Transforming Literacy:
Adventures in Digital Multi-Modality
NWP Spring Meeting
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University of California, Berkeley
Transforming literacy…

A familiarity with the full range of communicative tools, modes (oral and written), and media, plus an awareness of and a sensitivity to the power and importance of representation of self and others, along with the space and support to communicate critically, aesthetically, lovingly, and agentively.
DUSTY: Digital Underground
Storytelling for You(th)

Community technology center, a partnership among university, community centers, churches, schools

• access to new media tools and information technologies
• after-school and summer programs for children, youth, adults, and seniors from community
• mentoring opportunities for students from university

On-going research in participants’ experiences and center’s role in community

• exploration of new literacies
Paul Willis on “Symbolic Creativity”

“…the multitude of ways in which young people use, humanize, decorate and invest with meanings their common and immediate life spaces and social practices” (p. 2)

“…Necessary symbolic work is necessary simply because humans are communicating as well as producing beings…. All. This is our species distinction. Nor is this a merely formal or physiological property that might lie unused in some. Only through its exercise does communication exist and all of us communicate. This is how we manifest and produce the social and dynamic nature of our humanity.

–from Common Culture (1990)
Ruth Finnegan on the “multiplex” and “versatile” nature of communication

“This indeed may be among the distinctions of the human fashion of communicating: not our ‘mental’ or ‘intellectual’ achievements but our practice of interconnecting at once through many modes, simultaneously, overlappingly, subtly, differentially…. It is through this mix of arts—patterned yet flexible, multifaceted, fluid, human-recognized, made possible through the resources of the human body and its works in the world—that we organise our active human interconnectedness; that—for good or ill—we continue to create the human world in and through which we interconnect.” (p. 243)

—Communication: Multiple Modes of Human Interconnection (2002)
MICHAEL REES: performance, animation, video, installation, sculptural objects, computer software programs, and interactivity
Overview

• *Local Context*: Welcome to Oakland, CA and DUSTY

• *Theories*: Identity, New Literacy Studies/Semiotics, Geography

• *Voices and Literacies*: Digital Artifacts by Youth and Adults from Oakland

• *Research*
GAS CONNECTION
PLUMBING
510.501.5978
DRAINS
ESTIMATES FREE
This is not a Holiday to Celebrate.

SAVE THE TRAIN STATION
SAVE OUR HISTORY

WE WILL NOT BE MOVED

THE TRAIN STATION IS IN WEST OAKLAND
DUSTY:
Digital Underground Storytelling for You(th)
Conceptualizing Diversity

- Racial/Ethnic
  - Linguistic
    - Socio-Economic
    - Generational
    - Institutional
  - Spatial
  - Semiotic
Perspectives from Theory

• Socio-Cultural Perspectives on Identity: Narrating a Self

• New Literacy Studies and Semiotics: Multi-Media and Multi-Modality

• Cultural Geography: The Experience and Representation of Space, Place, and Landscape
Socio-Cultural Perspectives on Identity Formation

- Identity as enacted through language and other semiotic systems (Urciuoli, 1995)
- Constructed from past experiences, available cultural resources, and possible future selves (Holland and colleagues, 1998)
- Inseparable from learning and especially mastery of the acquisition of expertise (Wenger, 1998)
- Articulated through story or narrative (Bruner, 1994)
A Tellable Self

Selves, like cultures, are not so much preserved in stories as they are created, reworked, and revised through participation in everyday narrative practices that are embedded in and responsive to shifting interpersonal conditions. Memories of self and other provide a constantly updated resource that narrators exploit in projecting tellable and interpretable selves” (Miller, 1995, pp. 175-176).
Perspectives from Theory

• *Socio-Cultural Perspectives on Identity: Narrating a Self*
• *New Literacy Studies and Semiotics: Multi-Media and Multi-Modality*
• *Cultural Geography: The Experience and Representation of Space, Place, and Landscape*
The Pictoral Turn

Ours is an age in which the pictoral turn has supplanted the linguistic one, as images push words off the page and our lives becomes increasingly mediated by a popular visual culture.

Distinctive contrasts to the primarily linguistic texts and the forms of textual reasoning that predominate in schools and universities.

