

CONSIDERING STUDENT EMOJI USAGE IN NARRATIVE MEANING-MAKING: A
PRACTICAL APPROACH FOR REDUCING THE GAP BETWEEN CLASSROOM
REALITIES AND EXPLAINING CLASSROOM MULTIMODAL STUDIES

by

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(Under the Direction of KEVIN J. BURKE)

ABSTRACT

This study of multimodal composing in the classroom was shaped by the conceptual school of thought that society is in the process of a watershed transition in terms of the dominant forms of meaning-making in communication. As one of that school's most influential scholars, Gunther Kress has argued that transition involves a historic movement beyond the way alphabetic Western cultures have been dominated for centuries by writing as the main carrier of meaning toward an increasing reliance on image and multimodality. In multimodal communication, modes such as image and color work together – often with words – to semiotically enhance potentials for meaning. This study utilized emojis – a set of small images, symbols, or icons that can be added to electronic messages – in structured multimodal writing exercises, not as an object of study in and of themselves but to leverage their function as a familiar, standardized, and easily utilized form of multimodal communication. Messaging that combines words and emojis represents signs that multimodally utilize writing, image, and color in exactly the way Kress conceptualized it. The design of this study sought to reveal useful patterns regarding how students multimodally compose using the semiotic communication tools

that visual elements like emojis represent – through exercises aimed at heightening the students’ consciousness of multimodal communication and generating relevant data on such composition efforts. The study also was designed as a proposed response to the particular way analysis of multimodality in the classroom has been characterized by Kress and others as inherently and structurally challenging. The findings point to considerable potential meaning enhancement through multimodal composing. However, they offer less support for multimodal messaging involving images as necessarily superior to words-only messaging in effectively conveying meaning, as some literature on the subject suggests. Taken as a whole, implications from this study provide considerable encouragement that the sorts of exercises administered with the study participants can potentially help other students enhance their writing multimodally – by utilizing words and emojis in exercises aimed at heightening their consciousness of multimodal communication.

INDEX WORDS: Emojis, multimodal composition, Gunther Kress, multimodality, new literacies, language arts.

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DEDICATION

For my mother and father, Michelle and Gary Lawson, who have been the most supportive parents possible all my life, and especially during the long, challenging years of my doctoral work. Thank you more than I could ever say for always being there for me.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Researcher Positionality and Study Background

This is a study that explores students' multimodal composing through the use of semiotic multimodal tools – specifically emojis. I begin with my personal background as a means to sort through how my own professional and educational experiences shaped my research interests that have led me to conduct this study for my dissertation. It is important to emphasize that I did not enter doctoral study with any plan whatsoever to develop research on emojis. Indeed, I would say emojis were totally off my academic radar before I entered my doctoral program at the University of Georgia. My interest in the subject almost totally emerged from the coursework that I and so many other students complete in the Language and Literacy Education Ph.D. program at the College of Education, and then continued to grow through the same process.

In one after another of those courses, I began to be exposed for the first time to discussions and literature focused in various ways upon the topics of new literacies in language-arts instruction and related subjects. Eventually that would lead me into an immersion in the study of multimodal semiotics. For example, in my first semester in the Ph.D. program, the New Literacies course, LLED 7910, helped me consider the current move away from the long-established autonomous model of reading and writing toward broader understandings of the way many social, culture, technological, and other factors influence the reading and writing of texts.

Thinking about such developing trends in language-arts education and the impact of ever-changing digital technologies on the nature of new literacies often brought back thoughts from my four years of teaching language arts in middle school before I started my Ph.D. program. Although at that time I did not think about it this consciously, it was certainly clear on other levels how challenging it can be to make only traditional literacy instruction effective in an era in which students are endlessly engaged with an ever more pervasive digital culture that is social-media-based. In that class, my thinking began to turn more to exploring ideas for developing assignments that could help students consider the ways readers derive meaning from digital and traditional texts. In an assigned reading by literacy scholar J.P. Gee, he discussed Plato's criticism that writing cannot speak for itself – in that one can know only what one can critically and reflectively defend in face-to-face dialogue – and that “what writing cannot do is defend itself. It cannot stand up to questioning” (Gee, 2015, p. 69). That semester, I also learned that the Dictionaries Division of Oxford Dictionaries had chosen the “Face with Tears of Joy” emoji as its 2015 Word of the Year, declaring that such digital image/icons have become “an increasingly rich form of communication, one that transcends linguistic borders” (Steinmetz, 2015).

Like most college students I knew, I had begun using emojis at least occasionally without giving it much thought back when smart phones came into wider availability. Emojis just came along for me as a relatively small part of that process. They were just another feature that began appearing as part of smart-phone keyboards with alphabetic and other characters for typing electronic messages, with emojis being a set of small images, symbols, or icons that you could add to text messages, email, and social media. Most people, like me, gave them little thought but started using them now and then, most often as enhancement to accompanying words but also sometimes alone without words. By the time I finished college in 2012, it seemed everyone my

age was using their phones as much, if not more, for texting as for making calls. Then when I started teaching middle school in 2015, after finishing my master’s degree, I was taken back by the fact that not only did most of my students have smart phones, but many of them had better ones than I did. And almost all of them were using those phones as constantly as they were allowed to, particularly for texting and accessing social media – both of which involved ever greater use of visual elements such as emojis.

All that was percolating through my first-semester doctoral-student mind as I developed one of my first papers in the LLED program for the New Literacies class that I titled, “Emojis for Plato: Enhancing Student Voice by Incorporating Use of Emojis in Writing Assignments.” In some of my earliest reviews of related literature, I had discovered what some scholars were saying about the potential for emojis to “clarify the intended tone of a message” (Kaye et al., 2017, p. 66). In that, I conceptualized a possible response to Plato’s concern about writing not being able to speak for itself. Plato contended that true knowledge comes about when one person makes a statement and another asks, “What do you mean?” – a process that induces speakers to “re-say, or say in different words, what they mean, and therefore come to see more deeply what they mean” (Gee, p. 69). I thought maybe there could be potential parallels to that process through ways to help students utilize emojis in a more consciously intent manner to think through the meanings involved when they “re-say” with emojis more about the words they use with them. To that end, in my “Emojis for Plato” paper, I developed a series of assignments that utilized emojis in exit tickets assessing class material, learning Greek and Latin root words, learning literary devices, and enhancing sentences with emojis. For example, in the instructions for one of the exercises, I provided as an example of how one might combine emojis and words to create an example of the literary device of idiom: “It’s 🌂🐱 and 🤪.”

