to say that one is literate; one has to be literate *in* something. Most often, the word directly to the right of this phrase is the author's chosen literacy ("literate in dance," "literate in cultural sensitivity," "literate in the art of pitching," etc.). Interestingly, two students (Martha and Susannah) even wrote that they were "literate in writing," demonstrating an awareness that even their print-based literacy must be positioned as one of several possible literacies. Several students use the phrase "literate in" in more general statements about the contextual nature of literacy, as when Martha goes on to note that "we are all literate in our field of study or education."

As in the case of *literacy*, words relating to reading and writing were less strongly associated with *literate* than words related to other topics (*soccer* and *game*, for instance). In fact, *writing* is the only formulation that appears in the WordSmith-generated list of collocates, and it is only collocated with *literate* three times (ranked 72nd in the list). The words *dance* (35th), *baseball* (59th), *relationships* (66th), *community* (68th), and *coach* (71st) are all ranked higher than words related to reading and writing. However, this is likely less significant than the relative lack of association between formulations of *read/write* and *literacy*, as students in the corpus define the word *literate* less often than they do *literacy*. When students use the word *literate* to refer to

the ability to read and/or write, they likely do not feel the need to specify that they are referring to reading and writing, meaning these words would not appear in the list of the words most frequently collocated with *literate*.

It is possible that these patterns exist because, in student texts, *literacy* and *literate* are so tied to reading and writing that the words do not even need to be mentioned. However, close examination of the content of the texts does not support this. As noted in Chapter Two, I categorized students' definitions of *literacy* according to theme, placing definitions in multiple categories where appropriate. The frequency of occurrence for each definition type, including the implicit definitions of *literacy* discussed in the previous chapter, is presented in table 7 below in order from most to least frequent.[62]

Table 7

Students' Definitions of *Literacy*

	Occurrences[63]		Texts[64]	
	Number	**Percentage**	**Number**	**Percentage**
IMPLICIT DEFINITION OF *LITERACY*	331	84.0%	91	64.5%
LITERACY AS COMMUNITY PRACTICE	26	6.6%	21	14.9%
READING AND WRITING PLUS	17	4.3%	12	8.5%
LITERACY AS COMMUNICATION	14	3.6%	12	8.5%
READING AND WRITING	6	1.5%	5	3.5%
TOTAL	**394**	**100%**	**141**	**100%**

As illustrated in the table, many students chose to explain their form of literacy by explaining what a literate person needs to know or be able to do within their chosen community,

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[62] See Chapter Two for detailed descriptions of each definition type.
[63] The number of times this definition type occurred in students' New Literacies Narratives and accompanying reflections.
[64] The number of student texts in which this definition type occurred.

defining *literacy* implicitly rather than offering a formal definition of the term. Statements that implicitly defined *literacy* occurred 331 times throughout students' narratives and reflections. Notably, only twenty students' narratives did not include statements classified as *implicit definition of literacy*. Examples of statements that define *literacy* implicitly include Courtney's explanation that, in order to become literate in serving at the restaurant where she is employed, she had to "learn the menu, learn to read the customer and learn how to manage [her] time so that [her] customers are always happy." Amir, who wrote his narrative about his experience as a sneaker collector, explains some of the terminology that a person would need to know to be literate in "sneaker culture": ". . . the correct term to call the shoe enthusiast are 'sneaker heads'. That people that buy shoes, not because they like them per say, but because it's the newest thing out are called 'hype beasts'."

While many students center their implicit definitions of *literacy* on language, not all do. Rather, several students' explanations view *literacy* similarly to Gee: as mastery of a community's Discourses.[65] Some focus on particular attitudes, beliefs, or feelings a literate person needs to adopt. For example, Hamid describes the embodied literacies that relate to soccer: ". . . you need to make quick decisions on what you should do whenever you have the ball. For instance, you are supposed to decide whether to pass the ball or shoot it as quickly as possible." He then goes on to explain one of the most important attitudes a literate soccer player needs to adopt: "[My coach] advised me to keep my dreams ahead of me when I play. He said, 'Look at the goal you want to reach, look forward to accomplish new things, and seek to break the previous records and put your own records'." While these aspects of soccer literacy do not

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[65] As noted in Chapter One, Gee defines *Discourses* (with a capital *D*) as the behavioral conventions, speech patterns, clothing choices, and other norms of a given community.

focus on language, they are as essential as language and communication are to developing full literacy in soccer.

Even narratives that focused on academic experiences centered on reading and writing sometimes implicitly defined *literacy* by explaining what, beyond reading and writing, the student had to learn to be academically literate. Zach explains that knowing the academic expectations of your school is crucial to academic literacy, as he discovered when he transferred to an academically rigorous high school. Several students described how a knowledge of their learning disabilities enabled them to become literate by their schools' standards. Martha explains how writing a successful college paper involves more than the skill of putting words on a page:

> Now that I'm in college, I realized that being literate in writing is knowing what you have to talk about. When we are handed essays for class, yes we are given a prompt we must talk about, but I also know that most professors want you to write to what they want to hear rather then what you want to talk about. Being literate is not always about what we know, but about what we are learning along the way. . . .

She goes on to explain that many professors look for proficiency in "ideas, voice, word choice, organization, sentence fluency, and conventions,"[66] and points to several ways to get help in these areas. In this writer's estimation, knowledge of instructors' expectations is as essential to academic literacy as the skills of reading and writing.

In the most common type of explicit definition, *literacy as community practice*, the student specifies in their definition that literacy must be situated within a particular community. As explained in Chapter Two, some students contextualized these definitions in a specific

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[66] Education Northwest lists these factors as the "six key areas that identify excellence in writing" (Prior 16). Their system is widely used in classrooms, and it is likely that the author was exposed to it in high school or even before high school.

community (the focus of their narrative). For instance, in his narrative about learning the literacies of the United States Army, David writes: "In order to be considered a literate member of the United States Army there are fundamentals for addressing a superior or subordinate soldier, specific terminology and acronyms used on a day to day basis, and proper customs and courtesies of the Army." In this sentence, the author provides a specific, succinct definition of what *literacy* means in the context of the Army. Eliza, in describing her adjustment to a new high school, writes: "I took these mental notes and started to slowly learn the literacy of the school, which means I started to understand how the school worked and how people interact with one another." She situates this more general description of this literacy in a more detailed discussion of how she learned the "unwritten rules" of this community, including study habits, social groups, and how students dress.

Other students in the *literacy as community practice* category offer more general definitions of *literacy* that specify that it must be considered in the context of a particular community. Often, students use these definitions to set up their discussions of a more specific literacy or as their concluding idea. For example, Linus writes: "An essential part of communication, literacy is the ability to express your knowledge to a specific audience in a manner that will be meaningful to them."[67] However, these general statements about literacy occurring in the contexts of particular communities were much less common than definitions that situated literacy within one specific community, occurring only six times.

Twelve students used reading and writing as a starting point in their definitions, adding further elaboration or restrictions. These definitions were classified as *reading and writing plus*. Many of these students framed these definitions by explaining how their views on literacy have

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[67] This was also included in the *literacy as communication* category.

changed throughout the unit or assignment, as with Courtney, who writes in her narrative: "A few weeks ago if you asked me to define the word 'literacy' I would tell you that it is having the ability to read and write. While this is true there is more to that word than I thought. Because of this unit I was able to learn that literacy is also having knowledge in a specific area." Another twelve students heavily emphasized communication in their definitions of *literacy*; the *literacy as communication* theme occurs fourteen times. Examples include Eliza's definition of *literacy* as it relates to her school and David's definition of *literacy* within the US Army, both referenced above. It also includes Luke's definition of "soccer literacy": "Soccer literacy is the full understanding of soccer. Being able to discuss with anyone who enjoys the sport and have a detailed conversation with them."

Only five students reference the definition of *literacy* solely as the ability to read and write (often in those exact terms). These five students represent 3.5% of the students who defined *literacy* in their narratives and .045% of the total number of student participants. Notably, they all qualified their definition in some way. Two used phrases indicating that the definition was their own personal definition ("To me, literacy is . . ." and "My definition of traditional literacy is . . .," respectively). In positioning their definitions as personal to them, they are implicitly acknowledging that other people can have different definitions.

George makes a similar acknowledgment of other definitions in his paraphrase of a common dictionary definition of *literacy*: "Literacy is known as the quality or state of being literate, especially the ability to read and write." Though he emphasizes traditional literacy in this definition, the first half of the sentence does present a definition that could potentially be broadened, and his narrowing of the definition in the second half implies that he is aware of this. Martha (quoted above), despite equating literacy with reading and writing in the opening

sentence of her New Literacies Narrative, then places this definition in several contexts, mentioning that being a doctor or lawyer involves literacy before noting that "we are all literate in our field of study or education." Finally, Susannah indicates that her definition of *literacy* is one of many by specifying that the term is "traditionally understood as the ability to read and write," implying that there are other, less traditional ways of interpreting the term. Later in her narrative, she refers to writing letters as "an universal literacy," using the indefinite article to indicate that it is one of several possible literacies. These cases suggest that even when students choose to focus their New Literacies Narratives on reading and writing, they position the conventional definition of *literacy* as one of many, contextualizing their definitions in their knowledge of New Literacies.

Additionally, students (whether or not they wrote about an alternative literacy) sometimes made statements in their narratives acknowledging the fact that *literacy* can have multiple definitions. These statements did not always occur in definitions of the term (and thus were not classified according to the categories presented in table 7 above). For instance, David writes in his reflection: "I really enjoyed the process of learning how to write a literacy narrative, and learning about the different literacies within the United States." Cecilia concludes her New Literacies Narrative with the following statement: "To be fully literate in something takes a lot of work. Each community requires completely different aspects to be considered cultured in the group, but after 14 years of playing basketball, I would consider myself to be literate." These statements acknowledging the multiplicity of definitions of *literacy* occurred thirty-six times over twenty-five students' written work (22.5% of the 111 students included in the study).

Even students who chose to focus on language and print-based literacy often showed awareness of the influence of cultural context on their literacy development and an

understanding of literacy as a cultural phenomenon. This can be seen in the work of one student,

Kim, who wrote her New Literacies Narrative about learning English in her Vietnamese school.

In her narrative, titled "English," Kim explains how the complicated history between the United

States and Vietnam manifests itself in Vietnamese English education:

> After the Vietnam War, or as we call it the "Resistance Against the U.S.", ended, children
>
> were taught that Americans tried to take our land and to never trust these outsiders. Yet,
>
> many of us are sent overseas to an American institution by our parents and elementary
>
> students in Vietnam are taught English so they can have, as my dad usually put it, a
>
> "brighter future."

Kim resisted the recitation and grammar-focused instruction of her teachers, gaining most of her

knowledge of English through American music, television, and advertisements. Other students

who wrote more traditional literacy narratives showed a similar awareness of the social and

cultural contexts of their literacy development. In fact, only four students did not discuss the

influence of context on their literacy development in their narratives, suggesting that the vast

majority of students developed a meta-awareness of the social contexts influencing literacy

development.

Cultural Narratives and Genre Conventions

In the previous chapter, I explained how I adapted Alexander's methodology to explore

how the dominant cultural narratives she identifies as being characteristic of the literacy

narrative genre manifest themselves in students' New Literacies Narratives.[68] In Alexander's

study of students' literacy narratives, she found that these narratives were dominated by a theme

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[68] See the "Cultural Narratives" subsection of the "Analysis of Content" section.

she calls *literacy equals success*. However, in my analysis of New Literacies Narratives, I found

this to be the least common episode[69] type. In fact, I noticed that many of the episodes I

identified did not fit any of the categories Alexander outlines. Table 8 compares the relative

frequencies with which these narratives occurred in her literacy narratives compared to my New

Literacies Narratives, with the episodes that didn't fit one of her categories classified as *other*.

Table 8

Cultural Narratives Present in New Literacies Narratives and Traditional Literacy Narratives

	SLADEK 2016		ALEXANDER 2011	
	Number	**Percentage**	**Number**	**Percentage**
HERO	95	12.0%	112	15%
OUTSIDER	75	9.5%	36	5%
CHILD PRODIGY	65	8.2%	81	11%
LITERACY WINNER	63	8%	56	8%
REBEL	41	5.2%	39	5%
VICTIM	36	4.5%	137	19%
SUCCESS	29	3.7%	219	30%
OTHER	388	49.0%	54	7%
TOTAL	**792**	**100%**	**734**	**100%**

As depicted in this table, almost half of the episodes present in students' New Literacies

Narratives resisted classification according to the cultural narratives Alexander identifies, which

points to a developing meta-awareness of the literacy narrative genre. Students do not seem to be

uncritically reproducing the literacy narratives they've been exposed to through the media in the

way that the students in Alexander's corpus were. This could indicate that students are aware of

the prevalence of these cultural narratives and are consciously pushing back against them. It

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[69] As mentioned in Chapter Two, I considered an "episode" to be any unit or anecdote with a definable beginning, middle, and end.

could also be that, for students who write about alternative literacies, the shift in topic does not prompt them to access the same cultural narratives that are typically seen in literacy narratives. Possible reasons for this pattern and its implications for the literacy narrative genre are further discussed in Chapter Four.

Those episodes that did fit Alexander's cultural narratives did so in a different distribution. Notably, the *literacy equals success* theme, which accounted for 30% of the narratives in Alexander's corpus, only represent in 3.7% of the episodes in students' New Literacies Narratives. The most frequently-occurring cultural narrative in Alexander's corpus was the least common in mine. This seems to suggest that the New Literacies Narrative does not prompt students to access this common cultural narrative, Graff's "literacy myth," in the same way the traditional literacy narrative does. Of the twenty-six[70] students who did invoke the *literacy equals success* theme, eight focused their narratives on their experiences as readers, writers, or students. These narratives, despite their seeming acceptance of the literacy myth, almost always grounded their assertions that their literacy will lead to success in their specific experience. For instance, Maria wrote a narrative that in many ways conforms to the "literacy narrative arc" discussed earlier.[71] Yet, she did add a caveat to the myth that literacy inevitably leads to success: "Literacy is important because that is how we become powerful and successful in life. The power of literacy isn't one being able to read and write but also one being able to use those skills effectively." Though the first sentence in this passage appears to be an unquestioning echoing of the literacy myth, the second shows an attempt to qualify it, which could point to a developing awareness that this myth can be questioned. Both the content and the relative infrequency of the *literacy equals success* narrative in students' New Literacies Narratives

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[70] Three students' narratives included two episodes each that were categorized under this theme.
[71] Maria's narrative is discussed later in the section.

suggests that students are drawing conclusions that do not engage with one of the central, potentially problematic cultural tropes that Alexander identifies, pointing to a more advanced, meta-aware understanding of literacy.

Perhaps one of the most significant findings in my analysis of the cultural narratives students utilize in their New Literacies Narratives is that only two narratives in the corpus followed the "literacy narrative arc." As discussed in Chapter One, the "literacy narrative arc" describes an organizational pattern commonly found in student literacy narratives: the student opens by describing their early love for reading and/or writing, explains how they lost this passion due to the influence of the school system, and concludes with a statement reaffirming the importance of literacy (Sladek 63). Maria, quoted earlier, opens by detailing her early love for Dr. Seuss books and describing how her parents would read to her before bed. She was a voracious reader until middle school, when she was upset to find that her teachers would assign her books to read. She stopped reading assigned books in high school, when her teacher assigned "awful" books such as *1984* and *Of Mice and Men*. In keeping with the "literacy narrative arc" format, she closes with a general paragraph about the importance of literacy. The other narrative follows the exact same format, minus the references to specific book titles.

Despite the formulaic nature of these narratives, both open with a paragraph acknowledging the broadness of the term *literacy* and explaining that their paper will focus on reading and writing specifically. Even more importantly, these are the *only* narratives that conformed to the "literacy narrative arc." This is quite a departure from my experience teaching the traditional literacy narrative, when the majority of papers conformed to this pattern. This rarity could indicate that the New Literacies Narrative prompted students to tell their stories in more original ways or even push back against the genre conventions of the traditional literacy

narratives that they were exposed to and discussed in class. It could even point to the development of an emerging academic genre with its own conventions, a possibility I discuss further in Chapter Four.

Instructors' Perceptions of Student Meta-Awareness

In their interviews, four of the five participating instructors felt that their students ended the unit with a fuller understanding of literacy than when they started. Moira, the only instructor (other than myself) who had previously taught Beaufort's literacy narrative, particularly noticed a change between her students' New Literacies Narratives and her students' submissions when she taught the traditional literacy narrative. When she taught Beaufort's assignment, she noticed a pattern similar to the one I identified as the "literacy narrative arc," which she described in her interview:

> I think my main impression that very first semester was just so much repetition. So much so that it almost felt like . . . is this really even your own story? It seemed like they knew what was expected of them, in a way, like they just weren't prompted to think about anything in a new way. . . . A lot of that would be something about, like, "I loved learning when I was young and I loved reading and then . . . I had that horrible teacher that told me I had to structure my ideas . . . and so now I hate writing and reading and it's because my teacher stole my magic." Or something like that . . . a lot of learning to read and the takeaway from that is like, "oh, you just have to keep trying and then you will understand," or a lot of oversimplified ideas about how we learn . . . and largely disconnected from any sort of larger context.

This was not the case with her students' New Literacies Narratives or class discussions. She continued:

> . . . most of my students in both sections took a more nontraditional approach . . . and so in that way it felt like they were writing about something for the first time. So they were writing a paper about like being on the softball team that was different than most of the papers they'd ever written about their experience in softball, right? Like, they're having to reach for ideas, and . . . I think that for the most part they were really thinking about their experiences in an entirely new way. . . . I think it was . . . like a little bit more wrestling or struggle to understand exactly what we were doing, exactly what might constitute this form of literacy.

By the end of the unit, Moira's students were able to independently identify other literacies that even she wouldn't have thought of, such as the literacies involved in gang activity (hand signals, the colors worn by various gangs, etc.).