Sustained attention to the visual isn’t a customary part of schools’ literacy curricula, and in fact, there is much ambivalence toward it in the US
Multi-Media, Multi-Modality

“…there are now choices about how what is to be represented should be represented: in what mode, in what genre, in what ensembles of modes and genres on what occasions” (G. Kress, *Literacy in the New Media Age*, 2003, p. 117)

Literacy…. Choosing among and using available technologies, media, and modalities for expression and communication
Perspectives from Theory

• *Socio-Cultural Perspectives on Identity: Narrating a Self*
• *New Literacy Studies and Semiotics: Multi-Media and Multi-Modality*
• *Cultural Geography: The Experience and Representation of Space, Place, and Landscape*
How Place/Space Shape Identity

- Residential segregation in U.S. as a means of creating racial identities (Deskins & Bettinger, 2002)
- Design and control of space as a means of constructing youth culture

“From being able to have a room of one’s own (at least in richer families) to hanging out on particular corners, to clubs where only your own age group goes, the construction of spatiality can be an important element in building a social identity.” (Massey, 2002)

“The space of the street is often the only autonomous space that young people are able to carve out for themselves” (Valentine, Skelton, and Chambers, 1998)
Thinking Geographically: How do space, place, and landscape intersect with senses of self, community, and agency?

- “Landscape exerts a subtle power over people, eliciting a broad range of emotions and meanings that may be difficult to specify” (Mitchell, 2002).
- “Reminiscences of self are reminiscences of a place” (Susan Sontag commenting on Walter Benjamin, 1979)
- “Places are important for young people because these contexts play a large part in constructing and constraining dreams and practices (Aitken, 2001).
At DUSTY, participants....

...use multi-media, multi-modality to articulate pivotal moments in their lives and reflect on life trajectories.

...by means of these technologies and modalities and social practices, position themselves as agents in and authors of their lives locally and globally.
So far……

Centrality of symbolic creativity and power of multi-modal communication

• Local Context: Welcome to Oakland, CA and DUSTY
• Theories: Identity, New Literacy Studies/Semiotics, Geography
• Voices and Literacies: Digital Artifacts by Youth and Adults from Oakland
• Research
Voices, Music, and Stories from West and East Oakland, CA

- “Lyfe-N-Rhyme”: Digital story by Randy—Critique of life and times in Oakland and the US
- “Cristina”: Cristina’s digital journal
- “Delicate Man”: Taj’s animation
- “Powerful”: Hip hop lyrics and beats performed by Anthony and Raymond
- “Where I’m From”: Hip hop lyrics by Maisha, a.k.a. “Miss Juicy”; beats by “Infamis” and “Neva”
- “Will I Stay or Will I Go”: Robyn’s digital story about being a tutor
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Introducing Randy

• High school leaver
• Didn’t write in school, but wrote a lot outside of school: mostly raps
• Required to attend a vocational IT program in lieu of being incarcerated
• Talented musician, loyal son, proud dad, social critic, poet
• Unemployed; street vendor for soda company; warehouse dock loader, night shift to day
DUSTY as Pathway

“It made a way for me to put this stuff [his creative bent, his musical talent in particular] to use, so I can be here [inside his apartment] and not miss nothing. I can do what I want to do. I don’t have to be in the street. I was like, “it [the opportunity to be in DUSTY] was right on time.” Because that was when the murder rate was getting [high]. My partner got killed around the corner, another one around here. And it just took me off the street. … And it gave me a chance to use my creativity and tell my story.”

(Interview, 10/31/02)
“Lyfe-N-Rhyme”

- Two-minute video narrated by Randy, performing his original poem/rap

- Miles Davis tune as background music

- Illustrates, complements, or otherwise accompanies the words and music with approximately 80 images

- No visual transitions, such as fading
What’s Powerful about “Lyfe-n-Rhyme”?  

- Striking visuals, many of them photographs taken by Randy  
- Rhythm, prose/poetry  
- Word plus beat  
- Images paired with words  
- Social critique  
- Representation of self as agent
Aesthetics of Multimodality (Hull & Nelson, 2005)

Randy: *That's just something I like to do in my writing sometimes, but I really thought it was cool that I did it like that, like in the first one, I was like *隋love, truth, trust, *隋you know. At first I did it in twos, and then when I moved on it was *隋murder, money, mis-education, *隋all those threes, and it *隋just rotating, it just, you know, it *隋cool like that.* (interview, 1/14/02)
What multimodal practices are powerful? (Hull & Katz, in press; Bauman & Briggs, 2000)

“Recontextualization” of images

Randy “decenters” famous figures, like the Sphinx and Tupac and Marcus Garvey, removing them from their particular historical contexts, and recenters them, recontextualizing them in his own creative universe of this digital story and his own social world of Oakland, California.
Kids, Too: Dr. Cristina

- 7 year-old in 3rd grade whose family had immigrated from El Salvador
- Soft-spoken and quiet, she used the opportunity to share her writing as a chance to elaborate orally.
- Fluent in Spanish, she tolerated her older brother’s attempts to help her find the words she wanted in English and to correct her facts.
- First digital story was entirely in English, but her second was done partly in Spanish.
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## Process Dimensions and Possibilities