The professor's positive reinforcement and my growing interest in the subject led me to explore it further the next semester in the LLED 7070 Research Methods in Language/Literacy Education with a paper proposal for mapping meanings that students assign to emojis and other visual elements. Because students generally are likely not to be actively conscious of those meanings, the study was designed to help them articulate those meanings and then to document them in a mapping effort that could potentially contribute to the development of exercises to enhance literacy instruction through advancing better understanding of the complex syntactic structure of literate text. That led me to further exploration of what I was finding to be a more substantial than expected body of literature on research involving emojis. It was also in that class that I began to be influenced by the work of Joseph A. Maxwell on qualitative research, particularly in the way it had been used to provide the framework for the course structure, in which a substantial focus was placed on sequentially developing the respective components of qualitative research proposals and studies. I grew intrigued by the way Maxwell's approach to qualitative research conceptualized the researcher as the research instrument, in which "eyes and ears are the tools" used "to gather information and to make sense of what is going on" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 88).

The following Fall semester, I was able to delve further than ever into my interests in how emojis could be used in language-arts instruction in Dr. Harman's LLED/ QUAL 8750 Qualitative Research Writing Workshop. It was through my work in that class that I was able to come up with a plain-language summary of my own – rather than someone else's articulation – as to the fundamental and most essential rationale for why a research project like I was exploring could matter and what the ultimate objective could be: When we write traditionally, we are expressing thoughts and ideas *in words*. When we use emojis, at some level we are expressing

thoughts and ideas not in words but *symbolically and visually*. If some sort of mapping study could reveal useful patterns *in terms of words* regarding what students are expressing in their usage of *emojis*, then those results potentially could provide the basis for developing related curriculum for language-arts classes. That curriculum would be aimed at helping students enhance their writing *with words* through greater awareness of the way they use *emojis* to express thoughts and ideas. Again, those fundamental ideas are not ones I pulled from the work of others that can be cited, but rather they reflect my own efforts to think about my research ideas in terms of my own understanding and vision.

That proposed study was developed as a more ambitious mapping of meaning with a focus on the research question: When students are asked to discuss what they feel is represented by their usage of specific emojis and other visual elements, what patterns of meaning emerge? During that time, I was beginning to think about the subject in terms of the multimodal meaning-making that takes place when students construct messages utilizing words and emojis and potentially other modes of communication. I was also focusing more on thinking about research questions more deeply in terms of process questions that emphasize “*how* things happen, rather than *whether* there is a particular relationship or how much it is explained by other variables” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 82). That thinking involved three particular elements that, according to Maxwell, are much better suited to process questions than to variance questions that emphasize difference and correlation: Those that focus on the *meaning* of events and activities for people involved in them, those concerning the influence of physical and social *context* on such events and activities, and those concerned with the *processes* through which such events and activities and their outcomes occurred (Maxwell, 2013, p. 83). That phase of my studies also introduced me to how meaning-making can be explored through the concept of tapping into the inherent

way that people explain their activity in terms of narrative, through which we “are surrounded by stories and construct stories as we make sense of the events we live and witness” (Freeman, 2017, p. 31).

As will be elaborated upon throughout this dissertation, those elements – the role that emojis can play in multimodal meaning-making, how that might be tapped into to enhance language-arts instruction, how the inherent role of the narrative process in human understanding might help explore that, Maxwell’s approach to qualitative research, and the essential way I was thinking about the basic ideas in my own words – helped form the building blocks that I continued to draw upon as I assembled the key components of what has become the study on which I have developed this dissertation. All that will be discussed at more length in the many pages that follow.

Beyond all that, most importantly, as my thoughts on this gradually evolved, and as I discussed it with different professors, more and more they referred me to the work of linguist and semiotician Gunther Kress on multimodal semiotics. As I began to venture into what I would learn is a massive body of work by Kress and other scholars who have worked with him and/or conducted related studies, it generated the focus for my comprehensive exams, as well as the greater theoretical framework for this dissertation. In the next section of this chapter, which provides the introductory overview for the dissertation, I begin to discuss at length how that body of literature on multimodal semiotics helped coalesce the strands of thought I had been developing over my doctoral years into the specific approach that I take in this dissertation (which – along with all of the formal elements of this dissertation that have been developed – will be expanded upon later in this chapter and Chapters Two and Three. To note them briefly here in very basic form:

- A study design that most fundamentally utilizes emojis in structured multimodal composing exercises – not as an object of study in and of themselves but to leverage their function as a familiar, standardized, and easily utilized form of multimodal communication.
- A study that most directly seeks to reveal useful patterns regarding how students multimodally utilize the semiotic communication tools that visual elements like emojis represent – through exercises aimed at heightening their consciousness of multimodal communication and generating data on how students compose multimodally utilizing emojis.
- As will be emphasized and detailed more, a study designed most specifically to explore a proposed response to the particular way analysis of multimodality in the classroom has been characterized as inherently and structurally challenging (Kress, Jewitt, et al., 2001, p. 17).
- A study design that in response to that structural challenge offers a practical approach for potentially reducing that gap it highlights between the everyday realities of classroom interactions and efforts to explain them in terms of the conceptual framework of multimodality.

I humbly offer that in conceptualizing this approach as a possible way to address the specific problem Kress posed regarding the difficulty he had encountered in analysis of classroom communication, I am advancing an insight of my own making. I developed it progressively through years of reading and engagement with the overall ideas discussed in this dissertation, in class papers, in my comprehensive doctoral exams, and in my prospectus. It struck me that, if Kress – with his incomparable immersion in studies involving multimodality – found it challenging to bridge the gap between the everyday realities of classroom interactions and explaining them in terms of the conceptual framework of multimodality, how much more of a challenge would it be for classroom teachers to manageably implement such multimodal exercises into their curriculum? The body of literature on multimodality is vast, but I have found no other study focused specifically on bridging that gap. And now in the study conducted for this dissertation, I believe I have arrived at a way to develop a potentially new contribution to the scholarly body of knowledge: Testing my insights in practice toward bridging that gap, through

the way that this study was structured to gather relevant data, and then to provide analysis of that data.