Moira's students also developed awareness of the cultural capital attached to certain literacies at the expense of others:

> [They were] talking about like hierarchies of literacy and . . . [how] a certain kind of degree or like traditional literacy and how far you can push that in your degree tends to have like this easily recognizable clout and admiration from outsiders . . . And then recognizing, just taking a moment to recognize . . . how elaborate some of these other forms of literacy are and being able to just acknowledge that. . . . So that was another, like, larger takeaway was thinking about hierarchies of literacy and how much respect we give to different communities or don't give to certain communities that have intricate, elaborate forms of literacy. So that was another thing that was really exciting.

In her interview, Moira indicated that her students were able to develop an understanding of how literacy is embedded in various contexts, as well as the labels and values society assigns to different literacies. This is the type of meta-awareness the New Literacies Narrative is designed to foster.

Erin, Sasha, and Livi also expressed satisfaction with their students' meta-awareness of literacy in their interviews. They each stated that the level of student understanding was at or above the level they expected. Sasha points specifically to one student, Chloe, who wrote her New Literacies Narrative about her experience working as a nanny, noting that she "talked about . . . [how] a lot of women don't consider nannying a real job . . . But then she got into the amazing, really detailed intricacies of the job and how it was a literacy, how it was such a skill, and why it mattered. . . . She now has a better . . . social understanding of the importance of motherhood." Livi acknowledged that her students initially struggled with this new way of thinking about literacy, but that she was ultimately impressed with their work. She also noticed that students who centered their narratives on an alternative literacy were generally able to incorporate more detail into their papers. When discussing students' levels of meta-awareness, Moira, Sasha, and Livi spoke more about the narratives centered on alternative literacies.

Yet, the instructors did note that this meta-awareness was not uniform across all students. Erin mentioned in her interview that her students who wrote about alternative literacies often struggled with articulating those literacies in their papers, though there were several outstanding examples. Sasha estimated that only "55-60%" of her students displayed an adequate meta-awareness of literacy in their essays and attributed the other students' lack of success to burnout, as she taught the unit toward the end of the semester. Moira, while generally pleased with her students' understanding of literacy, did note that several students were only able to describe their

literacies in vague terms; for example, a student would state that football has its own language, but would not describe that language. This is something I have also noticed as an instructor, and I believe it is primarily due to the newness and difficulty of reconceptualizing literacy, a sentiment that was echoed by Moira, Sasha, Livi, and Erin. It requires a major shift in thinking for many students, so it is unsurprising that they would develop different levels of understanding. Yet, the fact that four of the five instructors were pleased with their students' level of meta-awareness points to the assignment's success in that regard.

Only Janet felt that her students did not leave the unit with a greater meta-awareness of literacy. In fact, she believed that "not many students wanted to write about literacy" at all, though this may be attributable to her own lack of critical meta-awareness of literacy. Though Janet did express some level of awareness regarding the connection between literacy and social context, she continued to associate literacy with reading and writing (and primarily with academic pursuits). In fact, Janet's student Alison stated in her interview that Janet specifically asked her students to write about an experience related to English or school. Because many of her students instead chose to write about alternative literacies, Janet struggled to see how many of them connected to her idea of literacy, perhaps leading to her negative perception of her students' understanding of literacy. This is discussed further in the next chapter, along with a more extended exploration of how instructors' goals and teaching style impacted student understanding of the New Literacies Narrative.

Self-Report of Student Meta-Awareness

Because of the low number of students interviewed, the majority of students' self-reports of meta-awareness can be found in their written reflections. Often, statements indicating a

developing meta-awareness of literacy were given in response to the questions regarding the most challenging aspect of the unit and what the student learned in the unit. Because these were counted as examples of self-reports of cognitive engagement, they are discussed in that section below. In this section, I focus on the critical meta-awareness demonstrated by the students who were interviewed.

Five students participated in interviews: Stacey, Gabriela, Leighton, Roger, and Alison. Stacey, quoted in the previous chapter, tied her experience working as a barista to literacy by relating the abbreviations baristas use for prepared drinks to language development:

> And I guess it goes down to . . . what you are used to, what you're taught with. Because each of these people who are working in the stores were taught by different people, and so that's kind of how a dialect for a language works, too. They're taught different languages by other people . . . if we were to, like, just make . . . learning how to be a barista as a giant allegory for . . . learning the language, since . . . how you grew up is where you were trained and how you were trained. And so, I mean, we do have an official guidebook, just like the United States has an official Standard American English. Sort of a dictionary and set of rules . . . but oftentimes we don't actually follow it and just go with what's instinctively natural for us.

Though Stacey focuses on language with this statement, her ability to tie the terminology used in her job to larger language issues shows an ability to contextualize this particular aspect of her literacy.

Leighton's definition of *literacy* also centers on the idea of community. She stated in her interview that *literacy* means "being a part of a community where people don't necessarily know, unless you're part of that community, what everything means." Roger, whose classroom-

focused narrative did not make a noticeable attempt to contextualize his literacy development, still noted in his interview that "to be literate in a community . . . you really have to be a part of that community." He was able to remember his instructor, Moira's, explanation of the literacies involved in navigating the world using a wheelchair and, when asked, could identify the literacies involved in his high school football team.

Gabriela similarly used communication to frame how her understanding of literacy evolved with the New Literacies Narrative unit:

> I didn't really have a definition for before, and if I did, it was probably . . . being able to be [fluent] in speaking in English and . . . knowing how to write and describe certain things in different types of styles. And now I would describe literacy as a unique understanding on an intake and being able to dissect and analyze and process something that no one else has thought about before. And able to put that into words so that a general public could understand what you're saying while still being specific to what you're writing. So, the literacy itself is just a small step into analyzing a new way to understand something from an individual's perspective.

In her new definition, Gabriela emphasizes that a truly literate person must be able to communicate their knowledge to "a general public," a component of literacy that was lacking from her pre-English 101 definition.

Gabriela displayed perhaps the greatest meta-awareness of literacy in her interview, tying her developing understanding of literacy to other situations and contexts. She was enrolled in a calculus course during the Fall 2015 semester, and she came to realize that being successful in class depended as much on socialization into the literacies of the mathematical discourse community as it did on quantitative reasoning ability:

With the way math professors think about it and I'd connected that to sociology because

[of] . . . the way they try to socialize you to think about math. Different from the way that

you're supposed to think about it. Different from the way you're supposed to actually act

it out. Each of those is different . . . because those who are literate in calculus, you know,

have a totally different perspective on how to teach it or how to learn from it . . . And I

was one of those people who didn't know it at all. . . . Like, the way [my professor] was

talking about it and understanding these numbers, I didn't really understand where he was

coming from. . . . And I was just left, like, completely blundered and whatnot. The way

that he was talking about how it's supposed to all go together . . . he was literate in a

language that I had no idea what he was talking about . . . his first problem with math and

the way he learned it was probably different from the way that I'd learned it. And so I'd

been socialized in math in a different way, learning how to go by the rules, "*a* times *x*,"

learning by the formulas rather than learning by the concepts. . . . And so that connected

to English. . . . I was taking . . . what I was learning from sociology and English and

putting it to each one of my other classes.

With this quote, Gabriela demonstrates an advanced meta-awareness of the contextual nature of

literacy as well as the ability to successfully transfer the knowledge gained in the New Literacies

Narrative unit to seemingly unrelated coursework. She also explained in her interview that her

knowledge of the various literacies embedded in communities enabled her to better understand

the perspectives of people different from her and helped her analyze how figures like Donald

Trump can use these literacies for their own advancement.

Of the five students who were interviewed, only Alison continued to view literacy as

synonymous with academic pursuits. Alison wrote her narrative about overcoming her fear of

public speaking in a speech class. However, while the narrative vividly describes her fear and her experience standing in front of the classroom, it does not explain what she needed to do to become literate in public speaking. When asked in her interview if her thoughts about literacy had changed over the course of the unit, she initially hesitated before replying, "I wouldn't really say it has. Whenever I think of literacy, I think of, like, reading responses . . . course essays and stuff like that . . . But as a whole . . . I'm not sure how I would describe my paper, how it would go to literacy. . . . I mean, it's an essay talking about personal experiences and stuff like that. But other than that . . ." I believe Alison's lack of critical meta-awareness of literacy can be at least partially attributed to her instructor, Janet's, own lack of understanding of the contextual nature of literacy and the fact that she didn't emphasize it in her teaching and scaffolding of the assignment, a possibility that is further explored in the following chapter. However, most students, whether or not they were interviewed, did show an adequate meta-awareness of literacy based on evidence from their narratives and reflections.

The New Literacies Narrative and Student Engagement

In this section, I explore the degree to which students signaled cognitive (mental) and affective (emotional) engagement with the New Literacies Narrative assignment and unit. I begin by discussing the ways in which students' topic selection can indicate engagement. I then analyze how the cultural narratives students employ in their papers could point to both types of engagement with the assignment and unit. Finally, I discuss what instructors and the students themselves had to say about student engagement in the New Literacies Narrative.

Topic Selection

In Chapter One, I discussed how the traditional literacy narrative and academic culture in general can work to ignore or devalue students' alternative literacy practices. As previously noted, the majority of students chose to write their New Literacies Narratives about an alternative literacy. This suggests that students' academic literacy experiences may not be a topic most students find particularly engaging. Many students indicated in their reflections that they enjoyed the freedom to choose the topic of their New Literacies Narratives. The eighty-seven written reflections contained fifty-nine separate statements where students expressed their enthusiasm for their topic or said that they enjoyed the freedom to choose the literacy they focused on.

Many of these were given in response to the question asking about their favorite part of the unit, as in the case of Amir, who responded, ". . . I really enjoyed writing a paper about my sneaker addiction!" Others framed their statements in the context of what they learned in the unit. Ingrid wrote: "I also learned that writing can be enjoyable especially if I am writing about my own topic." Finally, several students advised future students that choosing a topic they enjoyed would lead to a better experience with the assignment, like Kirk, who wrote: "More importantly, wright about something you care about. A thousand words fly by like nothing when you talk about something you care about." These statements indicate that the freedom to choose their own topic may have positively influenced students' affective engagement with the unit and assignment.

Cultural Narratives and Genre Conventions

Affective Engagement

Students indicated their affective engagement not only with the topics they chose, but with the ways they told their stories. Several of the above-mentioned cultural narratives students enacted in their New Literacies Narratives point to their affective engagement with the assignment (see table 8 above). For instance, there is an interesting difference in the comparative frequencies of *victim* episodes between Alexander's corpus and the New Literacies Narratives. This episode type was second only to *literacy equals success* in Alexander's literacy narrative corpus, accounting for 19% (36) of the episodes and appearing in in 21 students' narratives. Interestingly, it was second to *literacy equals success* in my corpus in terms of *in*frequency, making up only 4.5% of episodes. This could indicate that the New Literacies Narrative does not inspire students to access these potentially painful experiences as frequently as literacy narratives that restrict the focus to reading, writing, and academic experiences. Of the twenty-one narratives that included *victim* episodes, ten focused on school experiences. Students who wanted to use their narratives to reflect on painful school experiences were given the opportunity to do so, but those who did not want to access these memories were not forced to. This is not always the case with the traditional, school-based literacy narrative, where students who have negative memories of school may be forced to relive these memories, thus fostering apathy or even negative affective engagement.[72] While some students may use their literacy narratives to work through painful literacy experiences (thus potentially producing some positive affective engagement), the relative infrequency of the *victim* narrative in my corpus indicates that most students did not

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[72] As noted in Chapter Three, Michael A. Lawson and Hal A. Lawson do not consider negative emotions or the possibility of negative affective engagement (negative emotions would signal a lack of affective engagement as per their definition). I make the distinction between "positive" and "negative" affective engagement to acknowledge the fact that even negative feelings indicate some emotional engagement with the course material.

wish to do that. The New Literacies Narrative does not pose a threat to students' affective engagement by forcing them to relate negative experiences, as any engagement with painful memories is voluntary.

Another significant difference to note between Alexander's literacy narratives and my students' New Literacies Narratives relates to the narratives placed in the *outsider* category. Forty-two students in my study included *outsider* narratives in their papers. Like Alexander, I noticed several episodes where authors positioned themselves as an outsider in relation to a literacy-related person or force, or literacy in general. In fact, as can be seen in table 8, these narratives occurred more frequently in my narratives than in Alexander's. Without further consideration, this fact may seem to undermine my previous point regarding students' confidence in their own literacies, as Alexander specifies that the authors who write these narratives "[display] a negative, apathetic, or hopeless attitude toward literacy" (615). Yet, this was often not the case in the *outsider* episodes I observed. While students did express feelings of "outsiderness" in relation to a community, literacy, or some other force, this was not always framed as a negative feeling or experience.

As with the *victim* narratives, students who wanted to use their New Literacies Narratives to reflect on painful experiences were free to do so and those who did not want to engage with these experiences were not forced to. Thus, students who gained some therapeutic effect from writing about their negative experiences could also experience positive affective engagement. Yet, even when you ignore this possibility (as it is impossible to know which students benefited in this way from engaging with their negative experiences), the majority of *outsider* episodes demonstrate positive affective engagement by positioning the incident as a step towards gaining

confidence in the author's chosen literacy. The proportion of *outsider* episodes wherein the

student displayed a negative attitude to those that did not is presented below in table 9.

Table 9

Attitudes Expressed in *Outsider* Category

	Episodes (Number)	Episodes (Percentage)	Texts
POSITIVE/NEUTRAL	46	61.3%	28
NEGATIVE	29	38.7%	23
TOTAL	75	100%	----[73]

As illustrated in this table, 61.3% of the narratives wherein students placed themselves in an

outsider position framed the experience positively, or at least without signaling negative

emotions.

Students often used these *outsider* narratives to describe their initial stages of literacy

acquisition. For example, Edward describes his introduction to the literacy of the multiplayer

online role-playing game *Aion*, which he planned to play with his friends: ". . . when we decided

the play it some started earlier than others with me being the last to Download and install the

game and . . . there was a very likely chance that I wasn't even going to get to play with them."

He goes on to describe how several failed attempts at character creation put him even further

behind his friends, and by the time he had developed sufficient literacy in *Aion*, his friends had

already moved on to another game. However, he maintains his matter-of-fact tone throughout his

narration and does not express sadness, anger, or disappointment that he was not able to play the

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[73] Forty-two narratives contained at least one episode classified as *outsider*. Twenty-one contained multiple *outsider* narratives, and nine contained both "positive/neutral" and "negative" *outsider* episodes.

game with his friends. Instead, he simply plays with other users, finding a new community of game enthusiasts. Thus, this episode was classified as "positive/neutral."

In contrast to Alexander's findings, several students who wrote New Literacies Narratives chose to portray their experiences as outsiders in a positive light. For example, Richard, who wrote his narrative about learning the literacies of college life, expressed conflicting feelings of apprehension and excitement, saying, "When I first came to college I was able to experience something that I've never have before. My first day here I was really nervous I actually was really happy to be on my own and finally make my own choices." Students also used *outsider* narratives to explain how they found or developed their literacies, sometimes following up with *insider* episodes (discussed in Chapter Two and later in this chapter) to illustrate how far they've come. Annie, who is American but spent her childhood in Japan, explained that feeling like an outsider in relation to American culture led her to major in East Asian Cultures and Languages and pursue a career teaching English in Asia. Another student, Katherine, describes her first day of Basic Military Training:

> It was an excruciatingly long few hours, and every minute felt like an eternity. . . . It was like being dropped in another country, and the native people hated tourists with a passion. I spent the next 65 days learning, sometimes the hard way, how to become literate in this environment. I learned how to speak the language, understand the rituals, and survive the 66 days of hell I had signed up for. It took me forty-five minutes to fall asleep that night. I was really here, and I needed to do whatever it took to get to the end.

Katherine's first day of Basic Training, though certainly painful at the time, is not described as being a negative experience, but as an essential part of her literacy development.

Sometimes, these *outsider* narratives were deployed for humorous effect. For instance, Jess, who wrote his narrative about developing literacy in football, includes this memorable experience:

> . . . I am nine years old and on my way to my first ever real football practice. I step out onto the rocky dirt practice field, wearing my goofy looking pads and oversized helmet, despite looking like a large bobble head, I stood there confidently next to my newfound teammates. . . . I had every play and route known to football mastered, or so I thought. The coach came up to me, and asked "Have you ever played football, son?" to which I proudly replied, "Yes, two years of flag football, sir!" At this point, he grew a grim smile on his face and screamed, "Get down and give me 10 up-downs". I stopped, and stared at him with a blank face. "I thought you said you were a football player." he exclaimed. At this point I realized that although I was still playing football, the lingo and slang words used by teams are all very unique.

Though this experience may have been distressing to a nine-year-old and could have easily been framed as such in the narrative, the student instead chooses to use it for comic effect, painting an amusing picture of his "illiterate" childhood self. When he goes on to describe his later successes in football, this episode serves as a contrast and emphasizes how much his skills have developed.

One possible explanation for the relative lack of negativity expressed in *outsider* narratives relates to the freedom students are given to choose their own topic. When students are confined to writing their literacy narratives about academic literacy, some students are inevitably forced to write about a topic that doesn't interest them or even makes them feel nervous, angry, or self-conscious. In many cases, students are writing a literacy narrative (a genre that typically ends with the author gaining literacy) about a literacy they don't feel they have mastered.

However, when students are encouraged to write about a literacy that serves as a driving force in their lives and to situate literacy in a community they belong to, they are free to ground their narratives in a literacy they *have* mastered and about which they feel confident. Again, topic selection as it relates to cultural narratives and genre conventions provides insight into students' affective engagement.

The new episode types that emerged in the New Literacies Narrative corpus can also indicate some level of affective engagement. As explained in Chapter Two, due to the number of episodes classified as *other*, I further subdivided this category into frequently occurring "new cultural narratives" and rhetorical modes.[74] Descriptions of each are included in Chapter Two. Table 10 below details the frequency of occurrence for each episode type initially classified as *other* in my New Literacies Narrative corpus, what percentage this subtype represents in the overall *other* category, and the number and percentage of texts in the corpus that contained these episodes.