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leading Modalities</th>
<th>Oral Story</th>
<th>Written Story</th>
<th>Images</th>
<th>Music</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Co-Construction</td>
<td>Solo</td>
<td>Joint</td>
<td>Multiple</td>
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<td>Discovery of New Perspectives</td>
<td>Positionality Unhanged</td>
<td>Positionality Changed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appropriation of Technology</td>
<td>Requires Steady Assistance</td>
<td>Works More Independently</td>
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<tr>
<td>Effect on Teller</td>
<td>Little Effect</td>
<td>Enjoyment</td>
<td>Revelation Authorial Agency Catharsis</td>
<td></td>
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Genres and Purposes

- Autobiographical Narratives
- Descriptions of Place/Neighborhood
- Poems/Raps
- Social Critique/PSA
- Re-enactments of Cartoons, Comics, Movies, Video Games
- Reports, Biographies, Interviews

- Offer a tribute to Family Members, Friends
- Represent/Interpret a Pivotal Moment/Key Event
- Represent Community and/or Community History
- Create Art/Artifact
- Play/Fantasize
- Heal/Grieve/Reflect
- Reach/Inform/Influence Wider Audience
Taj the Animator

- 9 years old; African American and East Indian heritage
- “Different”—bow-legged, hated loud noise: “I don't like my neighborhood because people hang by the liquor store and talk loud all night.”
- Got in lots of fights and was picked on; kids bombarded him with the dodge ball
- Loved techno music, science fiction, super hero stories; wanted to be an animator
“Delicate Man”:
The Vulnerable Super Hero

- Imaginary character, “Delicate Man,”
- Events that took place at DUSTY
- How the super hero got his powers: accidentally put into a scientist’s mutating machine and cut into pieces
- Super powers: he falls apart!
- 42 images drawn in PhotoShop
- Composed his own digital music
Taj, the Delicate Boy

- Had trouble writing, but dictated easily; performed his typed text
- Clearly understood and exploited the genre of super hero stories
- Developed socially at DUSTY, making friends
- Penchant for science fiction, superheroes meshed with available technological means

Exchanging Cultures: From India to California

- In 2000 Dr. Urvashi Sahni installed a computer in Madantoosi Village, U.P., India, powered by solar panels.
- Later developed and provided software in Hindi in science
- Involved teachers and students in software production
- Digital story exchange initiated with DUSTY in 2002
Translation from Hindi

“This is our village Madantoosi. This is our school and we all study in it happily. This is our Panchayat house (council home). There are many animals in our village—like goats, cows, calves, and bulls. There is a lake in our village and a hand pump. This is a man selling clothes on a cycle (there are no shops in villages). And this is our Pradhan’s (village headman’s) house.”
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Music and Identity

“Music is…at the epicenter of practices of discursive identity formation for the young.” (p. 2)

Cornell West on Academics
Engaging the Larger Culture

“My vision of academic engagement embraces…academic standards of excellence yet also revels in overcoming the huge distance between the elite world of the universities, the young people in the hood, and the democratic activists who fight for social change.”

“…if I wanted to present a danceable education to young people in their own idiom I would do so.”

Hip-hop, Rap and Spatiality

“A highly detailed and consciously defined spatial awareness is one of the key factors distinguishing rap music and hip-hop from the many other cultural and sub-cultural youth formations currently vying for popular attention.”

—Forman, The ‘Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip Hop (2002)
“Powerful” CD
Beats and Rhymes by
Middle School Students

“Instead of selling dope on the street/I am at DUSTY trying to make these crunk oEl’ beats/Writin’ these rhymes all the time/Keeping my mind away from crime

“I’m powerful/Not with my muscles/I’m powerful/Not with the bullets/I’m powerful/With the knowledge I have/And the books I read/And the hooks I sing.”
Making Beats & Rhymes

5 students collaborated on writing the song, each contributing one verse

• Anthony, 14 years old, 8th grade
• Raymond, 12 years old, 7th grader, did the beat and wrote a verse
• Deavonte, 12 years old, 6th grader
• Rikki, 14 years old, 8th grader, wrote the chorus/hook
• J.T., 12 years old, 6th grader
QuickTime™ and a Motion JPEG OpenDML decompressor are needed to see this picture.
Lyric Excerpts: “Where I’m From”

Where I’m from ain’t no fairytale...

Where I’m from
We suffer our loved ones getting capped
Over senseless stuff
Like wearing a turf on your back

I’m dumbfound
Another Black male gunned down
Malcolm’s gone, with Martin and Pac to boot...

We not gonna sit around
And let you martyr us too

Where I’m from
Stereotypes say
Just because you’re Black
you’re dumb

Ain’t got to sugar coat it
To tell you where I’m from.
Focus Group Interviews

*Desire to complete product:* “I thought I couldn’t make it here, but I wanted to be here so bad that I’d do anything to get here and finish my product.”