I feel I should emphasize that all my work with this subject still has not transformed me into a total advocate, seeking to propose that emojis should or even can replace the traditional written word as the dominant mode of human communication. As I think this dissertation taken as a whole will articulate, my view on emojis is now very nuanced. Emojis have strengths and can contribute positively in many ways to communication processes, but they also have many limitations. Indeed, I would say that is essentially the case with multimodal communication more broadly. To the extent that Kress in at least some of his assertions seems to suggest that societally and as educators we should unreservedly embrace the process of moving from the dominance of writing to a dominance of image in conveying meaning, at least in part I disagree. The results of my study indicate that even youthful digital natives of today disagree in some ways. All that will be discussed further in the pages that follow.

So that is the short personal summary of the theoretical and methodological approach to which my doctoral journey has led me. In essence, it formed the basis of my prospectus, and then after that was approved, it was expanded upon and implemented in the study that I conducted for this dissertation. I did not imagine I would produce findings that would change the world, but I very much do believe this dissertation has the potential to arrive at findings that will provide useful insights and practical guidance, and which can potentially be applied in language-arts curriculum. My humble contribution ultimately may best be characterized as proposing a workable way for teachers to manageably introduce – or add – multimodal composing exercises into language-arts classrooms.

Overview Introduction

Gunther Kress argued extensively that recent decades have seen what he described as “a distinct move away . . . from the dominance of *writing* as the main or at times sole carrier of meaning to an increasing reliance on *image*” (Kress, 2010, p. 46). In that assertion and others, Kress does not seem to be claiming that a world of only writing is being replaced by one of only images, but rather that “writing is being displaced by image as the central mode for representation” (Bezemer & Kress, 2008, p. 166). He and Bezemer have presented as one example of that trend a study of how textbook design evolved between the 1930s and the 2000s in ways “no longer exclusively organized by the principles of the organization of writing” nearly as much as by “graphic, visual principles” (Bezemer & Kress, 2009, p. 260).

Kress has called for “a thoroughgoing review of what the features of this new world are likely to be and what curricular and pedagogic responses are likely to be possible and most useful” (Kress, 2000, p. 140). Beyond the considerable body of work that Kress and scholars with him produced in relation to that call, a great number of other scholars also have utilized multimodal social semiotics to develop an array of other classroom studies of multimodal composing and related subjects. That body of work will be explored in greater detail in the Chapter Two literature review and in other parts of this dissertation where also relevant.

This qualitative dissertation draws upon such approaches to explore students’ use of the semiotic tools that emoji very much can be understood as representing in multimodal composing. The regulated set of some 3,700 emojis – now in such wide usage that one of them was chosen as 2015 Word of the Year by Oxford Dictionaries (Steinmetz, 2015) – has been characterized as a sort of “universal language” (Danesi, 2017, p. vii). Stark and Crawford (2015) have discussed how the use of emojis can be traced historically to the development of the “smiley face” image –

the basic yellow, cartoon-like face with a wide grin and two dots for eyes – by an advertising artist for an internal public-relations campaign associated with the merger of two insurance companies in 1963 (p. 2). From there, the smiley face gained wide popularity, proliferating on t-shirts, buttons, and all sorts of other pop-cultural merchandise (Stark & Crawford, 2015, p. 2). The first set of emojis was released in 1999, created by designer Shigetaka Kurita as part of his work for a Japanese pager company (Bai et al., 2019, p. 3).

By the 1990s, more elaborate sets of emoji characters were being developed, spurred particularly by the growth of the cell-phone industry, and in 2010, emojis were formally incorporated into Unicode Standard by the computer industry as a basic worldwide character set administered by the Unicode Consortium (Stark & Crawford, 2015, p. 5). The communicative power of emojis can in part be explained as the “conceptual plasticity” of the way they straddle “the conceptual line between ideogram and pictogram” – between the relative indeterminacy of symbolic representations of particular concepts or ideas and the greater legibility of pictorial image of the object being represented (Stark & Crawford, 2015, p. 5). Thus, emojis can be understood as a semiotic resource, in terms of semiotics as the study of any physical form that stands for something other than itself in some specific context (Danesi, 2017, p.16).

This study prioritizes the way that multimodal research has shown such projects can create semiotic opportunities for adolescents to more compellingly express their identities and interests (Jewitt, 2008). As will be elaborated upon further, this study focuses on emojis because they provide a familiar, standardized, and easily utilized form of multimodal communication for use in an effort to develop insights into how students compose multimodally utilizing the semiotic communication tools that emoji represent. Very importantly, as noted in the Researcher Positionality and Study Background, the structure of this study was fundamentally shaped to

propose a response to the way analysis of multimodality in the classroom has been characterized as inherently and structurally challenging (Kress, Jewitt, et al., 2001, p. 17). The design of this study represents one proposed way to reduce the gap between the everyday realities of classroom interactions and efforts to explain them in terms of the conceptual framework of multimodality – through a narrowed focus utilizing emoji in structured multimodal writing assignments.

No study has been identified in the literature on multimodality that is focused specifically on bridging that gap. This overall approach also is consistent with related literature that finds potential for non-traditional literacy instruction in ELA classrooms focused on New Literacies to “clarify the intended tone of a message” (Kaye et al., 2017, p. 66) and to help students “re-say . . . what they mean, and therefore come to see more deeply what they mean” (Gee, 2015, p. 69). It also reflects Jewitt and Kress’s (2003) emphasis on the way “meanings are made, distributed, received, interpreted and remade in interpretation through many representational and communicative modes – not just through language – whether as speech or as writing” (p. 1).

Introductory Summary of Rationale

The essential rationale behind this dissertation is further grounded in Kress’s (2010) basic assertions on how “writing and image and color lend themselves to doing different kinds of semiotic work” (p. 1). His understanding of that work is more fully detailed in the Literature Review chapter. But in short for this introductory chapter, this study’s rationale proposes that for basic comparison, in the plain sense in which these activities are commonly understood, when we write, we are utilizing *words* – and when we use emoji, we more greatly in comparison utilize *symbols and visuals*. This dissertation has sought to reveal useful patterns *in terms of words* regarding how students multimodally utilize the semiotic communication tools that visual elements like *emoji* represent, for consideration in developing related curriculum for language-

arts classes. Such considerations were aimed at helping students enhance their writing multimodally by utilizing words and emojis in exercises aimed at heightening their consciousness of multimodal communication and its role in developing more effective language skills. It also sought insights into how students compose multimodally utilizing the semiotic communication tools that emoji represent and the degree to which students may already be in a process of becoming multimodally strategic in their use of emojis.