Table 10

Frequency of Occurrence of *Other* Episodes in New Literacies Narratives

	Episodes		Texts[75]	
	Number	**Percentage**	**Number**	**Percentage**
New Cultural Narratives				
INSIDER	77	19.8%	44	39.6%
LESSON LEARNED	55	14.2%	41	36.9%
POSITIVE EMOTIONS	36	9.3%	28	25.2%
Rhetorical Modes				
EXPLANATION	104	26.8%	52	46.8%
"OTHER"/UNCLASSIFIED	73	18.8%	40	36.0%

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[74] The implications of the rhetorical modes are discussed in Chapter Four.
[75] These columns refer to the number and percentage of students' texts that contain each type of episode. The "total" row for these columns represents the total number of papers submitted. Because all narratives contained more than one episode type, the numbers do not add up to the numbers reflected in the "total" row.

DEFINITION OF LITERACY	25	6.4%	23	20.7%
DESCRIPTION	18	4.6%	15	13.5%
TOTAL	**388**	**100%**	**111**	**100%**

Interestingly, all of the "new cultural narratives" that emerged relate a happy event or express positivity. As illustrated in table 10, the most common "new cultural narrative" in the corpus is *insider*, wherein students express feelings of belonging in a community. In fact, this narrative appeared slightly more frequently than its opposite, the *outsider* category Alexander identifies. One example is a swimmer who writes about finding a sense of community in the University's swim team:

> . . . I love being around the thirty girls on the team because everyone on the team is so encouraging and it makes you feel like you always want to keep trying so you can be the best. . . . It is very hard but the things that make it better is that as a team we love to have fun by listening to music and dancing in the locker room before and after practice.

In this passage, the student not only expresses enthusiasm about her participation on the swim team, but demonstrates her knowledge of the community's literacy by identifying a common practice in the community. Another example is Amir, who writes:

> To this day I still consider myself a sneaker head. I really think that it has become a huge part of who I am and the people I identify with. I know shoes are just a materialistic thing but it's more than that. This culture has given me great friends who share the same interest as me . . . I honestly don't think I would have been the same person I am today if I never was interested in sneakers.

In this passage, Amir eloquently explains that sneaker collecting, which many people would consider just a hobby, can actually be a significant source of community and identity building.

When given the freedom to choose their own topics, students are able to write about topics that inspire feelings of belonging and confidence and therefore tell more positive cultural narratives. This freedom of choice and the engagement this freedom creates can be lacking in the traditional literacy narrative assignment. With the New Literacies Narrative assignment, students can take ownership of their own engagement by selecting a topic that holds significance to them. This is further reflected in the emergence of a category exclusively devoted to episodes wherein students express enthusiasm for their topics. One example of a narrative categorized under *positive emotions* is Edward's opening paragraph: "Video games are amazing. For me they have always been great escapes from reality and great ways to meet new people with similar interest as yourself. Video games specially M.M.O.R.P.G's which stands for massive multiplayer online role-playing game. It is games such as these that my form of literacy takes its place." Bethany, who centers her traditional literacy narrative on her love for the book *If I Stay* by Gale Forman (as well as its film adaptation), begins her narrative with a paragraph relating her excitement for summer reading and at finding this book in particular. When students are allowed to write about any literacy they choose, those who are passionate about their print-based literacy experiences can write about these experiences, while those who are not can select a literacy with which they are more engaged. This increases the overall level of affective engagement with literacy as a topic and leads to the emergence of new cultural narratives that express positivity. The affective engagement also has the potential to increase cognitive engagement, as students who enjoy the work they're doing are more willing to expend more cognitive effort in this work. Because this type of engagement is difficult to detect outside of self-report, it is discussed below.

Cognitive Engagement

As previously discussed, the majority of the episodes students related in their New

Literacies Narratives did not fall into one of the dominant cultural narrative patterns identified by

Alexander, and only two narratives fit the "literacy narrative arc" I identified as a defining

feature of traditional literacy narratives, suggesting that students are developing a critical meta-

awareness not only of literacy, but of the literacy narrative genre. This meta-awareness requires

students to put in the cognitive effort needed to tell their literacy stories in more original ways.

This could also indicate that students are being selective about the literacy narrative features they

choose to utilize, a process that would require cognitive engagement. In fact, the change in

rhetorical situation brought about by the redesign of the literacy narrative and the subsequent

change in student response may even be leading to the emergence of a new genre with its own

conventions, a possibility that is further explored in Chapter Four.

Fifty-two of the eighty-seven students who submitted reflections (roughly 60%) indicated

that they thought carefully about what to include in their narratives and the ways they told their

stories. In his interview, Roger explained that he wanted to surprise his readers with the second

sentence of his narrative: "English classes have always been my enemy." Describing the thinking

behind this line, he said: "I mean, I feel like a lot of people who are doing a literacy narrative . . .

about a writing experience probably won't say something like 'I hate writing.' . . . So I thought it

brought a little twist . . ." Though Roger wrote about his experiences with academic literacy, he

attempted to do so in a way that would interest his reader and subvert their expectations of the

"boring" literacy narrative, a process that requires cognitive engagement. Stacey expressed a

similar desire to break away from the dominant conventions of the literacy narrative in

describing her experience as a barista. When asked what aspect of her narrative she thought was

most successful, she replied, "I think that . . . I didn't actually choose, like, 'oh, I learned how to read and write because I read *Harry Potter*' or something like that, which I know a lot of people would have taken the examples like that. It's not a traditional form of literacy. I think that's what made the paper great, in my opinion. Not great, but good."

Alison, who struggled to come to a critical meta-awareness of literacy, nonetheless demonstrated cognitive engagement in the way she played with narrative structure. For instance, she opens her narrative with a vivid account of her emotional response to standing in front of her classmates in speech class. She repeats this scene using the exact same language later in her paper. In her interview, she described the reasoning behind her decision: "So, the very first paragraph, I wanted it to grab the viewer's attention right away and have them immediately question like, oh gosh, what's going on? What's wrong? And I incorporated that into . . . one of the other paragraphs because I wanted to kind of bring back that intro and be like, oh, this is what was happening that was making me freak out." With this statement, Alison demonstrates that her unconventional decision, which some instructors may have attributed to carelessness, is actually a carefully considered rhetorical move, one that she had not seen in any other literacy narrative.

This is not to say that students completely rejected the genre conventions of the traditional literacy narrative. Several students reported in their interviews that they used the literacy narratives they read in class as inspiration for their own work. Gabriela explained how she drew inspiration from the way Tony Mirabelli describes the literacies of food service work, but adapted it to fit her topic. Stacy drew on Gloria Anzaldúa in the introduction to her narrative. She explained in her interview that her decision to begin her narrative with a bit of dialogue between her and her boss was partly modeled after Anzaldúa's "How to Tame a Wild Tongue,"

which begins with an interaction between Anzaldúa and her dentist. However, her decision to

include a representation of barista shorthand (see Fig. 1)

