

By Jacquelyn Rust

Fostering a Writer's Identity Through Multigenre Writing Projects



Writer's Identity

A multigenre writing project links a monogenre expository piece of writing with different genres presenting information on the same topic. Such a project allows writers to convey a message or information through writing from multiple perspectives for their intended audience, and then utilizes different genres to bring the information together in an entertaining and original way (Mack, 2002). This particular writing assignment affords students the chance to write genres such as newspaper articles, eulogies, blogs, songs, maps, formal letters, book covers, poems, game rules, and wordless, among others. Images, color, sound, and hyperlinks may be added to the multigenre projects to bring them to life and aid the audience

Jacquelyn Rust is a doctoral student in the literacy program at Sam Houston State University. She holds a master's degree in reading and has taught elementary school for a number of years. Currently, she teaches undergraduate literacy block courses and has taught grades 4-8 literacy methods as a graduate assistant at Sam Houston. Her research interests include preservice teachers use of digital and multimodal literacies and the education preparation programs curriculum. She can be reached at jrd050@shsu.edu.

Multigenre writing projects contribute to the use of out-of-school literacies, multiple modes of meaning, and writing from several perspectives to aid their audience in comprehending the material being presented. Students are able to write using real-world examples of writing pieces and are required to think critically when melding the pieces of writing together.

in comprehending the material (Romano, 1991). Writing a number of different genres on a central topic require students to think critically and change their writing styles, voices, and perspectives based on what information they are trying to convey (Mack, 2002).

Personal Experience

As a literacy doctoral student attending a small southern university, I registered for an elective course called Language Arts: Theory and Instruction. One of our assignments for the semester was to create a multigenre writing project. Excuse me. A what? I had never heard of this writing assignment and was most definitely never assigned such a multifaceted writing assignment in my school career. The multigenre research paper had to be written on a writing researcher of our choice; I chose Janet Emig. An anchor piece was required in the form of expository writing and then four additional genres were to be chosen from an extensive list. The genres I chose included a tagxedo, a flyer, a letter, and a eulogy. I utilized appropriate images, font styles, text sizes, colors that complemented the genre and conveyed the message to my cohort members.

After thorough research on Janet Emig's life, I began writing my expository piece, a familiar genre to me, but when I began working on the tagxedo, the flyer, the letter, and the eulogy, this assignment began to fascinate me. The tagxedo was represented by a key with words and phrases describing Emig's life. Next, I created a flyer advertising the Conference of English Education (CEE) award that is presented to individuals at the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) convention in Janet Emig's honor for her contribution to the field of English Education. Then, I wrote a letter in Emig's voice to the president of the university. Last, I wrote a eulogy in her honor. Two weeks prior to being assigned the multigenre writing project, my father passed away. I wrote his obituary for the newspaper, but I wished I had spoken at his funeral. In the end, I used my voice and perspective to write Janet Emig's eulogy and it gave me a sense of closure (Mack, 2002).

Teaching Preservice Teachers

Subsequently, I was informed that I would be the instructor for grades 4-8 content literacy methods course in the fall. I met with a colleague and friend of mine who was currently teaching a different section of the same course, and she created and assigned a multigenre writing project for the students to introduce their classmates to the class. A handout was provided that included a purpose of the assignment, an explanation of what a multigenre project entails, guidelines for completing the assignment, a list of genres, and a rubric that detailed how the assignment would be graded.

Preservice Teachers' Experience

For this specific assignment, the students were paired using a cooperative learning strategy called fold the line (Kagan & Kagan, 1994). While paired with their partner, whom they would be introducing to the class, the students were instructed to generate five interview questions for their interviewee, and when the questions were complete, they took turns interviewing one another. As an observer at this stage of the process, I noticed that

the students were laughing, smiling, conversing, and generating follow-up questions as they discussed specific topics throughout the interview process.

The students were allotted three weeks to complete the multigenre writing project. They wrote an expository piece about their classmate, and then used three different forms of genres to highlight facets of the expository piece. When it came time for the students to present their projects, I was amazed at their creativity, skills, and enthusiasm. In addition to the information they gathered in the interviews, the interviewers researched their classmates using out-of-school literacies such as Facebook and Instagram to obtain images and further information about the interviewee. The students also researched the structure and characteristics of the specific genres they chose and incorporated their own creativity through adding color, images, fonts, hyperlinks, visual aids, and music. For example, one student utilized a popular country song, changed the lyrics to appropriately fit the student's information, and then sang and recorded the new version of the song.

Melding Genres

Multigenre writing projects contribute to the use of out-of-school literacies, multiple modes of meaning, and writing from several perspectives to aid their audience in comprehending the material being presented. Students are able to write using real-world examples of writing pieces and are required to think critically when melding the pieces of writing together. A monogenre piece of writing is linear and is most often set by a standard format (Mack, 2002), but when students write a multigenre project, they are allowed to explore and create many identities.

References

- Kagan, S., & Kagan, M. (1994). *Kagan cooperative learning*. San Clemente, CA: Kagan Publishing.
- Mack, N. (2002). The ins, outs, and in-betweens of multigenre writing. *The English Journal*, 92(2), 91-98.
- Romano, T. (1991, March). A time for immersion, a time for reflection: The multigenre research project and portfolio assessment. Paper presented at the meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English, Indianapolis, IN.
- Ryan, M. (2014). Writers as performers: Developing reflexive and creative writing identities. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, 13, 130-148.