The analytic approach was structured to focus upon narrative data systematically generated through the administering of an in-depth, multi-part lesson plan and other interaction with the student participants, as discussed more fully in the Study Design and Methodological Framework chapter. That approach was shaped by the qualitative-methods guidance of scholars like Maxwell (2013) to structure research plans in advance, though not to the degree that it “leads to a lack of flexibility to respond to emergent insights” (p. 88). The data generated through this process was analyzed and assessed to potentially contribute insights useful in literacy instruction. The narrative analysis employed Maxwell’s qualitative strategies that prioritize fracturing and rearranging data into “categories that facilitate comparison between things in the same category and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 107), as well as a form of profile matrix to analytically consider the data from a perspective broader than the prompt-by-prompt narrative analysis and provide patterned formatting for addressing the research questions.

As discussed more fully in the review of literature in Chapters Two and Three, classroom studies focused on multimodal social semiotics have highlighted the pedagogical potential for multimodal composing to be leveraged in the classroom (Smith, 2018, pp. 208-209). Such research has been argued to expand understandings of “the open-ended possibilities for what

students can do with multimodal literacy” (Lenters, 2018, p. 647). This study explored ways students use emojis and how they think about their use of emojis through a study designed to focus on students’ multimodal work on carefully structured narrative-focused exercises, as will be discussed at length in Chapter Three and other relevant sections of this dissertation.

Introductory Summary of Theory-Method Relationship

The relationship connecting the theoretical and methodological components is discussed more fully in the Study Design and Methodological Framework chapter. But to briefly introduce it here: That connection is grounded in Kress’s focus on the centrality of meaning-making in communication and advanced in this study through data gathered via a lesson-plan design that emphasized the cultivating of individualized meaning-making in classroom exercises (McConnell, Conrad & Uhrmacher, 2020, pp. 37-48). Then with the data gathered through that process, narrative analysis was utilized for its focus on assessing the “unending flow of meaning-making” (Freeman, 2017, p. 31) in terms of the way visual elements can multimodally shape configuration of narrative content (Berger, 1997, p. 6). Through their individual meaning-making on the exercises of the multi-part lesson plan, the students generated what is considered “the particular semiotic substance” of narrativity through use of language and image (Ryan, 2004, p. 1).

Very importantly, the essential focus of this dissertation is not so much on emojis – as an object of study in and of themselves – but on how they can provide a familiar, easily utilized form of multimodal communication for use in an effort to develop insights into how students compose multimodally, utilizing the semiotic communication tools that emojis represent. That reflects the fact that emojis are not random, individual creations, but are utilized by all who use them as selections from a finite set of images that are approved by the Unicode Consortium and

included as a standard feature on every smartphone and many other electronic devices. Still, I understand that to the casual observer, emojis may seem like just one more passing novelty of the young, soon to be replaced by something more fashionable or trendy. In fact, as discussed in more detail in the review of literature, considerable evidence indicates emojis should be seen in more enduring and influential terms – iconic and fundamental in their significance for the age of social media. On one level, emojis can be understood as socially-semiotic multimodal components for the masses – in the sense that they are visual elements of communication made universally available through cellphones, email, and other forms of networked digital communication. Because emojis make a body of such socially-semiotic multimodal components widely and consistently available to large groups of users today, and will be generally familiar to the students in this study, emojis provide a practical means to help isolate the analysis of meaning-making activity. The purpose will be to identify patterns in students’ usage of specific emojis, rather than to track their general activity online.

To be sure, researchers have identified problems that can be involved in efforts to try to understand the meanings that people associate with emojis and other visual devices, as well as significant differences between expression of meaning through emoji usage and through traditional writing. For example, Dürscheid and Siever (2017) have discussed the way that “narrative sequences consisting exclusively of emojis lack possibilities of expression inherent to alphabetical writing” because important elements of sentence structure such as tense, mode, and case generally cannot be represented as effectively through emojis (p. 4).

However, as those authors also have argued, “Hieroglyphic writing, too, used pictograms and users were able to express complex matters in this way. Why is this not possible for emojis, then?” (Dürscheid & Siever, 2017, p. 4). This dissertation is grounded in the potential to better

understand just what sort of expression is taking place in students' use of emojis and other visual elements.

Most centrally, to re-emphasize the very important discussion earlier in this chapter, this study represents a proposed response to the way analysis of multimodality in the classroom has been characterized as inherently and structurally challenging. "One difficulty with our analytical approach to classroom communication as a multimodal event is that it makes the most prosaic classroom interactions appear enormously complex" (Kress, Jewitt, et al., 2001, p. 17). In such analysis of talk in classrooms, "language appears as the product of a myriad of complex social decisions, something which does not reflect the ease with which the majority of people engage in the everyday task of speaking" (p. 17). No study has been identified in the literature on multimodality that is focused specifically on bridging that gap. So this study proposes a way to potentially reduce the gap between the everyday realities of classroom interactions and efforts to explain them in terms of the conceptual framework of multimodality – by narrowing its focus to the use of emojis in structured multimodal writing assignments.

This study also is grounded more broadly in Kress's call for instructional efforts that emphasize the way communication processes involve working with "already shaped material (as 'semiotic modes' with grammars: writing, image, gesture, speech, music)" as well as working with such materials in ways that "constantly reshape them, remake them, in line with the characteristics of our designs" (Kress, 2000, p. 142). He has argued that in "an economy of information and services . . . meaning is no longer confined or confinable to 'texts' in a traditional sense" (p. 145). Kress has criticized what he characterized as the antiquated "still existing common sense" notion "that meaning in language is clear and reliable by contrast, with image or instance, which, in that same commonsense, is not solid or clear" (Kress, 2005, p. 8). In

his characterization, “words are (relatively) empty entities – in a semiotic account they are signifiers to be filled with meaning rather than signs full of meaning” (p. 7). Therefore, “the task of the reader is to fill these relatively vacant entities with her or his meaning” which is “the task we call interpretation, namely interpreting what sign the writer may have intended to make with this signifier” (p. 7). It is a regular theme of Kress’s, advancing in different ways the argument that “words are (relatively) vague, often nearly empty of meanings; by contrast images are full, ‘plain’ with meaning” (Kress, 2004, p. 112).