was her own. This shorthand, which (much like Anzaldúa's

Spanish) is never fully explained to the reader,[76] was

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3in
Soy C Phog ( W )+M+Cinn
2xshots xV
```
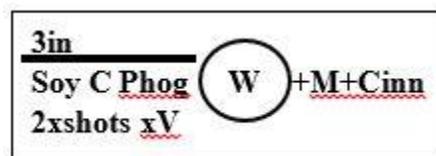
Fig. 1. Stacey's barista shorthand.

included to prompt the reader to feel the same sort of confusion Stacey felt when she was first

learning the shorthand.

In their interviews, all of the instructors reported that they felt the literacy narrative

examples were helpful to students writing their New Literacies Narratives. However, students

did not simply reproduce the literacy narratives they read in class. This becomes clear when

examining the course readings for the cultural narratives and rhetorical modes found in students'

New Literacies Narratives. Table 11 enumerates the cultural narratives and rhetorical modes

present in the three readings all students were exposed to: Gloria Anzaldúa's "How to Tame a

Wild Tongue," Sherman Alexie's "The Joy of Reading and Writing: Superman and Me," and

selected portions[77] of Tony Mirabelli's "Learning to Serve: The Language and Literacy of Food

Service Workers."[78] The cultural narratives identified by Alexander are represented in black text,

while the new cultural narratives and rhetorical modes present in my corpus are represented in

red.

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[76] Stacey explained in her interview that she asked her roommate to come up with the most complicated drink she could think of, which Stacey then translated into shorthand.

[77] See Appendix E for a more detailed reading schedule, including the specific excerpts of the Mirabelli text that students were asked to read.

[78] Because Mirabelli's essay is more of a researched participant observation than a literacy narrative, I applied the framework in relation to the central character in each episode. For example, when Mirabelli describes an interaction wherein a waiter makes a mistake because he doesn't know the inner workings of the kitchen, the episode is classified as *outsider* even though Mirabelli is not the central participant.

Table 11

Cultural Narratives and Rhetorical Modes in Course Readings

	Number	**Percentage**
OUTSIDER	11	13.9%
CHILD PRODIGY	8	10.1%
REBEL	6	7.6%
HERO	4	5.1%
VICTIM	3	3.8%
SUCCESS	0	0%
LITERACY WINNER	0	0%
EXPLANATION	23	29.1%
INSIDER	14	17.7%
LESSON LEARNED	1	1.3%
DESCRIPTION	1	1.3%
POSITIVE EMOTIONS	0	0%
DEFINITION OF LITERACY	0	0%
"OTHER"/UNCLASSIFIED	8	10.1%
TOTAL	**79**	**100%**

As illustrated in the above table, the *explanation* mode and *insider* cultural narrative occurred relatively frequently in students' course readings. It is important to note, however, that thirteen of the twenty-three occurrences of the *explanation* mode appear in Mirabelli's piece, which is intended as an exploration of an alternative literacy rather than an example of the literacy narrative genre (see footnote 78). The remaining ten occur in "How to Tame a Wild Tongue." This could indicate that, when using the *explanation* mode, students are either drawing upon Anzaldúa specifically (modeling their responses after a literacy narrative) or incorporating aspects from Mirabelli (drawing on another genre). Similarly, the *insider* cultural narrative only occurred in Anzaldúa (ten times) and Mirabelli (four times). Again, if students are drawing from the narratives and modes used in course readings, they are not drawing from the Alexie piece,

which is arguably the most clear-cut example of a traditional literacy narrative (with its linear

structure, absence of outside research or sources, and focus on reading and writing).

The remaining rhetorical modes (*description* and *definition of literacy*) and new cultural

narratives (*lesson learned* and *positive emotions*) did not occur often enough to be a likely source

of inspiration for students. The high percentage of *other* episodes, the new cultural narratives and

rhetorical modes that emerged in students' texts, and the above examples of student work all

suggest that students were selective in what they took up from the course readings, adapting their

genre knowledge to this new context. This critical awareness of the genre and the ability to adapt

what they were learning to fit their own narratives require careful thought and therefore indicate

that students were engaging cognitively as per Lawson and Lawson's definition.

Instructors' Perceptions of Student Engagement

Affective Engagement

Four of the five participating instructors indicated in their interviews that they were

pleased with the level of affective engagement observed in the New Literacies Narrative unit.

Erin, Livi, Moira, and Sasha reported that while students were initially confused by the idea of

New Literacies, they became more enthusiastic as they began to understand the concept over the

course of the unit. Erin similarly explained that her students were initially hesitant to embrace the

unit, but were excited to write their narratives after reading the Sherman Alexie essay. She also

observed that students who wrote about alternative literacies seemed to be more affectively

engaged overall, and praised the assignment's inclusiveness in terms of the literacies it validates.

I've found this to be true in my own experience teaching the unit—affective engagement seems

to be low at the beginning of the unit as students struggle to comprehend the new way we are

discussing literacy, then increases as students begin to understand how their passions, hobbies, and community affiliations can be understood as literacies. Livi made a similar observation, saying in her interview that the New Literacies Narrative unit supported her larger curricular goal of helping students realize that their lives and passions have validity and that it taught them that they have expertise in multiple areas. Livi also had students share their experiences with the unit in an additional written reflection and an in-class discussion, and most students told her that they enjoyed the unit and that she should teach it again.

Moira noted that her students enjoyed writing about themselves and that they appreciated the opportunity to experience "a new way of thinking about something that's pretty fundamental." Moira identified this type of creative thinking as one of her primary pedagogical goals in the unit. Sasha echoed this sentiment, saying: "I think that by the time they were all at that stage in the course, they were all really excited to do it because they had been analyzing and creating, like, public genres and things like that, so the turn to the private and their own identities, I think, was really exciting for them." Like Livi, she also mentioned that the New Literacies Narrative helped students "realize their own worth and the importance of it, not only to themselves but to other people." Sasha also shared that she thought the New Literacies unit was her students' favorite. In Sasha's case, the move from more analytical, "academic" genres to personal writing may have positively influenced students' affective engagement, as personal writing is often perceived as less restrictive (a sentiment frequently expressed in students' written reflections).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Janet's perception of her students' level of affective engagement differed from the other participating instructors. She expressed concern that the literacy narratives students read didn't "[spur] a lot of discussion and excitement," pointing specifically

to pieces by Gloria Anzaldúa and Richard Rodriguez.[79] When asked why she thought this was the case, she explained that she thought students couldn't relate to them and that they "don't speak closely to their own lives," as most of her students were "mostly white kids" from an affluent nearby county. However, despite Janet's concerns, her students did not report significantly different levels of affective engagement in their interviews and reflections than the other instructors' students, which perhaps suggests that her perception of her student's engagement was influenced by her own misunderstanding of and negative feelings toward the unit. The influence of instructors' attitudes on student engagement is further explored in Chapter Four.

Cognitive Engagement

All of the participating instructors shared that their students were initially confused by the idea of New Literacies and by the requirements of the New Literacies Narrative assignment, which is consistent with my experiences teaching the unit. However, four instructors said that they believed that the majority of their students did eventually cognitively engage with the course material enough to complete the assignment successfully. Moira noticed that the day when they watched the *Stephen Fry in America* episode seemed to be a big "click day" for students in terms of understanding the social contexts of literacy and that it helped them formulate their thinking for their papers. Erin acknowledged that some students had a difficult time describing their topics as literacies, but believed that student performance was at the level she expected. Livi noted that her students had the same struggles, but that they understood the unit concepts more after completing the course readings, particularly the essay by Tony

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[79] Janet was the only instructor to assign the reading by Richard Rodriguez (see Chapter Two).

Mirabelli. She was particularly impressed with students' range of topic selection and the ways they defined *literacy* in their narratives. Sasha observed that, since she taught the New Literacies Narrative as the third project, students' previous work with genre analysis and cultural critique prepared them to cognitively engage with the New Literacies Narrative unit, and that the students who did so found the unit "challenging in the ways that it's meant to be challenging." These instructors' experiences indicate that, with the proper resources, support, and scaffolding, the New Literacies Narrative can prompt satisfactory levels of cognitive engagement.

Again, only Janet observed a lack of cognitive engagement with her students. She expressed disappointment with the rigor of in-class discussions and in students' performance on written work. Again, though, I did not observe a noticeable difference in the levels of cognitive engagement reported by her students. I believe Janet's negative perception of her students' engagement (both positive and negative) may be due to her own understanding of and attitude toward the course material, as well as the fact that she required (or at least strongly encouraged) her students to write about a school-based experience or connect to reading and writing in some way. This complication is further discussed in the next chapter.

Self-Report of Student Engagement

<u>Affective Engagement</u>

All of the five students interviewed indicated that they were affectively engaged with some aspect of the New Literacies Narrative unit and assignment. Students' written reflections also indicate a high degree of affective engagement in the assignment and unit. The first column in table 12 below represents the occurrences of expressions of positive or negative emotions

related to any aspect of the assignment or unit,[80] separated according to whether or not the question prompted students to give this type of response.[81] The second column records the percentage of the whole represented by each type of statement. Finally, the third column indicates the number of sources (individual reflections or interviews) each type of statement appeared in.

Table 12

Positive and Negative Affective Engagement in Students' Reflections and Interviews

	Number	Percentage	Sources
POSITIVE, SOLICITED	95	48.2%	87
POSITIVE, UNSOLICITED	94	47.7%	50
NEGATIVE, SOLICITED	4	2.0%	4
NEGATIVE, UNSOLICITED	4	2.0%	3
TOTAL	**197**	**100%**	----[82]

Two students' reflections did not display clear evidence of positive or negative affective engagement.

As illustrated in the above table, when students expressed feelings about the unit or assignment, these feelings were overwhelmingly positive. All but two of the students who submitted reflections or participated in interviews indicated some sort of positive response to the New Literacies Narrative unit and/or assignment. Moreover, very nearly half of these positive statements were given in response to questions that did not solicit an emotional response, often

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[80] Statements were only recorded if they related to something particular about the New Literacies Narrative assignment or unit. Statements about liking peer review or having in-class discussion time, for instance, were not counted, as all of the participating instructors also incorporated these practices into their other units.
[81] See Chapter Two for further explanation.
[82] There were ninety-two total sources (eighty-seven student reflections and five interview transcripts). Ninety of these texts included at least one statement expressing positive engagement. Forty-seven of the fifty students who demonstrated unsolicited positive engagement also demonstrated solicited positive engagement. All students who expressed negative engagement also included statements expressing positive engagement.

the last question ("Anything else you would like to say?"). Expressions of negative feelings were comparatively rare and occurred equally in questions that did and did not solicit emotional responses.

In addition to the students who noted that they enjoyed the opportunity to write about a topic of their choosing (discussed above), several more indicated that they specifically liked learning about alternative literacies and rethinking what is meant by the term *literacy*. For instance, when asked about his favorite part of the unit, Edward responded in his reflection: "I really liked learning that literacy ment more than I thought it did. It was also nice to learn about the other forms of literacy." Amir tied his response to the reading by Tony Mirabelli and the *Stephen Fry in America* episode, noting: "My favorite part of the unit was learning about different types of literacy you see that are all around you. Like when we watched the video about the different states or reading about the Italian diner." Thirty-two of the eighty-seven students who submitted reflections indicated that they enjoyed thinking critically about the definition of *literacy*, indicating affective engagement with this aspect of the unit. Other positive statements focused on students appreciating the opportunity to write about themselves ("My favorite part of this unit was getting to give people a look into my life and having them learn about my personal life"); enjoying particular lessons, assignments, or activities ("I enjoyed the readings we had"); or simply liking the unit or assignment in general ("I enjoyed this Unit and writing this paper").

Notably, even students who expressed apathy or negative engagement with other writing or schoolwork expressed positive engagement with the New Literacies Narrative. Several students indicated in their reflections that this writing assignment was the first one they enjoyed, such as one student, Cecilia, who wrote in her reflection: "I learned that writing doesn't have to be as miserable as I always made it out to be. I used to dread writing, and this paper in particular

showed me it can be fun." Dean wrote: "The new meaning for literacy was really neat and the assignment was actually fun since it was something that I love, you don't really have a lot of assignments that you actually enjoy doing." Another student, Rory, noted: "I really enjoyed this essay and this is one of the first essays I have ever said this about ☺." Susannah even shared that her narrative "inspired [her] to write again."

     One student, in particular, illustrates how the New Literacies Narrative can inspire positive affective engagement even in students who do not normally connect with English classes. Roger wrote his narrative about a short story he wrote for an English class in 6th grade. This story, which he based on a young adult book series about a kid spy, was the first writing assignment he enjoyed and the one that made him believe he could be a successful writer. Roger's literacy narrative was traditional in many ways, a fact about which he felt a certain amount of insecurity. Two of the statements indicating negative affective engagement came from his interview, both explaining that he felt that he wasn't able to find an interesting topic and that his classmates' experiences were more interesting. However, despite his disappointment with this aspect of his performance, he did demonstrate overall positive affective engagement with the unit and assignment. He stated in his interview: "I'm not very big on writing. I just prefer not to. But I really enjoyed this type of essay. . . I actually had fun with it and, you know, I usually don't have fun when it comes to writing." He also noted that he felt proud of his vivid description of his sixth grade classroom and was engaged in class discussions. Roger's experience speaks to the New Literacies Narrative's potential to positively engage even students who don't normally find such engagement in writing classes, whether or not they choose to focus on school-based experiences.

Expressions of negative affective engagement, though comparatively rare, most often included assertions that the New Literacies Narrative was difficult to write. Five of the eight statements centered on the difficulty of the assignment, such as one written by Taylor, who wrote in her reflection: ". . . I have always told my story but really delving into the hard parts of the story and what I had to learn and change about my learning was hard and stressful." This example illustrates the difference between affective and cognitive engagement, as the student expresses cognitive engagement while also expressing a lack of positive affective engagement. Two students indicated that they don't like writing about themselves, including Leighton, who said in her interview: "I don't . . . like talking about myself, so . . . having to write about myself was, like, not a very enjoyable experience overall." However, both students who reported that they disliked writing about themselves later indicated that they were proud of the papers they produced. In fact, every student who expressed negative feelings about one aspect of the unit or assignment also expressed positivity about at least one other aspect of the unit.

Cognitive Engagement

Table 13 below depicts all instances of self-reported cognitive engagement found in students' interviews and written reflections.

Table 13

Indications of Cognitive Engagement in Students' Reflections and Interviews

	Number	Percentage	Sources
SOLICITED	101	66.4%	51
UNSOLICITED	51	33.6%	18

TOTAL	152	100%	----[83]

Thirty-four student reflections (roughly 39%) did not display clear evidence of cognitive engagement. This could mean that these students did not engage cognitively in the unit or assignment. However, in some cases, it could also indicate that they were unable to or chose not to articulate the ways in which they did cognitively engage.

For instance, Alison was the only student to indicate in her interview that she did not need to engage cognitively to complete the assignment. When asked about her writing process in her interview, she responded, ". . . I came up with the topic of the speech anxiety and honestly I just, like, I don't know, I just started it and went from there. I talked about how I felt, I talked about the struggles of it. . . . I didn't really have a structure or anything going into it." She also indicated that she didn't revise her narrative beyond checking for spelling and grammatical mistakes and didn't identify anything she would now change about her narrative if given the chance (despite the fact that she could not identify the way her narrative connected to literacy). However, when asked about specific passages, she was able to articulate the reasoning behind her rhetorical decisions. Alison also later modified her previous statement about her lack of revision, indicating that "I'm able to write so much and then I just go back and, like, take out certain things or put back in certain things, and then formatting it into a correct aspect." She did not consider this when I asked her about revision because she considered it to be part of her writing process rather than her revision process. This suggests that while there were almost certainly some students who did not cognitively engage with the unit, other students who do not demonstrate apparent cognitive engagement may in fact be engaged in ways they can't fully

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[83] As with Table 12, there were 92 total sources (87 student reflections and 5 interview transcripts). 82 texts contained some report of cognitive engagement. 21 texts contained both solicited and unsolicited indications of cognitive engagement.

articulate, a phenomenon similar to Nowacek's observation that instructors only observe knowledge transfer when students are successfully able to "sell" it in their writing (59).

The students who did indicate cognitive engagement did so in regard to various aspects of the unit and assignment. Many students reported that they struggled to find a topic that they could frame in terms of literacy, engaging cognitively to find an appropriate focus for their paper. Ingrid wrote: "The most challenging part of this assignment was choosing the perfect experience to write about. I have experienced many moments that could have been used for this assignment, but I had to chose the perfect one." Katherine, who wrote about her experience in Basic Military Training, reported that she struggled to settle on a central message for her narrative: "The most challenging part for me was developing a central idea behind the situation I used for the assignment. I know that the purpose was to tell how we learned a different form of literacy . . . In my case, the lesson so to speak was that no matter how difficult the challenge, it can be conquered." Another student, Jennifer, observed that the New Literacies Narrative was less restrictive, and therefore more challenging, than writing in high school: "Coming from high school where we are given multiple topics to choose from but were never really allowed a lot of creative freedom, so when we were given this assignment I had quite a lot to think about. I had multiple ideas of what I thought I wanted to do but I didn't really start to flow until we did some in class activities." This narrowing of her ideas, a process that was guided by her in-class work, required critical thought and cognitive engagement.

Other students reported having to think carefully about organizing their thoughts and adapting them to the length guidelines. Caroline noted in her reflection: "For me the most challenging part of this assignment was keeping the assignment as short as I could. There was so much information that I wanted to fit into the assignment because I felt it would make the

audience more intrigued to read what was to come, but that's hard to do while trying to keep it under a thousand words." This is echoed by Amir, who wrote that the "Most challenging part of the essay was definitely the organization and coming up with ideas about your literacy and how it is a literacy." This meta-awareness of rhetorical choices and self-report of being challenged by the assignment indicate cognitive engagement. Bethany, who wrote a more traditional literacy narrative, was similarly challenged in deciding what to include in her story: "The most challenging part of the assignment for me was trying to pick the topic that I wanted to create about and deciding what parts of the book I wanted to include without making it sound like a book report." David was similarly concerned with including all of the required information without making his narrative sound "too boring or dry." Still another student, Leonard, found it difficult to break away from research-based writing, noting that "The most challenging part of this assignment for me was the structure. I am used to writing papers in a research structure and having to do a narrative was just really difficult for me." These students' struggles and their awareness of their own rhetorical strategies point to significant cognitive engagement related to balancing the assignment's requirements while working to maintain the narrative mode, a tension that is further explored in the following chapter.

Conclusion

Taken together, I believe the results of my analysis of student work, interviews, and classroom observations demonstrate that the majority of students developed a critical meta-awareness of the contextual nature of literacy during the New Literacies Narrative assignment and unit. This can be seen in the range of students' topic selection, the way they chose to discuss and define *literacy* in their narratives, and the cultural narratives they enacted as they told the

stories of their (broadly defined) literacy acquisition. Additionally, most students demonstrated that they were affectively and/or cognitively engaged in the New Literacies Narrative unit, demonstrating interest in the idea of alternative literacies and in the opportunity to choose their own topics. Additionally, the New Literacies Narrative seems to address some of the previously-identified shortcomings of the traditional literacy narrative (see Chapter One) and perhaps has the potential to reinvigorate the genre of the literacy narrative.