*Pleasure in developing expertise:* “In the beginning I wasn’t really too good at making beats… everyone else was doing better. I became better at beats, raps, writing.”

*Appreciation of being taught:* “DUSTY should be a class. In [his school], they say they’re going to teach you about computers. But they just let you be on the computer.”

*Belief in self:* “You’ve got to be the person who believes in yourself, if nobody else does.” “I can do certain things that I thought I couldn’t do.”
### Descriptor Bands For DUSTY Interview Assessment

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Response eating* (kert-type scale, 1-4)</th>
<th>General Attitude Toward School</th>
<th>Sense of Competence/Confidence in Skills</th>
<th>General Level of Positivity towards Future</th>
<th>Level of Evidence of Post-Secondary Education Intention</th>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>R exhibits an extremely positive attitude toward school. S/he 1) enjoys being at school; 2) likes and participates actively in classroom learning, and 3) fully understands the value and importance of education. School work is a very high priority.</td>
<td>R exhibits pride in a range of well-developed capabilities and clearly, specifically understands how these skills will be of service in the future. R has investigated ways to position her/himself in such a way as continue to develop and use these skills to achieve positive ends.</td>
<td>R indicates being extremely hopeful about future prospects and has a well conceived, detailed plan for future success and fulfillment.</td>
<td>R fully intends to continue her/his education beyond high school, and has weighed her/his options carefully and realistically. A clear, sensible trajectory toward achieving concrete goals is evident in her/his thinking. She/ he has considered college financing options and logistical concerns seriously and carefully.</td>
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Undergraduate Mentors

• Undergraduate Education “service learning” course on literacy teaching & learning
• Tutor/mentor for 45 hours
• Literacy autobiography, field notes, case study, reflection project
• Robyn’s digital story, “Should I Stay or Should I Go”
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Research Questions

• What are the affordances of multi-media, multi-modal genres and composing environments? What is the relationship between these and print-based literacy?
• What identities are fostered through access to the digital media, social relationships, and contexts for learning at a community technology center?
• How do place, space, and landscape play a role in affording and constructing, constraining and directing, the dreams and practices of our youth?
• What constitutes “development,” for different individuals and groups, for the institutions, and for the community?
Types of Data

- Participant Observation
- Field Notes
- Formal/Informal Interviews
- Digital Multi-Modal Artifacts
- Print-based literacy Artifacts
- Video and Audio Recordings
- Pre/Post Skills Inventories
- Pre/Post Surveys
- Standardized Test Scores for Matched Sample Comparisons
- Service Hours/Demographics
Analytic Methods & Products

- Micro-analyses of social interaction captured on audio and video
- Descriptions/taxonomies of creative work
- Thematic analyses of fieldnotes
- Ethnographic descriptions of participation in and development of institutions and community
- Matched sample comparisons of performance on school-based tests
- Case studies/cross-case comparisons
- Comparisons of DUSTY/school performance
- Characterizations of learning spaces & practices
- Definitions of literacy; comparisons of school-based literacy with multi-modality
- Definitions of development
- Histories of institutional and community participation
DUSTY as a Learning Space for Youth and Adults

• Uses of, choices among multiple modes/modalities and creation and communication of valued cultural forms
• Bridges connecting traditional literacy, new literacies, popular culture, academic discourse
• Repeated entry points for participation across time
• Relationships that engender movement and participation across social contexts
• Multiple opportunities to enact an agentive and socially responsible self
Pedagogy/Participant Structures

Vygotskian concept of the “zone of proximal development”

Of assisting learner in doing something that she can’t yet do on her own
Interplay of Emotion, Cognition, and Human Action

Vygotsky’s vision of “a dynamic system of meaning” in which “the affective and the intellectual unite” (Thought & Language, 1986, p. 10)

Dewey’s call for “fusion of intellectual and the emotional, of meaning and value” (How We Think, 1933, p. 278)
Transforming Literacy

• Include a diversity of semiotic means and modes
• Move beyond the old dichotomies such as orality/literacy; personal/analytic; and cognition/emotion
• Make space for aesthetic uses of language/literacy alongside instrumental ones
• Construct paths to and from popular culture and academic discourse
• Expect and embrace the hybridity of cultural artifacts
• Position people as agents capable of making their worlds
~Thank You~

- Randy
- DJ
- Cristina
- Children from Madantoosi Village
- Youth from DUSTY Middle School program
- Raymond & Anthony
- Ms. Juicy
- Robyn
Please Contact Us!

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If you would like to view or listen to any of the video or audio that was originally a part of this presentation, please email Glynda Hull.