To that end, Jewitt and Kress (2003) have proposed that schools should no longer ask, “‘How does what is here match what a teacher *expected and wanted* to be there?’ But rather, ‘How does what is here give a teacher insight into the *interests of the maker* of what is here?’” (p. 12) Educators “could see the sign as a clue about the learning engaged in by the maker-of-the-sign-as-learner,” and “a teacher could focus on how the interests of her or his students have engaged with the teacher’s interest as expressed through the (curricular materials that they have presented in lessons)” (p. 12).

Therefore, as further detailed in the Study Design and Methodological Framework chapter, this study implemented through a multi-part lesson plan involving exercises in which students worked with such “already shaped” materials to reshape them and remake them in ways designed to generate data for analyzing the meaning-making process. In those exercises, students used what Kress would consider “signs full of meaning” to better fill what he has characterized as words “often nearly empty of meanings” (Kress, 2004, p. 112). And the analysis of the data generated as a result offers insights into the “interests of the maker” and how the students’ interests have “engaged with the teacher’s interests” (Jewitt & Kress, 2003, p. 12).

Organization of Dissertation

The next chapter will focus most fully on the review of literature, which lays out bodies of scholarship that shaped my thinking as I developed the ideas that formed the basis for this dissertation. Sections are devoted to much fuller discussion of the theoretical framework's grounding in multimodal social semiotics, scholarly considerations of emoji usage, and relevant mainstream classroom studies of student multimodal composing. That will be followed by the Study Design and Methodological Framework chapter, which will discuss scholarly influences involved in shaping this dissertation's plan for data collection and analysis, the research questions, and extensive background on the student participants in the study. That will be followed by the first presentation of analysis, focusing on meaning-making through analysis of selected focal narrative texts composed by individual participants. Then a major chapter will be devoted to providing discussion of the analytic process of qualitative "fracturing" of the data gathered, as emphasized by Maxwell (2013, p. 107), and another major chapter will be devoted to consideration of the data through the perspective provided through a form of profile matrix. A concluding discussions chapter will present guidance for how the sort of multimodal exercises utilized in this study can be most optimally implemented in classrooms, along with the perspective of the student participants after completing this study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework: Multimodal Social Semiotics

In order to understand emojis in terms of their role as semiotic multimodal components, we must deeply consider Gunther Kress's work on using social semiotics as a theoretical lens to explore multimodality, and related work. When one sends a text message using words and emojis, it reflects the way Kress (2010) argued for understanding 'multimodality' as the normal state of human communication" (p. 1). He spoke of the way "each mode does a specific thing" (p. 1). In that breakdown, "image *shows* what takes too long to *read*, and writing *names* what would be difficult to *show*. Color is used to *highlight* specific aspects of the overall message" (p. 1). And that "division of semiotic labor" is crucial because without it, "the sign, quite simply would not work," as "writing and image and color lend themselves to doing different kinds of semiotic work; each has its distinct potentials for meaning" (p. 1). Therefore, we can consider a text message combining words and emojis in terms of a sign that utilizes writing, image, and color in exactly the way Kress conceptualized it.

Kress's (2010) use of social semiotics is intrinsically grounded in the study of signs as a significant part of communications (p. 1). In short, he defined *signs* as "anything that communicates something to the sign's interpreter," whether the meaning is "intentional or unintentional," and whether what is communicated is "feelings, thoughts, even sensations such as taste, smell, etc." (p. 1). Multimodality, in his definition, "deals with all the means we have for

making meanings – the *modes* of representation – and considers their specific way of configuring the world” (Kress, 2004, p. 110).

Robert Hodge was influential in working with Kress on the uses of semiotic systems in social practice, with social interpretation being central to an understanding in which the message producer “relies on its recipients for it to function as intended by drawing upon shared knowledge” (Hodge & Kress, 1988, p. 4). Important in the ideas their work built upon were those of linguistic theorist Michael Halliday, who had introduced the term “social semiotics” in arguing for a semiotic approach to linguistics beyond a narrow focus on written language. Halliday discussed language as “a system of meaning potential” that draws upon different sets of resources that include a complex process of social semiotics shaped by a number of social elements (Halliday, 1978, pp. 39, 69). That body of thought was fundamentally influenced by the work of Roland Barthes, whose work asserted a broad understanding of anything in culture potentially communicating messages through the sign systems of semiotics – intertwined with a human process that “converts reality into language.” He described that process as “the universal method of communication in humans” through which “we can potentially convert everything into language” (Barthes, 1972, pp. 109-110).

For Kress (2010), “semiotic production” is the dissemination and distribution of messages and meanings, a form of production that has shifted from the dominance of older technologies of print the last few centuries to digital, electronic means, and from writing being the dominant mode toward rising dominance of the mode of image and others (p. 6). Critical in understanding that production is his use of “design” as a way to look forward in recognizing what individuals actually do in their social lives, in contrast to the concept he references as “critique” – his characterization of the basis for traditional knowledge, which he dismisses as

looking backward to impose the past actions of others on individuals in the present. In that way, Kress's understanding of design reflects an approach to the making of meaning that emphasizes considering the way all individuals "design" their communication through the use of multimodal participation in the shaping of the social and semiotic world (pp. 6-14). He proposed that culture be understood to reflect "socially made values, tools, meanings, knowledge," and other effects and products of social actions and work (p. 14).

His work makes the case that society is in the process of a watershed transition in terms of the dominant forms of meaning-making. Kress (2004) argued that historically, alphabetic Western cultures have been dominated for the past 300 years or so by the "*mode of writing*" and the "*medium of book and page*," shaping "western imagination, forms of knowledge, practices of reading" (p. 113). In that world where the traditional book represented an author's work to order a body of knowledge or understanding of the world into coherent, complete sentences, paragraphs, and chapters, their form and purpose meant "the reader's task was to attempt to follow the pre-given ordering of the written text," as well as "the authority of the author, working assiduously to reproduce the meaning which the author had intended for the reader" (p. 113).