I further explore this potential in the final chapter, wherein I discuss the implications of my findings for composition studies. I examine in more detail the new cultural narratives and modes of narration that emerged in the New Literacies Narrative and the implications that holds for the literacy narrative genre, speculate on the potential of this assignment to facilitate writing knowledge transfer, discuss other ways to increase students' understanding of multiliteracies, and point to possible directions for future research. I also consider the influence of other factors that may have affected my results, including the participating instructors' pedagogical approaches.

Chapter 4: Conclusions, Implications, and Future Directions

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss some general conclusions and implications from my study of the New Literacies Narrative, as well as factors that may have influenced my results. I begin by revisiting my guiding research questions in light of my major findings and discussing the potential contributions of the present study to the field of composition. I then explore some pedagogical implications of the New Literacies Narrative itself. Next, I speculate about ways in which the new cultural narratives and rhetorical modes found in the New Literacies Narrative may influence the genre of the literacy narrative or lead to the creation of a new genre with its own set of conventions. Finally, I conclude by identifying possible directions for further study and present my final thoughts on the New Literacies Narrative's potential to reinvigorate the literacy narrative in the writing classroom.

The New Literacies Narrative, Meta-Awareness, and Engagement

In this section, I situate my major findings related to the New Literacies Narrative's ability to foster a critical meta-awareness of literacy and positive student engagement within the context of the research questions identified in Chapter One:

- Does the New Literacies Narrative unit successfully encourage students to develop a critical meta-awareness of literacy?

- Do students demonstrate engagement with the New Literacies Narrative assignment and unit?

I also discuss in greater detail the contributions of the study itself to the larger conversation surrounding literacy narratives and composition studies more generally.

The New Literacies Narrative and Critical Meta-Awareness of Literacy

As described in Chapter Three, the majority of student participants demonstrated a critical meta-awareness of literacy in the New Literacies Narrative assignment. I noted in that chapter that 83% of students' narratives did not center on academic literacy, and that 75% did not center on verbal or written language, suggesting that students developed an awareness of multiple literacies (as reflected in the diversity of potential topics for their narratives). Additionally, students' definitions of *literacy* reflected a developing awareness of multiple literacies and of the context-dependent nature of literacy. Many students situated their definitions within the context of particular communities, and others included more general statements regarding the need to discuss literacy in its social or cultural context. Others reflected a meta-awareness of multiliteracies through the use of phrases such as "a literacy," "literate in," and "the literacy of [the author's chosen topic]." Only five students defined *literacy* as simply the ability to read and write, and all of these students situated this definition as one of many or qualified this definition in some way.

Students also demonstrated a meta-awareness of literacy by not echoing the dominant cultural narratives of literacy commonly found in literacy narratives (as reflected by the number of episodes that did not fit the original classification scheme).[84] Perhaps most significantly, few students invoked the theme that Kara Poe Alexander calls *literacy equals success*, wherein literacy is positioned as essential for professional or personal advancement. This could indicate that the New Literacies Narrative helps students resist the "literacy myth" perpetuated by education and the media. Moreover, students demonstrated critical thought and originality in terms of their content and structure: only 2 students of 111 wrote narratives that followed the

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[84] The implications of this shift for the literacy narrative genre are discussed later in this chapter.

formulaic "literacy narrative arc" I identified in my pilot study (Sladek 63). The five students who were interviewed could critically discuss the influence of context on literacy development and were able to connect their knowledge to other experiences and situations, pointing to their meta-awareness of literacy. These impressions were supported by four instructors' statements about their students' increasing meta-awareness of literacy in the New Literacies Narrative unit.[85] Taken together, I believe that there is sufficient evidence to determine that the New Literacies Narrative successfully inspires most students to develop a meta-aware understanding of multiliteracies and the cultural influences on literacy development.

The New Literacies Narrative and Engagement

In Chapter Three, I explained how most students demonstrated evidence of their affective (emotional) and cognitive (mental) engagement with the New Literacies Narrative assignment and unit. Students demonstrated affective engagement in the narratives themselves through their topic selection, which reflected their diverse range of interests. As noted in Chapter Three, many students indicated that they appreciated the freedom to choose their own topics, pointing to their affective engagement with the assignment. The range of the literacies represented in students' papers also indicates that students engaged cognitively enough to develop an awareness of multiliteracies.

Fewer students than in Alexander's study related negative events in which they felt like a victim or outsider in relation to their literacy experiences, suggesting that the New Literacies Narrative gave students the opportunity to engage with positive, confidence-building experiences

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[85] As explained in Chapter Three, only Janet felt that her students did not develop a critical meta-awareness of literacy. This is further discussed later in the chapter.

rather than negative ones (though several students did choose to work through painful memories in their narratives). Whereas the traditional literacy narrative could force some students to relive painful academic memories (and therefore negatively affect affective engagement), the New Literacies Narrative does not have this potentially damaging effect. Students also signaled positive affective engagement with the creation of the "new cultural narratives" labeled *insider* and *positive emotions*, described in Chapter Three. The new cultural narratives and rhetorical modes that emerged in my analysis could also point to students' cognitive engagement, as they are not unconsciously reproducing the literacy narrative conventions they've observed from classroom examples and other sources.

Students' engagement was further displayed in their written reflections. The vast majority of students who submitted a reflection expressed positive affective engagement at some point. The few students who expressed negative affective engagement with some aspect of the assignment or unit expressed positive affective engagement about something else related to the unit. Most students also reported in their reflections that they engaged cognitively with the assignment and unit, thinking critically about their topic, how to define *literacy* in the context of their community, or some other aspect of the project. Four of the five participating instructors indicated in their interviews that they were pleased with their students' levels of cognitive and affective engagement.[86] As is the case with critical meta-awareness, I believe there is sufficient evidence that most students engaged with the New Literacies Narrative both cognitively and affectively.

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[86] Again, Janet was the only instructor with a negative assessment of her students' engagement. This is further discussed later in this chapter.

Contributions of the Present Study

The mixed methods approach of this study takes literacy narrative research in a new direction. By blending qualitative and quantitative analysis, I was able to more fully see the ways in which students demonstrated evidence of engagement and meta-awareness of literacy. My analytical approach draws upon methodologies often seen in composition studies (textual analysis, observation, interviews with study participants) as well as those more typically found in language studies (examining word collocation). While linguistic analysis is not unheard of in composition research, it is less common than textual analysis and qualitative methods (to my knowledge, collocation has yet to be used in a study on literacy narratives). The analytical nuance and empirical support I gained through my combination of qualitative and quantitative research speaks to the further potential for mixed methods approaches in composition, as well as the benefits of interdisciplinary research.

The present investigation of the New Literacies Narrative also contributes to and expands the rich tradition of classroom-based studies in composition. In Chapter Three, I noted that much of the knowledge we've gained about writing knowledge transfer was discovered through classroom-based studies. Additionally, most scholars who write about literacy narratives discuss their own students' work and/or their own experiences teaching literacy narratives. This study expands this practice in its focus on multiple sections of the same course taught by several instructors. In collecting materials from eleven sections of introductory composition, I was able not only to greatly increase the size of my study corpus, but I was able to gain insight into how different instructors interpreted the assignment and unit. I was thus able to see how the assignment could fit into a variety of curricula and fit different sets of instructional goals.[87] The

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[87] The instructors' varying approaches to the unit and assignment are further discussed later in this chapter.

pedagogical implications of the assignment itself (independent of the study) are discussed in the next section.

Pedagogical Implications of the New Literacies Narrative

The New Literacies Narrative and First-Year Writing

The New Literacies Narrative is another way to bring literacy studies into dialogue with composition pedagogy. Not only does this assignment celebrate students' alternative literacies, but it teaches them how to use literacy as a lens through which to interpret their educational and life experiences. When used in first-year composition, students from a wide variety of disciplines and with a wide variety of viewpoints are exposed to literacy studies. This widens the range of perspectives students are exposed to and allows students to see the diverse literacies embedded in everyday life. In exploring the literate practices of different communities through course readings, peer review, and in-class discussion, I argue that students are able to develop a better understanding of and tolerance for the practices and beliefs of others. Recognizing that different cultures and groups have different literacies may inspire students to see the skill and intelligence of groups they had previously derided or marginalized. It also allows students from these groups to write narratives about their knowledge and success rather than narratives of perceived illiteracy. This can be seen in the relative infrequency of *victim* narratives seen in students' papers, discussed in Chapter Three.

The New Literacies Narrative also builds upon the benefits of the traditional literacy narrative. In Chapter One, I identified several pedagogical affordances of the literacy narrative, including its capacity to build genre awareness, work as a scaffolding device to later writing, allow students to articulate the complexities of their relationship to literacy, help students

understand their positions in the educational system, and prompt students to critically analyze their literacy practices. The New Literacies Narrative possesses these benefits along with the additional capacity to facilitate meta-awareness and engagement, as discussed in the previous chapter. The literacy narrative is seen as a staple of first-year composition, and this modified version of the assignment could be part of a new generation of literacy narratives that work to validate multiple literacies that students possess in various contexts.

The New Literacies Narrative can also go beyond the benefits of the traditional literacy narrative by giving students a way to approach other educational experiences. In Chapter Three, I described how one student, Gabriela, applied her knowledge of New Literacies to her calculus class, understanding calculus as a literacy and the mathematical community as a discourse community into which she needed to be socialized. Using literacy as a framework to understand her difficulty in the class and being able to connect her struggles to her experiences playing softball gave her an entry point to help her overcome her difficulty in math. It gave her the confidence to know that she could successfully become literate in calculus, just as she became literate in softball—she simply needed to learn the rules and norms of the mathematical discourse community, as represented by her instructor. While many literacy narrative assignments (such as Beaufort's, included in Appendix C) do include the goal of facilitating this awareness of discourse communities, I believe the New Literacies Narrative can more effectively do so because of its focus on exploring literacies within communities and social contexts. The New Literacies Narrative focuses more explicitly on discourse communities than Beaufort's, which can lead to greater discourse community awareness.

Because the New Literacies Narrative assumes a flexible definition of *literacy*, students are able to critically analyze what it means to be literate. This is demonstrated by the variety of

definitions of *literacy* students wrote as well as their ability to contextualize their discussions of literacy through the use of phrases such as "literacy of" and "literate in," as discussed in Chapter Three. This flexible definition of *literacy* can be more easily applied to other experiences and communities that students will encounter both inside and outside the classroom. In describing how they learned to become literate in a particular community or practice, students like Gabriela can abstract skills and processes for developing literacy in other communities, practices, or contexts. The New Literacies Narrative may thus have the potential to effectively promote writing knowledge transfer, discussed below.

Writing Knowledge Transfer

Perhaps one of the more interesting implications of the New Literacies Narrative's effects on student learning is its potential to facilitate writing knowledge transfer. As discussed in Chapter One, writing knowledge transfer is defined as the application of knowledge gained in one context to another context (Perkins and Salomon "Teaching for Transfer" 22). As also noted in that chapter, the traditional literacy narrative's perceived lack of applicability to other writing contexts (and therefore limited potential for transfer) is one of the critiques most often leveled against the literacy narrative. The traditional literacy narrative can thus be classified as a "school genre," which David W. Smit describes as an assignment that fits the classroom context but "lack[s] sufficient context to help students grapple with all of the rhetorical constraints they will confront in the world at large" (148). While this same criticism can also be directed at the New Literacies Narrative, which students will likely never be asked to write outside a classroom setting, the New Literacies Narrative's potential to increase engagement and meta-awareness of

literacy may more effectively lead students to develop knowledge and skills they can transfer to other writing contexts.

Unfortunately, writing knowledge transfer is notoriously difficult to identify. Doug Brent notes that experiments designed to assess knowledge transfer may limit such transfer by imposing artificial constraints on subjects, giving them inadequate time to learn the target skill and requiring them to perform according to rigidly imposed expectations (562). While many studies of transfer are conducted in real-life classroom settings (Beaufort *College Writing and Beyond*; Bergmann and Zepernick; Cheng; Nowacek; Wardle; Yancey et al.), writing knowledge transfer still often proves to be elusive. While this has led some researchers to conclude that transfer doesn't happen as often as teachers would like (Beaufort *College Writing and Beyond*; McCarthy; Smit), others conclude that evidence of transfer is simply difficult to see. For instance, as noted in the previous chapter, Nowacek found that students in her study did in fact transfer knowledge from one class to another despite instructors' inability to detect it (59). In many ways, writing knowledge transfer seems to be too complex and too internal to reliably identify.

These difficulties are, in my case, compounded in the absence of a longitudinal study (further discussed below). Because I was not able to track students' understanding or performance across other courses, assignments, or writing situations, I cannot know for sure whether or how students transferred the knowledge gained in the New Literacies Narrative unit to other writing contexts. However, my study does reveal glimpses into the New Literacies Narrative's potential to facilitate writing knowledge transfer. In Chapter One, I discussed the relationship between meta-awareness and writing knowledge transfer, drawing upon Perkins and

Salomon, Wardle, Nowacek, and others who identify meta-awareness as important for conscious, mindful transfer of writing knowledge from one context to another.

In Chapter Three, I presented evidence that indicates that most students in the study did develop a critical meta-awareness of literacy, a way of thinking about how literacies are shaped by context that they can transfer to other courses and situations. Students' departure from traditional topics and their ability to capture the complexities and nuances of literacy in their discussions points to this critical meta-awareness, which could facilitate transfer. As also discussed in Chapter One, student motivation and engagement have been linked to writing knowledge transfer, as engaged students are more likely to pursue opportunities for high-road transfer (the mindful application of knowledge from one context to an unrelated context). Chapter Three demonstrated that the New Literacies Narrative did facilitate both affective and cognitive engagement with the unit and course (as demonstrated by students' self-reports of engagement in interviews and reflections), thus making it more likely that students will put in the effort required to transfer their knowledge of writing and literacy to other contexts.

There are other signs that the New Literacies Narrative can effectively promote writing knowledge transfer. Perkins and Salomon note that the first step in writing knowledge transfer is identifying the opportunity for such transfer to occur. The first step in their "detect-elect-connect" model of high-road transfer is, as noted in Chapter One, for students to "[detect] a potential relationship with prior learning" ("Knowledge to Go" 248). Several students detected such possibilities for transfer in their interviews. Stacey observed in her interview that her ability to think critically about the literacies she gained through her barista work could potentially help her get a job at another coffee shop and more quickly learn the literacies involved in future jobs. She also described how the specific narrative strategies she learned in the New Literacies

Narrative unit could be applied to writing fiction. These students are engaging in forward-reaching high-road transfer, or "abstract[ing] [their knowledge] in preparation for applications elsewhere" (Perkins and Salomon "Teaching for Transfer" 26).

Students' written reflections also reveal instances of forward-reaching high-road transfer. The fifth question of the reflection prompt (see Appendix B) asked students to identify knowledge and skills gained in the New Literacies Narrative that they could transfer to the next project in the course.[88] Martha (one of Livi's students), who moved from the New Literacies Narrative unit to a rhetorical analysis of visual images, identified an ability to "expand and add details to [her] ideas" as a skill she could transfer to later academic work. Several more of Livi's students noted that, despite the fact that their upcoming analysis paper would be more academic, they could still incorporate personal insight and experiment with tone and register to advance their rhetorical points. Many students who transitioned from the New Literacies Narrative to an analysis paper remarked that the skills they used in defining and analyzing their chosen literacy could be transferred to analyzing arguments, advertisements, and other texts. While I was not able to assess work not assigned in the New Literacies Narrative unit or track students in other writing situations, the fact that these students were able to identify possibilities for future transfer speaks to the potential of the New Literacies Narrative to facilitate such transfer.

Students also reported engaging in backward-reaching high-road transfer, which occurs when "one finds oneself in a problem situation, abstracts key characteristics from the situation, and reaches backwards into one's experience for matches" (Perkins and Salomon "Teaching for Transfer" 26). While I did not specifically ask students in their reflections to identify previous

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[88] Erin, Moira, Livi, and I assigned analysis papers in the unit after the New Literacies Narrative. Janet's next project was a profile based on an interview. Sasha's students completed their final project, in which they revised previous low-stakes writing into a new genre, immediately after writing their New Literacies Narratives.

writing situations or genre knowledge they drew upon to complete the project, several did identify such knowledge in their interviews. Gabriela reported drawing upon previous knowledge of writing processes in drafting her narrative: "this was similar to my previous writings because . . . analyzing is part of the process and writing descriptions . . . and that was something I had experienced in previous assignments and previous essays." Leighton made similar connections to personal writing in college application essays when writing her New Literacies Narrative:

> . . . it almost felt like writing like a college essay . . . So I applied to the architecture school, and so you had to write like a paper on why you wanted to be there and, like, why you wanted to be an architect. So . . . it was . . . kind of a perfect transition from, like, writing about yourself for all of these applications for college and your first . . . paper in college is like writing about yourself again, which was interesting . . . But it like definitely helped, I guess, going through the college . . . applying process, like how you write, how you talk about yourself, without sounding, like, third-persony and strange.

With these statements, both Gabriela and Leighton demonstrate that they were able to successfully transfer their earlier writing knowledge to the New Literacies Narrative assignment.

Other students who were interviewed shared that they engaged in backward-reaching high-road transfer in later assignments for other classes. Alison noted that she drew upon her writing process for the New Literacies Narrative (freewriting followed by revision) in later assignments when she found herself stuck. Stacey described how she drew upon the personal narrative writing skills she learned in the unit when writing a later paper in English 102, the second course in the department's introductory writing sequence: ". . . in English 102 we're . . . writing a paper about how technology has influenced our way of life. So of course, that's going to be centered around us because . . . we're going to put in our own input saying, 'Hey,

technology has done this,' and so I feel like that paper will be really similar to this paper . . ." Stacey's 101 instructor, Sasha, was also her instructor in 102 and identified the same opportunity for writing knowledge transfer in her interview.

The ways in which students interpreted the genre of the New Literacies Narrative also point to the potential for writing knowledge transfer to occur. Because the New Literacies Narrative is not a genre with which most students would be familiar (even if they had been previously exposed to literacy narratives), it is difficult for them to draw upon established genres when writing their essays. Thus, they are forced to draw upon discrete strategies gained from their experience writing in various genres—they must "cross" genre boundaries rather than "guard" them (Reiff and Bawarshi). For instance, though Leighton understood the differences in the rhetorical situations surrounding her New Literacies Narrative and college application essays, she was able to also recognize similarities (keep the focus on yourself, describe your passion for something, use personal pronouns) and therefore transfer strategies from her application essays to her New Literacies Narrative.