That era, in Kress's interpretation, has "now been overtaken by the new constellation of image and screen," with the way book and page long shaped the logic of writing and reading increasingly seeing its dominance weakened by "the logic of the image . . . shaping the order and the arrangements of the screen" (Kress, 2004, p. 115). In Kress's assessment, when writing appears on a screen, "subordinated to the logic of the image; just as image could appear on the page, though subordinated to the logic of writing," and that will become more and more the case as a new era progresses in which the dominance of authors recedes and "the designer and the mode of image dominate" (p. 116). That represents a recurring theme in Kress's work, that it is

time to understand that the written word has begun to be supplanted in human communication processes by increased use of images, and that that process will continue to accelerate.

Kress and Jewitt explored the nature of modality in research focused on the then relatively neglected role played by language in the description of learning processes and evaluating learning outcomes (Kress, Jewitt, et al., 2001). Through analysis of semiotic resources operating in the classroom, they showed each meaning-making system called a mode “contributes to teaching and learning as *multimodal accomplishments*” (p. 10). Also, “the meanings made with language, whether as speech or as writing, are interwoven with the meanings made with other modes in the communicated contacts, and this interaction itself produces meaning” (p. 11).

My distillation of Jewitt and Kress’s (2003) considerable work into its most basic assumption concerning research involving multimodal semiotics, “is that meanings are made, distributed, received, interpreted and remade in interpretation through many representational and communicative modes – not just through language – whether as speech or as writing” (p. 1). They find this so, it seems, because “the world as it is represented in different modes has a different appearance, and . . . such different appearances have differential effects for learning,” a semiotic multimodal “approach to learning requires us to take seriously and attend to the whole range of modes involved in representation and communication” (p. 1). If that is the case, then for Jewitt and Kress it follows that all “modes together will be representing significant meanings of the overall message” in that the “meaning of the message is distributed across all,” with “different aspects of meaning . . . carried in different ways by each mode” and each mode “carrying a part of the message only” (p. 3).

Jewitt and Kress (2003) emphasized that fundamentally a person is able to “only ever represent some aspects of what it is they want to represent” in representing for example a car, because a person “can never fully represent all that . . . a car might mean to them” (p. 12). In such a situation, the person must “make a selection, based on their interest, from all the features that could signal *car*,” such as “aspects of its performance – its sleekness, shine, color, rather than its speed, its power, its petrol consumption.” Thus, analyzing such a selection provides researchers an operationalized means to analyze aspects of the sign-making process of social semiotics. What anyone selects to signify *car* “depends on their ‘interest’ at that moment” – how they wish to represent speed and power, for instance; or the intensity, the depth, the sheen of the color on the bodywork.” Additionally, “how they choose to signify power or speed will depend on their relations to and perceptions of their audience” (p. 12). Given all that, it makes it possible to “read” the sign in terms of how it “represents the interests of its maker” and the hypothetical inferences that can potentially be made, utilizing the sign as “evidence of the interests of its maker in the moment of representation” and “the sign-maker’s engagement with the world to be represented” (p. 12).

Even beyond that, however, there is “a more profound way of seeing the process of semiosis (of making meaning) as a process of learning” (Jewitt & Kress, 2003, p. 13). Because “in making a representation a person is making a new sign out of what they want to signify, with existing signifier materials,” and “chooses the signifier that is most apt . . . to represent that which they wish to signify.” Yet, because “there is never an exact fit,” that means “in the gap between what they meant to mean and what they have to use to mean,” there “exists the possibility of . . . a sign that wrenches their meaning in unpredictable directions” (p. 13).

So even though Kress's work did not include study of emojis, emoji users very much are engaging in multimodal activities in the way he described them – such as, for example, “making a new sign out of what they want to signify, with existing signifier materials” (Jewitt & Kress, 2003, p. 13). This dissertation seeks to help students consider more consciously and purposefully ways that their use of existing signifier materials – emojis in this case – may influence their intended meaning, such as the challenge in best fitting “what they meant to mean with “what they have to use to mean” (p. 13). As discussed next, scholars are increasingly finding emojis worthy of study. Their work provides many indications of how the use of digital visual images such as emojis potentially can enhance the communication process by clarifying intention and increasing accuracy.

Scholarly Considerations of Emoji Usage

Much scholarship on emojis has developed recently. Experimental research has indicated that conscious use of emojis can “bring benefits to communication by supporting users in expressing their intentions” (Dos Reis et al., 2018, p. 147). The work of those researchers is focusing on developing emojis with user participation to enhance the expression of intentions, and to produce emojis with greater degrees of representative accuracy in relation to intentions (Dos Reis et al., 2018, pp. 159-160). The work of Hsieh and Tseng (2017) found that involving users in the design of emojis “helps them express their emotions more accurately” (p. 412). Their findings also indicate that the “fun and perceived playfulness” associated with emoji use and availability of a wide variety of emoji types facilitates social connectedness among users and greater identity self-expression (Hsieh & Tseng, 2017, p. 412).

Bhattacharya et al. (2019), focusing particularly on India, have proposed that the effectiveness of healthcare related messaging can be heightened significantly through focused

use of emojis, particularly in the way that it can overcome language barriers and provide culturally relevant enhancement of such messaging (p. 245). They discuss how pictorial modes of expression have deep grounding in paleo-anthropology and linguistic development as “a connecting link between our past and the present” and the way that “Homo Sapiens have always used symbolic languages and wall paintings to communicate with each other ... dating back to the age of the caveman and woman” (Bhattacharya et al., 2019, p. 243). The work of Oleszkiewicz et al. (2017) has found that children were able to accurately recognize emotions in virtual communication with the highest accuracy when emojis were utilized, to a degree comparable with emotion recognition in non-digital communication (p. 375).

Other research has found that the use of emojis in scales designed to measure vocational interest were not only as accurate as the use of verbal scales but potentially better (Phan et al., 2019, p. 115). Coyle and Carmichael (2019) have found that communication in text-messaging is enhanced more when both parties involved utilize emojis than when only one does (p. 188). The work of Dam et al. (2019) has provided indications that use of emojis in communication platforms in conjunction with other therapies can contribute positively to treatment of mental problems in youth (pp. 8-9). Research by Dasa et al. (2019) has documented greater effectiveness in advertising messaging when emojis are utilized (p. 154). Vandergriff's (2013) work indicates that emojis can contribute positively to the learning of foreign languages (p. 10).

As Onursoy (2018) has characterized it, however, although emojis can help convey important parts of meaning related to linguistic structure and provide clues as to what users intend in their writing, “the simple relationship between emojis and emotional expressions is quite problematic” (pp. 283-284).

Techniques researchers have utilized to try to understand the meanings that people associate with emojis and other visual elements have included analyzing interviews with emoji users on the basis of hyper-coordination theory, for example, which helps assess the expressive dimension of mobile-phone use in integrating or coordinating emotions and social communication (Onursoy, 2018). Other efforts have sought to explain the relationships of emoticons and emotions through biological mechanisms (Damasio, 2005). (Emoticons are frowny and smiley faces that can be created using punctuation marks. Some studies in this field have included emoticons as a form of related visual elements in electronic communication. They are not the focus of this study because they are not part of a standardized, regulated set of visual elements as emojis are, a condition critical to the conceptual basis for this study.)

Among the insights that researchers have reached so far regarding the meanings that people associate with emojis and other visual devices, such meanings often evolve and vary by context, similar to the way the meanings of words do (Naomi & Baron, 2009). Emoticons can also suggest possible behaviors individuals demonstrate in response to particular situations (Dresner & Herring, 2009).

Kaye et al. (2017) discussed the way that the use of emojis can “reduce discourse ambiguity” and “aid expression through establishing an emotional tone,” providing emoji users “with a toolkit for clarifying emotional concepts” (pp. 66-67). Because of the growth in online communication lacking the subtle nonverbal cues of face-to-face interaction, “compensatory mechanisms have quickly developed to counter the diminished nonverbal channels,” with emojis and other visual elements being prominent among those mechanisms (Kaye et al., 2017, p. 66). Such symbols have become “a frequently used expression of emotion and communicative

intent,” portraying “a wide breadth of emotions far beyond those of simple smiles and frowns” (Kaye et al., 2017, p. 66).

Additionally, research has found indications that emoji and other visual elements can serve important verbal and nonverbal functions in communication (Yuasa et al., 2011). They may also be able to provide insight into the personalities of those using them (Wall et al., 2016). Nevertheless, research into the meanings associated with use of emojis and other visual elements is in early stages, and the work so far has shown further research is needed to better understand the relationship between such elements and how they are being used (Jaeger & Ares, 2017).

Emoji Usage as Developing Universal Language

The research on emojis most relevant to the focus of this dissertation has drawn upon semiotics centrally as an analytic tool. One of the largest studies of emoji usage concluded that emojis “are not words, in any traditional sense of that word, . . . They are stylized, almost comic-book-like, pictures that can (and do) replace words and phrases” (Danesi, 2017, p. 15). The main function of emojis “seems to be that of providing nuances in meaning in the tone of messages” because “they are not completely substitutive of traditional written forms.” Rather than replacing traditional writing, emojis “reinforce, expand, and annotate the meaning of a written communication, usually by enhancing the friendliness of the tone, or else by adding humorous tinges to it” (p. 15). In short, emojis can best be understood as “meaning-enhancing devices that are amalgamated with alphabetic ones, turning modern-day informal writing into a unique kind of bimodal system” (p. 15).

The researchers focused on analysis of college students’ use of emojis and grounded their work in semiotics, “the discipline studying and documenting signs, sign behavior, sign creation, and functions,” which represented “an ideal tool for conducting an analysis of a specific set of

signs” such as emojis (Danesi, 2017, p. 16). The goal of the research was to “establish an evidence-based framework for gleaning the implications – or lack thereof – of emojis in contemporary human life, rather than basing it on subjective speculations” (Danesi, 2017, p. 15). Qualitative research methods were employed, focusing on a body of representative sample messages involving emojis, semistructured interviews, and the in-depth contributions of the student participants “for whom emojis are an essential part of daily digital interactions” (p. 15). The research focused on emojis as “signs or symbols connected to each other in specific semiotic (meaning-making) and formal ways” (Danesi, 2017, p. vii).

The study considered the way that emojis have grown “increasingly popular across the world, allowing people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds to communicate and interact with each other more concretely” and potentially “facilitate intracultural communications by transcending the symbolic barriers of the past demarcated by specific scripts and the implicit sociopolitical ideologies that they entailed” (Danesi, 2017, p. vii). The research represents “an attempt to explain why the topic of emojis is a significant one for everyone,” proposing that in an age in which people of multiple languages and cultures are in more frequent contact online, “the emoji code might well be the universal language that can help solve problems of comprehension that international communications have always involved in the past” (p. vii).

Developed originally in Japanese electronic messages and Web pages, emoji usage now flourishes irrespective of language or cultural background, Danesi declares, and “emoji code harbors within it many implications for the future of writing, literacy, and even human consciousness” (p. vii). While emoji writing is a product of the Internet age, “there are precedents for analogous writing styles in previous years, as can be seen in the illuminated texts of the Medieval and Renaissance eras” (Danesi, 2017, p. viii). Historically, “writing systems

have been found to evolve typically by expanding their modalities or styles (ways of writing)” with the “modality of early systems... essentially iconic” featuring forms “created to stand for something via resemblance, such as a drawing of the sun to stand for the actual sun” (p. 12).

Over time, “to make their coverage more expansive,” writing systems included or developed “elements of indexicality, such as visual forms pointing to or indicating something, and symbol signs that were used for specific ritualistic or other social needs” (p. 12). Emojis “are essentially stylized iconic forms similar to sketches” whose “basic iconicity is expanded to include other modalities as the situation might require” – in the way, for example, that a cloud emoji represents a picture graphic form suggesting the outline of a cloud, but a sunrise emoji “is an idiographic form, showing the shape of a sun as it rises up from the background” (p. 12).

Among the findings of this emoji research are consistent indications from informants that the use of emojis represents “an efficient shorthand method, a fine and entertaining way of communicating a larger meaning in simpler ways” (Danesi, 2017, pp. 115-116). Also, because emojis are provided to the public via standardized systems such as Unicode, “they essentially constitute a visual alphabet, allowing users to insert the images in text structurally, conceptually, and pragmatically” (p. 182). Further, the “most common, and communicatively effective, use of emoji is in hybrid writing” that “allows for the distribution of the images to be guided by the conceptual flow of a message” and “inserted in locations to emphasize the meaning of some word or phrase” (p. 182).