Leighton, Alison, Gabriela, and Stacey all described drawing on the literacy narratives they read in class in writing their New Literacies Narratives, but they all acknowledged the ways they had to adapt their writing to fit this new rhetorical situation. In Chapter Three, I discussed how Stacey's decision to begin her narrative with a representation of the shorthand she learned to record drink orders (shorthand which she does not explain to the reader) was influenced by Anzaldúa's use of dialogue and untranslated Spanish in "How to Tame a Wild Tongue." Gabriela explained how she drew upon Mirabelli's "Learning to Serve" in connecting her experiences playing softball to literacy: "I think I similarly wrote it to a passage in one of the books that we read in class. It was a passage about being a waiter . . . I related it somewhat to

that because I talked about steps and all of the things about being a softball player." Alison was the only student who reported seeking out additional literacy narrative examples online, saying that she " . . . just read [the examples] and then just kind of structured my, like, language . . . to doing that same kind of writing when I started mine." She did note, however, that she was careful not to draw from these examples too strongly. The implications of this for the literacy narrative genre are discussed in the following section.

Reimagining the Literacy Narrative Genre

New Genre Conventions

In Chapter Two, I identified three new cultural narratives (*insider*, *lesson learned*, and *positive emotions*) and three rhetorical modes (*explanation*, *definition of literacy*, and *description*) that emerged in my analysis of students' New Literacies Narratives. Though these themes were not accounted for in Alexander's analysis of her students' literacy narratives, they occurred often enough in my corpus to enable me to track their frequencies of occurrence (see table 10 in the previous chapter). The commonalities that emerged in the episodes that did not fit Alexander's categories (and which were therefore initially classified as *other*) may represent emerging conventions for the New Literacies Narrative genre, just as the narrative patterns Alexander identified in her corpus can be seen as conventions of the traditional literacy narrative genre.

Genre conventions arise because they respond to a rhetorical situation, defined by Lloyd Bitzer as "a natural context of persons, events, objects, relations, and an exigence which strongly invites utterance" (4). Carolyn R. Miller famously defines genres as "typified rhetorical action" (151). In the case of classroom assignments such as the New Literacies Narrative, the rhetorical

situation is created by the teacher, students, course texts, assignment prompt, and other elements of the classroom context. As similar rhetorical situations arise, genre conventions emerge from the similar responses they invite. The common cultural narratives identified by Alexander[89] and Bronwyn Williams arise through the ways students interpret the rhetorical situation created by the classroom context and literacy narrative assignment. These cultural narratives can thus be thought of as genre conventions of the literacy narrative. The "literacy narrative arc" I identified in my pilot study (wherein the student describes an early love for literacy, an experience that made them lose interest in literacy, and a general closing statement about the importance of literacy) can also be seen as a genre convention that influences the way students structure their responses. When students receive this assignment, they may be reminded of other times they were asked to write personal narratives (for other English classes, job and college applications, etc.) or other situations in which they were asked to discuss or write about literacy (likely in other educational contexts). The texts they produce are therefore influenced by their schema for what a literacy narrative looks like.

John Swales explains that "human beings consistently overlay schemata on events to align those events with previously established patterns of experience, knowledge, and belief" (83). Schemata related to form and content "can contribute to a recognition of genres and so guide the production of exemplars" (86). The ways in which people respond to a rhetorical situation is guided by their mental representation of that situation based on past experiences. This aligns with Alexander's observation that students draw upon the literacy stories they are exposed to through the media when crafting their own narratives. Films such as *Freedom Writers*, *Dead Poets Society*, and others position literacy or a knowledge of literature as a path toward material

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[89] *Literacy equals success*, *victim*, *hero*, *child prodigy*, *literacy winner*, *rebel*, and *outsider*

success and/or personal fulfillment. These themes also permeate course textbooks and many literacy narratives students might read in class, such as Frederick Douglass's "Learning to Read and Write," Rodriguez's *Hunger of Memory*, and even Rose's *Lives on the Boundary*. If a student has written about or discussed literacy in previous coursework, they may draw upon those experiences as well. Given the fact that most discussions of literacy in the media and in the classroom view literacy (in the sense of reading and writing) as universally positive and liberating, it is perhaps unsurprising that literacy tends to be discussed this way in student literacy narratives.

As Amy Devitt notes, "The challenge for all writing teachers is to use existing genres without reinforcing a rigid—or worse yet, inaccurate—formula for writing" (151). To help avoid this, it is essential to teach the social context of genres. When students are exposed to the social context of the literacy narrative through the study of New Literacies and alternative definitions of *literacy*, it is possible that students are less likely to draw on previous understandings and discussions of literacy and therefore less likely to be influenced by a generic schema for the New Literacies Narrative. In Chapter Three and the previous section of this chapter, I discussed how several students selectively pulled strategies and rhetorical devices from the literacy narratives they read rather than trying to reproduce the genre. These students acted as "boundary crossers" rather than "boundary guarders," to return to Reiff and Bawarshi's terms. While it is not definitively clear why students chose to draw on discrete strategies rather than whole genres, it is possible that the framing of the New Literacies Narrative assignment prompt encourages students to do so.

The fact that students' New Literacies Narratives did not employ Alexander's narratives in the same way as the students in her corpus may signal a shift in the literacy narrative genre. As

explained in Chapter Three, students writing New Literacies Narratives did not often employ the *literacy equals success* cultural theme, which Alexander identified as one of the defining features of literacy narratives. This suggests that students may be beginning to problematize or reject that narrative, perhaps due to the influence of classroom discussion. Students also related fewer negative literacy experience in their narratives, as evidenced by the lower percentages of *victim* episodes and *outsider* episodes which framed the experience negatively. Students repurposed the cultural narratives Alexander identified to fit the new rhetorical situation created by the unit and assignment. Additionally, very few New Literacies Narratives followed the "literacy narrative arc" outlined earlier, perhaps signaling another shift in the literacy narrative genre.

The emergence of new cultural narratives and rhetorical modes could even indicate the development of a new genre with its own conventions. While *description*, *lesson learned*, and perhaps *positive emotions* are fairly common to personal narrative writing, the other modes and narrative types (*explanation*, *definition of literacy*, and *insider*) seem specific to the New Literacies Narrative. The *explanation* and *definition of literacy* modes could signal a move to a more expository form, a possibility explored in the following section. *Insider* serves as a counterpoint to the *outsider* narrative Alexander identifies. The number of new themes, as well as the fact that the majority of the episodes in students' New Literacies Narratives fall into one of these new categories, suggest that the New Literacies Narrative may represent a new stage in the evolution of the literacy narrative genre, if not an entirely new genre. While the New Literacies Narratives students produced certainly have much in common with the traditional literacy narrative in terms of tone, structure, and sometimes content, there are also significant differences. One of the most prominent differences is the incorporation of more expository writing.

Personal v. Expository in New Literacies Narratives

One tension I observed in my analysis of student literacy narratives was that many of them occasionally approached the style of expository (informative, more typically "academic") or even instructional writing, particularly in episodes classified as examples of the *explanation* or *definition of literacy* mode. Because many students did not focus their narratives on academic experiences or *literacy* as it is traditionally understood, students often felt the need to explain or justify how their topic related to literacy. This sometimes took the form of the student explaining what a person would need to know or be able to do to be considered literate in their chosen topic. Almost half of the narratives in the corpus included such explanation. For instance, Hamid outlines a few best practices that a fully literate soccer player would need to know: ". . . when you talk to your coach, you should show more respect than when you talk to one of your team members. Also, you need to make quick decisions on what you should do whenever you have the ball. For instance, you are supposed to decide whether to pass the ball or shoot it as quickly as possible." Interestingly, Hamid uses the second person rather than the first person voice in this passage, a departure from the typical style of the personal narrative. Instead, his tone approaches that of a teacher or coach instructing a novice soccer player.

Sometimes, students contextualized these explanations in anecdotes about how they learned a particular bit of knowledge or behavioral norm in their community.[90] For instance, Caroline explains how she learned the hand signals used by her softball team:

> A big part of softball is understanding the signage used. When you think of signs you
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> may think of Sign Language, which would be a good thought because that is exactly what
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> the signs used in softball are. For example, my Coach may want me to do something

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[90] These episodes are distinguished from those classified as *insider* by their focus on explaining some aspect of the literacy itself rather than on the author's experiences acquiring the literacy or joining the community.

specific at bat to move someone on the bases, so they may give me a particular sign to accomplish this. For example, one time I was up to bat and my coach touched his nose and then his hip, but I looked away not realizing he wasn't done. When the ball was pitched I hit it to the second baseman and they tagged the runner on first and then threw me out; my coach had wanted me to bunt, but I hadn't waited for him to provide me with the final sign-a clap.

In this passage, Caroline states that one must know the appropriate hand signals to be literate in softball, draws an analogy to something a non-softball-playing reader would know, and explains a particular hand signal by telling the story of how she learned it. Though this passage is written in a more narrative style than Hamid's passage above, she is using an anecdote to exemplify a point rather than to tell a story. This showcases her understanding of softball literacy in a narratively compelling way, but in a way that diverges from the traditional literacy narrative.

While many of these *literacy* definitions and explanations are presented in a narrative context, not all are. Rather, several narratives seem to temporarily shift into a more informative, "academic" expository mode. One student, Kyle, explains the literacy involved in his position as pitcher for his baseball team:

To save arm strength throughout the game you don't necessarily want to throw with your arm, but using your lower body to push your arm forward. Knowing that the lower body is the main part of your body that increases velocity of each pitch is something that you are not born knowing, it is not common knowledge, and it takes learning how to pitch and constant practice to implement into a persons own pitching.

Nick, who wrote his New Literacies Narrative about weight lifting, provides a detailed description of the embodied literacies needed to be a successful lifter, weaving his own diet and workout plan into the text:

> . . . A general base plan for most lifters is chest/tri one day, the next back/bi, then legs and/or shoulders. These days can alternate, however a heathy way of working out is letting the muscle group you just worked rest for two to three days. When you work out, you are literally tearing the muscle fibers of the specific muscle you're working. Working the same group each day is a dumb idea, depending on your workout, because each muscle needs at least 48 hours to recover, ideally you should wait 72 hours but in this time, your body is producing protein to repair the muscles you just tore and making them even stronger than before. You can think about this process as an adaptation because however you work your body is how your body will repair it and then some . . .

This is only part of a long paragraph devoted to a detailed description of proper exercise protocol. Neither student references himself at all or explains how he developed his personal pitching style or workout plan; rather, they almost take the tone of a trainer instructing the reader in how to pitch a baseball or develop an exercise plan. These extended, expository-style passages in students' papers were not something I had noticed in my experience teaching the traditional literacy narrative.

While most of these expository interludes were brief, lasting only one or two paragraphs, several were longer. The majority of Edward's narrative, for instance, was devoted to describing the intricacies of the *Aion* universe rather than explaining his literacy development (prompting me to note in my response to his paper that, overall, it read more like a video game manual than a literacy narrative). One New Literacies Narrative in particular read more like an expository paper

from start to finish. Emily, one of Livi's students, wrote her New Literacies Narrative on the meanings of various slang terms. However, rather than explaining how she learned these terms, she frames her paper as a lesson wherein she teaches the reader the meanings of the terms. She devotes roughly one paragraph to each word, as in the following example:

> Another very common slang word is lowkey. An example of this is "Lowkey I really like this guy that I have class with but he doesn't know." When someone uses the word lowkey they are referring to something that is supposed to be on the down low or is secretive. Everyone thinks that lowkey originated and got popular from low or subdued tones in music because they are more secretive and not noticeable. Lowkey has been around for quite a while but in my own personal opinion I think it got so popular because famous rappers started including it into their song lyrics.

She follows this same pattern with each word: a definition, followed by speculation about the word's origin, and some concluding thought or transition into an explanation of the next word. There is no discussion of how one could develop literacy in slang terms or story of how she herself learned these terms. In fact, there really is no section of her paper that could be classified as narrative, and the text as a whole does not seem to fit the "literacy narrative" label.

This tension between the personal and expository seems to only occur in narratives that center on alternative literacies. It is likely that this tension can be at least partially traced to one of the instructions for narratives about alternative literacies listed in the assignment prompt (see Appendix A): "If you choose this option, your paper should explain why your topic can be considered a type of literacy and what role this literacy has played in your life." Some instructors prioritized this explanation more than others. Livi, for instance, wanted students to incorporate an explicit definition of *literacy* into their papers. At the other extreme, Janet did not seem to

care whether or not her students explicitly related their topics to literacy.[91] At any rate, when students are asked to explain how their topic can be considered a form of literacy (an explanation that generally isn't required when writing about reading and writing), they seem to shift to a more expository mode. It is also possible that, when choosing an alternative literacy, the student feels more of a need to explain the topic to an audience that might not be familiar with it, particularly when the student feels like they are an authority on the literacy in question. Again, this would not be the case when considering only the traditional definition of *literacy* as reading and writing.

When I first noticed this tendency during my first semester teaching the New Literacies Narrative, I assumed it was because the students did not accurately understand the genre conventions of the literacy narrative. However, after teaching this assignment several times and observing student work from other instructors, I believe it could be a way in which the New Literacies Narrative is evolving away from the literacy narrative genre. Because the traditional literacy narrative typically focuses on reading, writing, or academic literacy, the topic does not need to be justified as a literacy. Rather, the need to explain how one's topic is a literacy adds an additional constraint that alters students' responses, prompting them to shift into a more expository mode when they are explaining or analyzing their literacies. Instead of treating this as an error or inappropriate change in tone, it may be more productive to instead teach students how to deploy the expository mode effectively and selectively in their New Literacies Narratives, teaching them to fully and accurately explain their chosen literacy while still maintaining a personal connection to the reader.

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[91] Instructors' effects on student understanding and performance are discussed in the "Future Directions" section.

Perhaps, in the end, it would even be more accurate to change the New Literacies Narrative label to more fully reflect the mode of student responses it solicits, possibly as a "literacy exploration," a "personal literacy analysis," or another label that does not limit students solely to the narrative mode, a restriction that may not fit the new rhetorical situation created by the New Literacies Narrative. However, relabeling the assignment in this way could potentially push students further away from the narrative mode, perhaps leading students to focus more on explaining their literacies than describing their development in these literacies. This could lessen the personal connection students feel to the stories they tell, which could potentially affect students' affective engagement. This relabeling would also weaken the assignment's connection to the literacy narrative tradition that has been established in the composition studies literature, meaning that the success of this assignment would do less to contribute to the genre's continued relevance in writing classrooms. It could also make it more difficult for students to draw upon strategies from the literacy narrative genre, as the connection to the genre would be less apparent. As is the case with any assignment, individual instructors should tailor the title of the assignment to emphasize the knowledge and skills they want students to develop most; perhaps the "personal literacy analysis" label would more accurately reflect Livi's pedagogical goals, while the "New Literacies Narrative" label would be a better fit for Janet's classroom.

Future Directions

Different Student Populations

As noted in Chapter One, the majority of students enrolled in the university at the center of the study are full-time, residential students, and 74% of students are white. Because of the relative homogeneity of the student population, it would be interesting to see how the New

Literacies Narrative would translate to other contexts. Non-traditional and commuter students would likely have different educational goals and different literacy experiences to draw upon. Situating the New Literacies Narrative in a more ethnically diverse classroom setting may also influence the kinds of stories students relate in their narratives. Jabari Mahiri, Beverly J. Moss, and others have done excellent work in studying the literacies of ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse communities. I believe the New Literacies Narrative is adaptable enough to fit a wide range of instructional contexts (perhaps even more so than the traditional literacy narrative) due to the freedom it affords students, and the ways in which different student populations take up the assignment could potentially reveal fresh insights into the connections between literacy and identity.

Students below the college level would also likely interpret the course content in different ways. Despite the fact that many high school students are still exposed to versions of the literacy myth and/or an autonomous model of literacy development (as discussed in Chapter One), there is a growing movement among secondary English teachers to work to develop a nuanced understanding of literacy in their students. In their analysis of policy documents released by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), Ye He et al. note that these statements advocate for culturally responsive pedagogies that support the needs of language learners and emphasize multilingual pedagogies that highlight the relationship between language and culture. The authors then go on to suggest a new pedagogical orientation that further prompts all students to engage with global perspectives in the classroom (329). Yet, Allison Skerrett notes that "little knowledge exists about the processes through which youth develop [multiliterate] practices and identities across social worlds spanning school and outside school. Furthermore, scholars in the multiliteracies tradition invite considerations of how youths' outside-school multiple language

and literacy practices may productively inform literacy work in school" (322-323). She contributes to this discussion by tracing the development of one student's diverse range of literacy practices, as well as how her teacher utilized these literacies as resources in this student's education. The New Literacies Narrative could further contribute to this conversation by enabling secondary students to critically examine these same multiliterate practices, particularly those that develop outside of the classroom context.

Literacy narratives have also been well utilized in Basic Writing classrooms. George Otte and Rebecca Williams Mlynarczyk note that literacy narratives, particularly Rose's *Lives on the Boundary*, "helped to focus attention on . . . underprepared students: not just the confrontation with academic culture but also the home culture that sustained identity formation" (28). Caleb Corkery describes the benefits and complications of using literacy narratives in the Basic Writing classroom. He notes that while literacy narratives can increase writing confidence and demonstrate to students that "the struggle to attain a desired but foreign form of literacy is manageable," students enrolled in Basic Writing may not relate to the literacy narratives of established authors. In fact, Basic Writing students may feel even more alienated from literacy when reading these accounts, particularly when they do not align with the literacies of their home cultures (49). The New Literacies Narrative could work to address Corkery's criticisms, as students are given the freedom to choose how they define and discuss *literacy*. Introducing these students to definitions of *literacy* that do not center on printed text could allow writers who have been labelled "illiterate" to find and celebrate the literacies they do feel they possess, enabling them to begin their college English education from a place of confidence and creating a safe space in which to explore language and literacy.

Teaching Style and the New Literacies Narrative

Unit Sequence and Scaffolding

Though I did not include unit positioning as a factor in my analysis of student work, it would be interesting to explore the various ways the New Literacies Narrative can fit into an introductory composition curriculum and how that would affect student understanding and performance. As noted in Chapter Two, instructors were given the freedom to choose where they positioned the New Literacies Narrative unit in relation to other units. Four of the six instructors involved in the study (Janet, Moira, Erin, and myself) taught the New Literacies Narrative as the first unit of the course. Livi taught the unit as the second in her four-unit course sequence. Sasha taught the New Literacies Narrative unit as the third unit of her course before a short fourth unit that focused on revision of previous work. Each instructor reported that she was pleased with where she chose to place the unit in the curriculum, and the students who were interviewed indicated that they were also pleased with the positioning of the unit (regardless of where it was placed).

Literacy narratives are often used as a way to introduce students to academic writing. DeRosa notes that literacy narratives are typically assigned at the start of the semester (4). Several scholars who write about teaching literacy narratives, including Beaufort and Cheng, mention that they assign this project as the first in their assignment sequences. As indicated in the first chapter, the literacy narrative (and the New Literacies Narrative) can be an effective way to introduce students to audience and discourse community expectations, genre awareness, and other essential components of academic writing. Moira, Janet, and Erin also explained in their interviews that positioning the unit first allowed students to begin their college writing experiences discussing a topic they knew well and likely felt comfortable writing about.

Yet, both Livi and Sasha identified advantages of placing the New Literacies Narrative later in the semester. Livi taught the New Literacies Narrative immediately after a unit where students were asked to analyze their own language use in different contexts. She explained in her interview that this unit provided a nice transition into the New Literacies Narrative: "I did [the language analysis unit] first because I always want them to think about their positions with . . . their identities and language first . . . and then to me that segued nicely into the literacy narrative unit because you're still . . . thinking about your experiences, but maybe now you're expanding it to education or just your other interests. So I thought that segued nicely." This sequencing could have influenced Emily's decision to focus her New Literacies Narrative on slang terms, and the move from language analysis to the narrative mode may have played a role in the expository style she adopted. Livi also explained that discussing visual literacy in the New Literacies Narrative led into her third unit, a rhetorical analysis of visual images. With this careful sequencing, it is possible that students could more easily transfer the knowledge gained in each unit to future units and assignments.

Sasha shared in her interview that she chose to teach the New Literacies Narrative toward the end of the semester because she "wanted [students] to be able to talk [and] investigate . . . their own personal history and personality and identity and things like that after they have all of the tools to do so, so they can . . . do it more meaningfully." Her first two units were based on genre critique, and she noted that her students were able to quickly pick up on the genre conventions of literacy narratives. She said: "[The students] had known . . . how to look at genres, how to read genres, and to some degree how to read the ideologies. So when we started reading the examples for Unit 3 . . . they . . . really dug into them, and were picking up on . . . the cultural significance and the ideologies behind them." Sasha also explained that she believed

students would be excited to tackle more personal writing after two assignments focusing on public genres, thus fostering more engagement at a time in the semester when some students tend to struggle.

Livi and Sasha demonstrate the versatility of the New Literacies Narrative and how it can work in a variety of curricula. Both instructors thoughtfully scaffolded their courses and positioned the New Literacies Narrative where they believed it would be most beneficial to their students. It would be interesting to explore whether and how the understanding these instructors observed manifested itself in student work, and whether literacy narratives composed later in the semester demonstrate any differences in engagement or critical meta-awareness of literacy. It would also be useful to examine students' work in other assignments to assess the degree to which the positioning of the New Literacies Narrative unit affects students' other coursework or their ability to transfer their writing knowledge to other assignments.

Instructor Specialty and Student Understanding

One possible area for further research would be the influence that the instructor's specialty has on the way they teach the assignment and unit. As noted in Chapter Two, Janet, Moira, and Erin specialize in Creative Writing, while Livi, Sasha, and I specialize in Rhetoric and Composition. Because of my lack of training or experience in creative writing, I initially had some difficulty teaching methods or tips for crafting a compelling narrative. Even now, I try to resist the urge to prioritize the "literacy" aspect over the "narrative" aspect in my instruction, and I likely devote more time to discussion and analysis of the students' literacies than on the craft of writing. While we do discuss the genre features of the literacy narrative (which, as explained above, do not perfectly fit the genre of the New Literacies Narrative), my professional focus in

Rhetoric and Composition undoubtedly frames the way I approach writing instruction in this unit. Livi expressed a similar sentiment in her interview, admitting that she may have inadvertently locked her students into formatting their narrative in a certain way because she had difficulty thinking of alternatives.

As creative writers, Moira, Erin, and Janet may have approached the unit differently. Because I was only able to observe one class session for each instructor, I cannot say definitively whether or how their instruction differed from one another. However, I did notice that when I observed Erin's class, it was in many ways reminiscent of a creative writing course. In teaching students how to write in the narrative genre, she approached it more from a literary standpoint than a genre analysis standpoint. She devoted more time to discussion of the typical story arc for a narrative, noting that a chronological structure is the easiest way to achieve a traditional narrative arc with a climax and denouement. Erin also devoted a portion of class to an activity aimed at developing students' descriptive writing. In this activity, she asked students to describe the physical space of their classroom, thinking carefully about what details they would include in their description (the arrangement of the desks, the placement of the marker board) and what they would leave out (the list of the other classes that met in the same room, the coffee stain on the floor). Her approach was effective; in fact, I borrowed the description activity for my own class. However, being taught a more conservative narrative form may have influenced her students to produce more traditional literacy narratives. Nearly half of her students (six of thirteen) chose to write their narratives about academic literacy, a significantly higher percentage than the other instructors' students.[92] A follow-up study with more classroom observation or more standardization in instructional approaches could enable cross-disciplinary comparison and

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[92] The instructor with the 2nd-highest percentage of academic literacy narratives was Livi, with five of twenty (25%). I was the instructor with the lowest number of academic literacy narratives (zero of ten).

shed more light onto how instructors' specialties inform their pedagogical approaches, as well as how these approaches affect students' understanding of New Literacies.

It would also be interesting to study whether the instructors' specialties influenced their assessment of student work. Though I did not look at students' feedback or grades, each instructor addressed assessment in her interview. For example, when asked what she looked for in successful papers, Livi's concerns were almost exclusively rhetorical. In responding to student work, Livi looked for a clearly structured paper that explicitly defined what it means to be literate in the student's chosen topic, followed by two or three anecdotes about how the student learned different aspects of this literacy. She even noted in her interview that she allowed students to write in an expository style if they accomplished this goal, showing that she valued students' understanding of literacy over their skill in writing in the narrative mode.

At the other extreme, Janet indicated that she was more concerned with writing processes and the craft of writing than with students' understanding of literacy:

I think [what makes a New Literacies Narrative strong is] what makes any paper strong. Creative, original insights. You know, not just a rehashing of what you can think of off the top of your mind the night before it's due . . . obviously the person has done the reading, they've thought about it, they've let it mull over in their subconscious or whatever . . . They try a draft and they revise . . . I tell students, "I do not care what you express or what you believe. It's how well you express your thoughts that you'll be graded on." I mean . . . strong writing, you know . . . I do an exercise in 101 called painting with words, when we just go out and sit outside because the weather is so nice and I say, "Just write down what it is to be in this scene right now. What do you see? What do you smell? What do you hear? What, is there a breeze going by? . . . Bring that

sensory information into your writing, even academic writing." . . . I mean, you know what a good paper is. When the writing just grabs you. The writing is really fresh and original.

With this statement, Janet clearly emphasizes vivid imagery and original writing over students' understanding of literacy, even indicating that she didn't care about the content of the narratives as long as students expressed themselves well. While vivid imagery and well-crafted narrative style are certainly important, the fact that she does not mention literacy once in her description of her assessment is telling. However, her seeming disregard for literacy in her assessment of her students' New Literacies Narratives cannot be solely attributed to her professional focus on creative writing, as both Moira and Erin expected their students to demonstrate an understanding of literacy in their narratives. Rather, Janet is a different case, one that represents another possible direction for future research.

Instructor Perspectives and Student Learning

A possible area for further study would be to compare students' meta-awareness and engagement across instructors, comparing these results with instructors' attitudes toward the unit and their perceptions of their own students' work. As discussed in Chapter Three, Janet was the only instructor who had a negative perception of her students' levels of meta-awareness and engagement. It is worth noting that I did not notice any significant differences in meta-awareness or engagement between different instructors' students as I conducted my analysis. It could be that Janet's negative perception of the unit is related to her own understanding of it. Janet indicated at several points throughout the semester that she had difficulty understanding how *literacy* could be defined outside of reading and writing, expressing concern that her students

were not writing about literacy. In her interview, she noted that she was sometimes frustrated by the fact that she was teaching course content she didn't design and felt like she couldn't make changes.[93] I believe that Janet's perception of her students' understanding and engagement may be more reflective of her own attitude toward the unit than her actual student work.

Janet had difficulty with the idea of alternative literacies. For instance, when I asked her what she meant when she said her students didn't write about literacy, she responded, ". . . I don't think that they really addressed what it was to adopt the literature of a different culture." Though Janet clearly did understand the importance of cultural context, her focus on literature is somewhat puzzling and may help explain her negative perception of her students' work (as only two of her twenty-four students wrote narratives about reading and writing). When I asked Janet to explain in her own words what the assignment asked students to do, she read from the assignment prompt that "it asked them to focus on their development as a reader, writer, or language user," ignoring Option B (the option that focused on alternative literacies) entirely. In response, I asked her what a strong paper that responded to Option B would look like. Janet responded: ". . . one gal did a good job in her exploration of the LGBT community. She had a friend who was gay and she did a good job trying get inside his head and trying to imagine what it would be . . . how he came to acquire his beliefs, what it would be like to live his experience."[94] When I asked Janet how this paper related to literacy, Janet explained that ". . . she was not connecting to literacy . . . she was exercising the option B, the alternative literacy." In this telling quote, it becomes clear that Janet does not consider alternative literacies to be

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[93] Though I reminded Janet at several points during the semester that she was free to modify the course materials, she feared that doing so would affect the "purity" of my results.

[94] The student who wrote this paper chose not to participate in the study. Based on Janet's description, the student was not writing about a community to which she belonged, leading me to question whether this paper could even be classified as a personal narrative.

literacies at all, and believed Option B essentially gave students the option to avoid writing about literacy. Given this understanding, we can see how she would not perceive connections to literacy in her students' work, most of which focused on alternative literacies.

However, Janet's perceptions were partially reinforced by my interview with her student, Alison. As I noted in the previous chapter, Alison could not connect her narrative about overcoming her fear of public speaking to literacy. Janet was able to connect Alison's narrative to literacy due to its focus on spoken language, but the fact that Alison herself was not able to make this connection is troubling. By Janet's account, Alison was an excellent student who performed well on all of the assignments, including the New Literacies Narrative. This makes Alison's lack of meta-awareness of literacy even more perplexing. One possible reason for this is that, according to Alison, Janet specified that students' papers needed to relate to English or school in some way, equating the term *literacy* with academic pursuits. The fact that Alison, who did well on the assignment, continued to associate literacy solely with academic pursuits even after the end of the semester may be reflective of the way the concept was explained in class.

Janet's negative perception of her students' affective and cognitive engagement does not seem to be reflected in her students' reflections or Alison's interview. It is possible that Janet's negativity toward her students' levels of engagement can also be attributed to her perspective on the course content. If Janet was frustrated about her perceived lack of control over the unit or upset with her students' performance, it may have affected her perception of students' feelings toward the unit. Janet's perceived lack of cognitive engagement may be able to be similarly traced to her understanding of the unit. If reimagining literacy as a dynamic construct influenced by social context does promote positive cognitive engagement with the unit (as suggested in Chapter Three), then Janet's students, who were not asked to reimagine their definitions of

literacy, may have missed out on this opportunity to demonstrate cognitive engagement in class and their written work. Even students who wrote about an alternative literacy, such as Alison and the previously referenced student who wrote about her friend's experiences in the LGBT community, were clearly not challenged to frame their topics in terms of literacy, as both students performed successfully on the assignment without demonstrating (or without understanding) their papers' connection to literacy.

Every other participating instructor expressed in her interview that she enjoyed teaching the unit and that she was pleased with her students' performance and engagement throughout. Systematically tracking students' meta-awareness of literacy, affective engagement, and cognitive engagement by instructor would enable us to see in more detail how well the instructors' perceptions align with student work. It could also shed light on the degree to which the instructor's feelings toward the unit and understanding of key concepts like literacy influence student work. Clearly, the New Literacies Narrative does not fit all instructors or curricula. Janet noted in her interview that she had greater instructional success teaching a more traditional literacy narrative focused on reading and writing, both in English 101 and 102. Janet's example highlights the importance of selecting and adapting instructional materials to fit one's own pedagogical goals and teaching style, whether or not these materials include the New Literacies Narrative.

The Relationship Between Cognitive Engagement and Meta-Awareness

As discussed earlier, cognitive engagement has shown to be essential in developing meta-awareness of writing and literacy that can transfer across writing contexts. Further analyzing the relationship between students' expressions of cognitive engagement and their levels of meta-

awareness in the New Literacies Narrative could add to the conversation about the role engagement plays in meta-awareness and transfer. Students like Gabriela, who demonstrated above-average cognitive engagement and meta-awareness of literacy, suggest that engagement and meta-awareness are indeed positively correlated. Future research could explore whether the students who express cognitive engagement related to rethinking literacy (as opposed to some other aspect of writing the paper such as deciding which anecdotes to include) are the students who also demonstrate greater degrees of meta-awareness of literacy. The lasting implications of this relationship, including its implications for writing knowledge transfer, could then be assessed through a longitudinal study.

Longitudinal Applications

Because the present study was confined to one semester, it is impossible to speak to the lasting implications of the knowledge students gained in the New Literacies Narrative unit or how they applied it to their future learning and writing. These implications would be illuminated by a longitudinal study tracking students over multiple semesters or even years of collegiate coursework. It would be interesting to see what students retain from this assignment and unit as they progress through their education and how (or if) this knowledge influences their perceptions of their education, their lives, and the world around them. A longitudinal approach that tracks students beyond English 101, incorporating regular interviews with subjects and analysis of student work across the curriculum throughout their college careers, would work toward answering the question of whether or not the positive gains seen in the New Literacies Narrative unit led to long-term engagement and meta-awareness of literacies. It would also more

definitively identify if and how students transferred the knowledge gained in this unit to other writing situations, making the literacy narrative genre more applicable to other types of writing.

Incorporating Multimodality

Another interesting avenue of study would be to explore the implications of turning the New Literacies Narrative into a digital or multimodal assignment, such as the digital literacy narratives featured in the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives (DALN). Skerrett asserts that despite scholars' calls for instruction in multiliteracies, "descriptions of how teachers implement these pedagogies are sorely lacking" in secondary education (325). Scholars such as Jody Shipka, Kristin Arola, Anne Frances Wysocki, and others have provided such descriptions and advocated for the importance of incorporating digital and multimodal instruction in the composition classroom. There is also an increasing digital influence in the literacy narrative landscape, as evidenced by the previously referenced 2012 special edition of *Computers and Composition* devoted to literacy narratives in a digital context (Chandler and Scenters-Zapico), the expansive collection of digital literacy narratives housed in the DALN, and a growing body of scholarship on digital literacy narratives.

Assigning the New Literacies Narrative as a digital or multimodal project would allow students to communicate the story of their literacy acquisition in any mode they deem appropriate, whether it be a traditional literary essay, a video, an in-class demonstration, a photo essay, or any other mode of presentation. It would give students the opportunity to demonstrate additional literacies from their repertoire, whether they be digital, performative, oral, or any other form of literacy. They could even demonstrate the literacy that provides the focus for their narrative; for instance, a student could demonstrate their computer literacy by designing a web-

based narrative. Sasha echoed this in her interview, saying that she may assign a multimodal New Literacies Narrative the next time she teaches English 101. It would be interesting to see if and how the change in format would affect engagement with the unit and assignment. Similarly, assigning the New Literacies Narrative as a text-based essay and then asking students to revise their essays into multimodal projects could prompt them to develop further meta-awareness of genre, medium, and audience considerations.

Conclusion: Reinvigorating the Literacy Narrative in First-Year Writing

Is the literacy narrative dead? In the final analysis, it seems clear that the consensus of the WPA-L discussion—that the literacy narrative is indeed alive and well—holds up. One reason for the genre's continued relevance is its versatility and adaptability, from the digital projects, researched essays, and multimodal narratives referenced in Chapter One to the New Literacies Narrative studied here. Taken together, I believe the results of my rhetorical and linguistic analyses of students' New Literacies Narratives and written reflections, along with instructor and student interviews, demonstrate that the New Literacies Narrative has the potential to help students develop a critical meta-awareness of the cultural embeddedness of diverse literacies while positively fostering student engagement with the assignment and course. While student success was not uniform across all students and classes, I was excited to see the ways in which students were able to identify and analyze multiple literacies, and students did genuinely seem to enjoy completing the assignment.

If the literacy narrative is indeed in decline, as some have argued, the New Literacies Narrative represents one of several iterations (or alternatives) that can retain the pedagogical benefits of the original assignment (discussed in the Chapter One) while challenging students to

think critically and potentially develop knowledge they can transfer to other writing contexts. Furthermore, the New Literacies Narrative's focus on alternative literacies facilitates a more inclusive classroom dialogue about literacy, one that does not disenfranchise students with negative school experiences. Whether the New Literacies Narrative can be more productively thought of as a modified literacy narrative or a new genre unto itself, the assignment is a promising alternative for instructors who have grown disenfranchised with the more traditional literacy narrative.

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Appendices

Appendix A: New Literacies Narrative Assignment Prompt

<u>Writing Project 1: Literacy Narrative</u>

"…literacy means joining a specific community through understanding the issues it considers important and developing the capacity to participate in conversations about those issues."
        --Anne Ruggles Gere, *Writing Groups*

Task: Write an autobiographical narrative essay of at least 1000 words describing how you acquired and developed a certain type of literacy. There are 2 directions you can take with this:

  a. You can choose to focus on literacy in the traditional reading/writing/language sense (like Anzaldúa or Alexie). This would involve highlighting a few significant events in your development as a reader, writer, or language user (or a combination thereof) and explaining why these events are connected and meaningful.
  b. You can explore an alternative literacy (like Mirabelli). Think about how you learned the 'unwritten rules' of a certain community, subculture, skill, or activity (technology, workplaces, athletics, Greek organizations, religious organizations, special interest clubs, and countless others). What verbal language or written communication is used? If you choose this option, your paper should explain why your topic can be considered a type of literacy and what role this literacy has played in your life.

With either option, your final product should take the form of a personal narrative. You may include visual elements such as photographs to enhance your narrative, but it is not required. We will discuss the conventions of a personal narrative in class.

Purposes of the Assignment: This assignment will allow you to examine yourself as a reader and writer of texts (written or otherwise) in multiple contexts. This process will deepen your understanding of how you have been a member of, or influenced by, various communities and contexts. It will also begin developing our shared understanding of your literacy experiences. The project will give you an awareness of the genre of the literary or personal essay (in contrast to an academic or scholarly essay) and the rhetorical skills associated with the genre.

Tips for a Successful Literacy Narrative:

<u>Organization</u>

  • Organize your essay thematically rather than give an account strictly based on a chronology. Look for the overarching point/theme that ties two or three prominent experiences together. Then develop each experience, through anecdote, telling stories to subtly support your overarching point. Give specific details to illustrate your theme.
  • Don't begin your essay with a thesis statement laying out your overall point. The literary essay as a genre depends on extensive descriptions and details to build to the point, which is usually revealed at the end of the essay.

<u>Rhetorical Strategies</u>

- Specific examples are always more effective than generalizations in a literary essay. If you are going to generalize, be sure you provide specific evidence and examples to support your generalization. Through careful selection of telling details, put us in the scene so we can experience what you describe.
- No 1000-word essay can tell a person's entire history (even in a specific area such as literacy). You will have to be selective and choose only the most memorable experiences. Make your words count.
- I encourage you to include other types of media in your literacy autobiography. These types do not count toward the 1000 words, however. (In other words, if you include photocopies of your first short story, you still have to write at least 1000 words of text).

All submissions will be processed by SafeAssign anti-plagiarism software.

Appendix B: End-of-Unit Reflection Questions

1. What was the most challenging part of this assignment for you? What was the part that came most naturally?

2. What was your favorite part of this unit?

3. What do you wish you could have improved upon in this draft? Why couldn't you do that?

4. What did you learn about writing in this unit?

5. The next project will be a [brief description of the following unit and project]. What do you want to remember from this unit and project to apply to the next unit and project?

6. What advice would you give to a student next semester writing the same assignment?

7. Anything else you would like to say?

Appendix C: 2012 Literacy Narrative Assignment Prompt, adapted from Beaufort's
College Writing and Beyond

Writing Project #1 Literacy Autobiography Essay

Task:
Write an autobiographical essay (four pages minimum) that focuses on those turning points or most meaningful events that have shaped who you are today as a reader and writer in multiple scenes, situations, and genres.

Purposes of the Assignment:

This assignment will allow you to examine yourself as both a reader and writer of texts in multiple contexts. This process will deepen your understanding of how you have been a member of, or influenced by, various communities and contexts. It will also begin developing our shared understanding of your writing experiences. The project will give you an awareness of the genre of literary essay (in contrast to an academic or scholarly essay) and the rhetorical skills associated with the genre.

Tips for a Successful Literacy Autobiography Essay:

Organization

- Organize your essay thematically rather than give an account strictly based on a chronology. Look for the overarching point/theme that ties two or three prominent experiences together. Then develop each experience, through anecdote, telling stories to subtly support your overarching point.
- Don't begin your essay with a thesis statement laying out your overall point. The literary essay as a genre depends on extensive descriptions and details to build to the point, which is usually revealed at the end of the essay.

Rhetorical Strategies

- Specific examples are always more effective than generalizations in a literary essay. If you are going to generalize, be sure you provide specific evidence and examples to support your generalization. Through careful selection of telling details, put us in the scene so we can experience what you describe.
- No four- or five-page essay can tell a person's entire history (even in a specific area such as literacy). Think of the full book that Eula Biss wrote to tell a portion of her autobiography. You will have to be selective and choose only the most memorable experiences. Make your words count.
- I encourage you to include other types of media in your literacy autobiography. These types do not count toward the four pages, however. (In other words, if you include photocopies of your first short story, you still have to write at least four pages of text.)

Evaluation Criteria:

Rhetorical Purpose

- Essay shows a clear focus—answers the "so what" question for the reader
- Essay fulfills reader's genre expectations for a literary essay

Content

- Essay shows ability to apply theories of scene, situation, and genre to a particular situation, as tools for analysis
- Essay shows insight, creates interest through descriptive and narrative rhetorical skill

Structure
- Essay parts follow a logical, thematic sequence that leads up to the overall point of the essay
- Essay's point is either implied or stated at the end of the essay
- Paragraph breaks are logical and facilitate easy reading of the essay

Linguistic Features

- Essay shows careful choice of language appropriate to its intended audience
- Essay is virtually free of sentence-level errors in Standardized Edited English, except where another language variety is deliberately chosen for purposes apparent to the reader

Class's Criteria
- Other features of these essays that the class agrees should be part of the evaluation criteria

(assignment, details, and wording taken from Anne Beaufort, *College Writing and Beyond*, pages 191-194, with slight modifications)

Appendix D: Fall 2015 New Literacies Narrative Peer Review Guide

Reviewer's Name_____   **Author's Name**_____

Before you exchange papers: On the back of this sheet, write down 2 specific questions about your own paper that you want your peer reviewers to answer and that aren't already on the worksheet.

As you read through the draft the first time:
1. Mark with a star, happy face, or some other positive indicator some spots in the draft you especially liked.
2. Mark with a squiggly line places where you got a bit lost or confused (don't mark any grammar or usage items for now; focus on being a genuine reader, not a judge).

Answer the following questions after you read the entire paper at least once:

How well is the literacy theme incorporated? Are there any areas where the connection to literacy could be made clearer? Where does the paper stray off topic?

How effective is the paper's organization/sequencing/paragraph arrangement? What can the author do to improve organization and/or flow?

In 10 words or less, what would you say is the main point/focus/conclusion of the narrative? Is this an effective one?

Appendix E: New Literacies Narrative Unit Schedule[95]

Page numbers refer to *Everyone's an Author* unless otherwise specified. "BB" = Blackboard, *EAA = Everyone's an Author*, and *WR = A Writer's Resource*.

Unit #1: Exploring Literacy

Day 1	**Introduction to English 101**
24 August 2015	Class Intros and Syllabus Review
Monday	
Day 2	**Finding Your Writing Process**
26 August 2015	*Homework Due:*
Wednesday	☐ *Complete Syllabus Quiz on BB*
	☐ *Read p. 24-28*
	☐ *Go to the text's Tumblr site (linked on BB) and complete any one of the activities*
Day 3	**Writing for Different Audiences**
28 August 2015	*Homework Due:*
Friday	☐ *Read p. 515-525*
	☐ *Journal response on BB*
Day 4	**What is a Literacy Narrative? // Introduce WP1**
31 August 2015	*Homework Due:*
Monday	☐ *Read Anzaldúa, "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" (on BB)*
	☐ *Read Alexie, "The Joy of Reading and Writing" (on BB)*
	☐ *Journal response on BB*
Day 5	**Exploring Nontraditional Literacies**
2 September 2015	*Homework Due:*
Wednesday	☐ *Read Mirabelli, "Learning to Serve" (on BB—just read "Lou's Restaurant," "The Menu," and "Conclusion" sections)*
	☐ *Journal response on BB*
	☐ *Read WP1 prompt and write down any questions you have*
Day 6	**Exploring Cultural Literacies**
4 September 2015	*Homework Due:*
Friday	☐ *Sign up for a conference time on BB by 11:59 pm*
	☐ *Journal response on BB*
	☐ *Remember: no class Monday (Labor Day)*

[95] I used this schedule when teaching this unit and provided it to the participating instructors, who were given freedom to modify it. The unit schedules of the other participating instructors varied slightly.

Day 7	**Writing Your Narrative**
9 September 2015	*Homework Due:*
Wednesday	☐ *Read p. 101-105, 108-117 (EAA)* ☐ *Read p. 155-157 (WR)* ☐ *Journal response on BB*
Day 8	**Rubric and Peer Review Prep**
11 September 2015	*Homework Due:*
Friday	☐ ***Cultural Literacies Mini-Paper due at 11:59 pm via BB*** ☐ *Read p. 122-127* ☐ *Write down 3 concerns you have about your draft*
Day 9	**NO CLASS SESSION: Individual Conferences**
14 September 2015	If you're not meeting with me, you should be writing today. *Homework Due at Conference:*
Monday	☐ *Conference Draft* ☐ *Pre-Conference Reflection Worksheet*
Day 10	**NO CLASS SESSION: Individual Conferences**
16 September 2015	If you're not meeting with me, you should be writing today. *Homework Due at Conference:*
Wednesday	☐ *Conference Draft* ☐ *Pre-Conference Reflection Worksheet*
Day 11	**NO CLASS SESSION: Individual Conferences**
18 September 2015	If you're not meeting with me, you should be writing today. *Homework Due at Conference:*
Friday	☐ *Conference Draft* ☐ *Pre-Conference Reflection Worksheet*
Day 12	**WP1 Peer Review**
21 September 2015	*Homework Due:*
Monday	☐ *2 hard copies of WP1*

Appendix F: Prompt for *Stephen Fry in America* Response Essay

Cultural Literacies Mini-Paper

"To be literate means to have control of . . . 'a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group . . .'" (Gee quoted in Mirabelli 146)

In a 300-word paper, please answer the following questions about <u>ONE </u>of the communities or subcultures Stephen Fry interacts with.* Note that some of these subcultures have more clearly defined literacies than others, so choose wisely. These questions may also be helpful as you begin to think about your own literacies for WP1. <u>You will turn this in via Blackboard by Friday, September 11</u> (worth 20 homework points). All submissions will be processed by SafeAssign anti-plagiarism software. <u>This will be graded (A-F) and late work will not be accepted</u>. Your paper should address all of the following questions, though not necessarily in this order.

1. Which community featured in the video are you discussing?

2. What methods do community members use to communicate?

3. What sorts of texts (written or otherwise) are used in this community? How are they used?

4. Based on what they share with Fry (an outsider), what seems to be important to this community? What do they want the world to know about their community?

5. What are some of the things you would need to know to be considered a literate member of this community?

6. How can participation in this community can be considered a type of literacy? What kinds of literacies do these people employ as community members? Feel free to use the quote at the top of this page or the Gere quote from your WP1 assignment prompt to frame your response.

*If you missed class on September 4, you can access the video at the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_IjDThAPpxc. It is also linked on BB under Unit 1 In-Class Material.

Appendix G: Fall 2015 Journal Prompts

Journal due 8/28: You are part of a student group that is trying to persuade the University to build more free parking lots on campus, and they put you in charge of getting the message out to other students and administrators. It is important for your audience to know what your cause is and why it's worth supporting. Compose the following:

--text for a flyer to be posted around campus

--an email to the provost

--a tweet to be sent via your organization's Twitter account.

As you composed in these different genres, how did your writing style change? What different factors did you consider?

Journal due 8/31: Based on the literacy narratives you read for your assignment (Anzaldúa and Alexie), what would you say are the defining characteristics of a literary or personal narrative essay? Think about topics/themes, language used, intended audience, etc. You will be writing in this genre for Writing Project 1. What are some important things to keep in mind when you write your own personal narrative essay?

Journal due 9/2: In your reading, Mirabelli explores what he describes as "the language and literacy of food service workers." How can what he observed in this community be considered a type of literacy?* What sort of texts (written or oral) does the community use? How does Mirabelli's article expand traditional notions of what literacy is? Can your reading for today be considered a literacy narrative? Why or why not?

*You may want to refer to Gere's definition of literacy on your WP1 prompt.

Journal due 9/4: Based on what we've discussed about nontraditional literacies thus far, write down two skills/communities/aspects of your life that involve literacy. For each, answer the following questions:

--Why can this be considered a form of literacy?

--What forms of communication (written, verbal, or otherwise) are involved?

--What does it take to become "literate" in this skill/community/practice/etc.?

Journal due 9/9: Using what we've learned about literacy and literacy narratives, write one paragraph of a rough draft of your literacy narrative (you don't actually have to use this in your final paper, though you are welcome to do so). Write about an important event in your literacy development, whether you are focusing on reading/writing/language or something else. Try to make this as detailed and engaging as possible--paint a mental picture for your audience. If you have any questions or concerns now that you've started writing, please bring them up in class.

Appendix H: Interview Protocols

Instructor Interview Protocol

Note: Depending on the interviewee's responses to these questions, I asked follow-up questions or altered my script slightly. Each interview covered, at minimum, these questions.

1. Please state your name and the semester in which you taught the English 101 literacy narrative unit.
2. Overall, how would you describe your English 101 classroom and your goals as a composition instructor? What do you emphasize in your class? What do you want students to be able to do at the end of the class, and how does the literacy narrative fit into or help accomplish these goals?
3. Was this your first time teaching a literacy narrative? If not, how did this assignment compare to other literacy narratives you've taught? How would you describe your experience with the literacy narrative unit and assignment?
4. In your own words, what do you think the literacy narrative assignment asked students to do?
5. Overall, how would you describe your students' reactions to the assignment? What concepts did they understand easily? Where did they struggle?
6. Please describe any changes you made to the assignments, daily schedule, etc. Why did you make these changes (if applicable)? What effect do you think these changes had?
7. Can you briefly describe the focus of your other units and assignments? How did the literacy narrative fit into your larger curriculum?
8. Overall, how would you describe your impression of students' work? How did it meet, exceed, or fall short of your expectations as an instructor?
9. Please describe one of the stronger papers. What made it a strong paper?
10. Please describe one of the weaker papers. What made it weak?
11. What did you want your students to gain in this unit and assignment? Do you think this assignment helped your students achieve the goals you set out for them? Why or why not?
12. Did you observe any instances of your students drawing on knowledge gained in the first unit in later assignments and class discussions?
13. Would you teach this assignment again? Why or why not? If so, what would you change?

Student Interview Protocol

Note: Part of this was a discourse-based interview, meaning that the questions will varied somewhat based on what the student wrote in his/her literacy narrative. Depending on the interviewee's responses to these questions, I asked follow-up questions or altered my script slightly. Each interview covered, at minimum, these questions.

1. Please state your name, your teacher's name, and the semester in which you took English 101.
2. How would you describe your overall experience in English 101?
3. How would you describe your experience with the literacy narrative unit and assignment?
4. In your own words, what do you think the literacy narrative assignment asked you to do?
5. How was the literacy narrative assignment similar to other kinds of writing you do or have done in the past? How was it different?
6. Describe the focus or topic of your literacy narrative. What goals were you trying to achieve with your literacy narrative?
7. How does your narrative relate to literacy?
8. Would you be willing to take a look at your paper and talk about some of the choices you made there? (At this point, I will ask questions regarding the narrative's focus, development, and organization).
9. What was your biggest take-away from the literacy narrative assignment? What were the most important things you learned?
10. Can you think of any times when you drew upon knowledge gained in the literacy narrative unit in other 101 projects or class discussions? What about other classes or non-academic situations?
11. Can you think of future situations in which you can use the knowledge you gained from this assignment?
12. If you could re-write the assignment, what changes would you make?

Appendix I: Word Frequencies

Table 14
250 Most Frequently Used Words[96] in Student Narratives and Reflections

	Word	Freq.[97]	Texts[98]	%[99]		Word	Freq.	Texts	%
1	NOT	732.00	110.00	95.65	39	NEW	192.00	73.00	63.48
2	HOW	537.00	107.00	93.04	40	NOW	192.00	73.00	63.48
3	DO	490.00	103.00	89.57	41	STARTED	186.00	74.00	64.35
4	TIME	479.00	105.00	91.30	42	WANT	185.00	70.00	60.87
5	SCHOOL	477.00	96.00	83.48	43	WRITE	185.00	30.00	26.09
6	LIKE	446.00	107.00	93.04	44	REMEMBER	182.00	60.00	52.17
7	JUST	434.00	100.00	86.96	45	KNEW	177.00	62.00	53.91
8	LIFE	349.00	93.00	80.87	46	ABLE	176.00	67.00	58.26
9	PEOPLE	332.00	89.00	77.39	47	FRIENDS	173.00	57.00	49.57
10	GET	323.00	99.00	86.09	48	ENGLISH	170.00	80.00	69.57
11	DAY	313.00	86.00	74.78	49	READING	170.00	33.00	28.70
12	DID	300.00	89.00	77.39	50	NEXT	168.00	65.00	56.52
13	WRITING	288.00	28.00	24.35	51	SEE	163.00	76.00	66.09
14	PART	283.00	66.00	57.39	52	SAY	162.00	63.00	54.78
15	GAME	279.00	37.00	32.17	53	GOOD	158.00	73.00	63.48
16	MAKE	265.00	87.00	75.65	54	STILL	157.00	72.00	62.61
17	EVEN	261.00	96.00	83.48	55	SAID	156.00	57.00	49.57
18	TEAM	251.00	41.00	35.65	56	YEARS	156.00	73.00	63.48
19	KNOW	249.00	89.00	77.39	57	LEARN	154.00	60.00	52.17
20	GO	243.00	85.00	73.91	58	WANTED	154.00	61.00	53.04
21	NEVER	241.00	89.00	77.39	59	WELL	151.00	67.00	58.26
22	GOING	238.00	82.00	71.30	60	WORDS	151.00	46.00	40.00
23	MADE	233.00	86.00	74.78	61	PERSON	150.00	67.00	58.26
24	WAY	232.00	90.00	78.26	62	WORK	150.00	66.00	57.39
25	YEAR	228.00	74.00	64.35	63	WENT	149.00	77.00	66.96
26	LITERACY	224.00	60.00	52.17	64	THINK	147.00	69.00	60.00
27	VERY	222.00	81.00	70.43	65	THOUGHT	146.00	65.00	56.52
28	BACK	218.00	86.00	74.78	66	PLAY	143.00	37.00	32.17
29	REALLY	217.00	78.00	67.83	67	FELT	142.00	59.00	51.30
30	CAME	214.00	75.00	65.22	68	THING	142.00	65.00	56.52
31	PAPER	210.00	29.00	25.22	69	SAME	141.00	59.00	51.30
32	HIGH	208.00	79.00	68.70	70	HELP	138.00	66.00	57.39
33	LEARNED	208.00	73.00	63.48	71	MOM	138.00	42.00	36.52
34	THINGS	208.00	84.00	73.04	72	BETTER	137.00	59.00	51.30
35	DIFFERENT	204.00	73.00	63.48	73	HARD	137.00	70.00	60.87
36	UNIT	204.00	15.00	13.04	74	LITTLE	136.00	71.00	61.74
37	READ	199.00	49.00	42.61	75	TAKE	136.00	69.00	60.00
38	CLASS	198.00	57.00	49.57	76	BEST	135.00	68.00	59.13

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[96] Minus function words, linking verbs, and student and instructor names.
[97] The frequency with which the word occurs in the corpus.
[98] The number of texts in which the word occurs.
[99] The percentage of texts in which the word occurs.

	Word	Freq.	Texts	%		Word	Freq.	Texts	%
77	BOOK	129.00	29.00	25.22	123	COACH	88.00	21.00	18.26
78	OWN	128.00	65.00	56.52	124	TOO	88.00	52.00	45.22
79	HAVING	126.00	64.00	55.65	125	UNTIL	88.00	57.00	49.57
80	FAMILY	125.00	41.00	35.65	126	STORY	87.00	31.00	26.96
81	EVER	119.00	66.00	57.39	127	FEW	86.00	56.00	48.70
82	EXPERIENCE	118.00	59.00	51.30	128	START	86.00	52.00	45.22
83	TAUGHT	118.00	53.00	46.09	129	ACTUALLY	85.00	46.00	40.00
84	LOT	117.00	60.00	52.17	130	END	85.00	53.00	46.09
85	WHY	117.00	54.00	46.96	131	IMPORTANT	85.00	55.00	47.83
86	GIVE	116.00	46.00	40.00	132	SOMEONE	85.00	56.00	48.70
87	HOME	116.00	53.00	46.09	133	SURE	85.00	46.00	40.00
88	LONG	116.00	60.00	52.17	134	FINALLY	84.00	46.00	40.00
89	DAD	115.00	32.00	27.83	135	POINT	84.00	49.00	42.61
90	PARENTS	114.00	43.00	37.39	136	TELL	84.00	42.00	36.52
91	UNDERSTAND	114.00	53.00	46.09	137	USED	84.00	42.00	36.52
92	PUT	113.00	65.00	56.52	138	LANGUAGE	83.00	32.00	27.83
93	TEACHER	113.00	33.00	28.70	139	NEEDED	83.00	48.00	41.74
94	FAVORITE	111.00	34.00	29.57	140	NIGHT	83.00	41.00	35.65
95	FOUND	109.00	61.00	53.04	141	COLLEGE	82.00	34.00	29.57
96	RIGHT	109.00	54.00	46.96	142	KNOWLEDGE	82.00	35.00	30.43
97	DOING	108.00	57.00	49.57	143	ROOM	82.00	46.00	40.00
98	TOOK	108.00	57.00	49.57	144	GREAT	81.00	44.00	38.26
99	BECOME	107.00	53.00	46.09	145	GETTING	80.00	52.00	45.22
100	LOVE	106.00	46.00	40.00	146	JOB	80.00	39.00	33.91
101	WORLD	106.00	52.00	45.22	147	NEED	80.00	48.00	41.74
102	LEARNING	105.00	49.00	42.61	148	LOOK	79.00	50.00	43.48
103	FEEL	104.00	55.00	47.83	149	PLAYED	79.00	38.00	33.04
104	LITERATE	104.00	32.00	27.83	150	STUDENT	79.00	28.00	24.35
105	PRACTICE	103.00	31.00	26.96	151	ELSE	78.00	37.00	32.17
106	GRADE	102.00	41.00	35.65	152	MIND	78.00	42.00	36.52
107	PROJECT	102.00	15.00	13.04	153	ASKED	77.00	47.00	40.87
108	COME	101.00	61.00	53.04	154	ORDER	76.00	39.00	33.91
109	TOLD	100.00	51.00	44.35	155	PLACE	76.00	47.00	40.87
110	BOOKS	96.00	21.00	18.26	156	DAYS	75.00	46.00	40.00
111	FIND	96.00	53.00	46.09	157	GAVE	75.00	49.00	42.61
112	HOUSE	96.00	31.00	26.96	158	MAKING	75.00	45.00	39.13
113	LAST	96.00	53.00	46.09	159	ONCE	75.00	48.00	41.74
114	WHOLE	95.00	52.00	45.22	160	TIMES	75.00	50.00	43.48
115	BECAME	94.00	57.00	49.57	161	SKILLS	74.00	36.00	31.30
116	CALLED	93.00	48.00	41.74	162	HELPED	73.00	37.00	32.17
117	BALL	92.00	19.00	16.52	163	MOMENT	73.00	40.00	34.78
118	TALK	92.00	42.00	36.52	164	RULES	73.00	25.00	21.74
119	SOCCER	90.00	8.00	6.96	165	FOOTBALL	72.00	16.00	13.91
120	ASSIGNMENT	89.00	16.00	13.91	166	RUN	72.00	27.00	23.48
121	GIRLS	89.00	29.00	25.22	167	CHALLENGING	71.00	16.00	13.91
122	PLAYING	89.00	37.00	32.17	168	STUDENTS	71.00	27.00	23.48

		Word	Freq.	Texts	%		Word	Freq.	Texts	%
169		TRYING	71.00	45.00	39.13	215	SENIOR	56.00	31.00	26.96
170		USE	71.00	46.00	40.00	216	RUNNING	55.00	31.00	26.96
171		BASKETBALL	70.00	9.00	7.83	217	SUMMER	55.00	31.00	26.96
172		BIG	70.00	45.00	39.13	218	CLASSES	54.00	22.00	19.13
173		TOGETHER	70.00	36.00	31.30	219	PLAYERS	54.00	23.00	20.00
174		UNDERSTANDING	70.00	38.00	33.04	220	EXCITED	53.00	33.00	28.70
175		WORKING	70.00	34.00	29.57	221	FUN	53.00	32.00	27.83
176		KIDS	69.00	36.00	31.30	222	APPLY	52.00	17.00	14.78
177		FEELING	68.00	43.00	37.39	223	BODY	52.00	26.00	22.61
178		FRIEND	68.00	37.00	32.17	224	EASY	52.00	28.00	24.35
179		KNOWING	68.00	40.00	34.78	225	SOON	52.00	36.00	31.30
180		TRY	68.00	43.00	37.39	226	FACE	51.00	36.00	31.30
181		CHANGE	67.00	31.00	26.96	227	LET	51.00	33.00	28.70
182		FRONT	67.00	31.00	26.96	228	TODAY	51.00	36.00	31.30
183		LOOKED	67.00	35.00	30.43	229	BELIEVE	50.00	33.00	28.70
184		AGAIN	66.00	40.00	34.78	230	ENDED	50.00	33.00	28.70
185		HERE	66.00	36.00	31.30	231	KEEP	50.00	33.00	28.70
186		WEEK	66.00	35.00	30.43	232	MUSIC	50.00	14.00	12.17
187		FIELD	65.00	20.00	17.39	233	REALIZED	50.00	35.00	30.43
188		GAMES	65.00	24.00	20.87	234	GROUP	49.00	26.00	22.61
189		LOOKING	65.00	40.00	34.78	235	MEANT	49.00	36.00	31.30
190		GIRL	64.00	29.00	25.22	236	QUICKLY	49.00	32.00	27.83
191		TOPIC	64.00	16.00	13.91	237	SAW	49.00	38.00	33.04
192		WORD	64.00	31.00	26.96	238	SOMETIMES	49.00	29.00	25.22
193		LOVED	63.00	37.00	32.17	239	LINE	48.00	24.00	20.87
194		SHOW	63.00	37.00	32.17	240	PERSONAL	48.00	30.00	26.09
195		DONE	61.00	37.00	32.17	241	SEPTEMBER	48.00	40.00	34.78
196		HAND	61.00	34.00	29.57	242	TAKES	48.00	32.00	27.83
197		IDEA	61.00	34.00	29.57	243	CAMP	47.00	6.00	5.22
198		MIDDLE	61.00	34.00	29.57	244	DRAFT	47.00	11.00	9.57
199		PLAYER	61.00	22.00	19.13	245	FRESHMAN	47.00	27.00	23.48
200		TALKING	61.00	37.00	32.17	246	MAKES	47.00	33.00	28.70
201		DECIDED	60.00	34.00	29.57	247	ADVICE	46.00	11.00	9.57
202		OTHERS	60.00	33.00	28.70	248	NATURALLY	46.00	7.00	6.09
203		COMMUNITY	59.00	23.00	20.00	249	OPEN	46.00	28.00	24.35
204		HEAD	59.00	37.00	32.17	250	PAST	46.00	31.00	26.96
205		WISH	59.00	9.00	7.83					
206		LATER	58.00	37.00	32.17					
207		OLD	58.00	36.00	31.30					
208		LEFT	57.00	35.00	30.43					
209		COURSE	56.00	33.00	28.70					
210		DANCE	56.00	6.00	5.22					
211		EYES	56.00	29.00	25.22					
212		MOTHER	56.00	24.00	20.87					
213		NAME	56.00	36.00	31.30					
214		NARRATIVE	56.00	27.00	23.48					