Use of the code of emojis “amplifies writing practices considerably, retrieving pictographic and illuminative practices of the past in new ways,” not rendering the phonetic alphabet obsolete, but rather allowing “users to reflect upon hybrid writing as related to other modes of writing, such as the more serious and philosophical ones” (Danesi, 2017, p. 183).

Arguably most significantly, “overall, the emoji code has resurrected visuality and phonetic writing, albeit in a new way, allowing our eyes to recapture the visual modality that was there in early writing systems” (p. 183).

The next section will discuss in depth other studies that have found useful insights through the implementation and analysis of composing instructional efforts involving multimodal classroom projects, as the study developed for this dissertation research has sought to do. The following discussion details a variety of ways that the researchers involved in such studies gather potentially useful data on how students make meaning through the use of multimodality in completing the exercises implemented in those studies.

Relevant Mainstream Classroom Studies in Multimodal Semiotics

The recent work of Blaine E. Smith demonstrates many of the most mainstream elements involved in the ways that literacy researchers are using to investigate adolescents’ digital multimodal composing processes and products. In 2018, for example, his research provided a multidimensional understanding of the way adolescents demonstrate varied but related multimodal composing goals when assigned to create digital products during a literary analysis unit (Smith, 2018, p. 210). The study revealed ways that students compose in such work for multiple purposes and audiences (p. 206). The multidimensional view of their composing goals (the expressed motivations behind their modal designs) was developed by assessing their perspectives at different stages of the process (p. 183). The research showed that the students “employed multiple modes – intentionally or not – to concurrently meet multiple composing goals focused toward different audiences” (p. 184).

In that project, Smith applied in-depth, qualitative data analysis to the multimodal composing perspectives of students identified through purposeful sampling that involved

classroom observations, student questionnaires on interests and technology skills, and consultation with their teacher. Students in that study sample, from a 12th-grade advanced-placement literature/composition class, varied in literacy abilities, technology experience, out-of-school interests, and class engagement (Smith, 2018, pp. 188-189). The qualitative data analysis focused on the goal of developing insights into students' multimodal composing goals and modal designs, first examining what students' work while composing during in-class workshops revealed, a process that was recorded through screen capture, video observations, and field notes (p. 194). The many ways students composed with different modes during their composing process were recorded, including their searching for images, writing, remixing media, editing their work, and discussing it with other students. Emergent themes were recorded as to how and why students made specific modal decisions (p. 194).

The research was guided by what Smith described as an integration of sociocultural and social semiotics theoretical frameworks. His use of sociocultural theories of literacy emphasizes new literacy studies and the way they recognize that literacy practices broadly and multimodal composing in particular are shaped by an array of factors involving social, cultural, material, historical, and individual influences (Gee, 2012; Prior, 2006; Street, 1984). His approach highlights two elements of sociocultural theory of particular relevance for investigating adolescents' multimodal composing goals and designs.

First, it is essential to understand that literacy practices are infused with users' beliefs, interests, and social identities, something that is reflected in their use of modes (Gee, 2012; Rowsell & Pahl, 2007). Beyond that, multimodal projects enable expression of identities in more ways than do traditional, print-based literacy practices (Hull & Katz, 2006; Hull, Stornaiuolo, & Sahni, 2010). And second, the sociocultural approach also considers the making of meaning to

be an activity that is mediated between individuals and the cultural tools available to them through modalities such as visuals, sound, text, digital programs, and technology (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991, 1998). Such mediated actions can serve multiple purposes and come into conflict, so they cannot be interpreted effectively unless researchers recognize those multiple goals rather than a single, more easily characterized goal (Wertsch, 1998).

Smith's use of social semiotics draws upon a view that all making of meaning is multimodal in the way it comprises linguistic, visual, aural, gestural, and spatial elements (Hodge & Kress, 1988; Kress, 2010). Semiotics can be defined briefly as the study of any physical form that stands for something other than itself in some specific context (Danesi, 2017, p.16). In the conceptual framework of social semiotics, each mode in such communication ensembles interacts dynamically with one another to synergize new messages in ways that no one mode alone can effectively express by itself (Jewitt, 2009). A social semiotics approach also emphasizes that modes are shaped by sociocultural factors influential in the way they are used communicatively (Smith, 2018, p. 186). Thus, integrating sociocultural and social-semiotic frameworks as Smith did can provide more insightful understandings of the way multimodal practices are situated within particular contexts (Street, Pahl, & Rowsell, 2014). That reflects the way that multimodal research has shown how digital projects create semiotic opportunities for adolescents to more compellingly express their identities and interests (Jewitt, 2008). It also is grounded in what such research has shown about the way adolescents are often able to recognize, label, and leverage the particular semiotic resources of various modes in advancing their goals and modal designs (Ho et al., 2011; Pantaleo, 2012; Towndrow, Nelson, & Yusuf, 2013).

So, we see how Smith examined multimodal composing as a distinctive merging of sociocultural, emotional, content-related, and personal dimensions, and provided "a nuanced

understanding of the interrelated dimensions shaping adolescents' modal usage in response to literature" (Smith, 2018, p. 208). His findings highlight the pedagogical potential for multimodal composing to be leveraged in the classroom to analyze literature (p. 209). Empowering students to compose digitally through the use of visuals, sounds, text, "created a rich semiotic space for adolescents to engage with literature – including analyzing literary themes, connecting with the emotions of characters, and re-creating the multisensory narrative world – while concurrently making the assignments personally relevant and for a broader audience" (p. 210).

In a study published in 2019, Smith again utilized a similar integration of sociocultural and social semiotics theoretical frameworks to examine the multimodal composing processes of 12th-grade students as they collaboratively created digital projects focused on responding to and analyzing literature in an English Language Arts class (p. 14). The projects included a Web site, hypertext literary analysis, and podcast. Because more research has addressed the collaborative nature of adolescents' multimodal composing processes, this study aimed at how and why collaborative partnerships can differ across composers or digital tools, producing insights as to how such differences reflect convergence of factors, including students' technical and multimodal composing expertise, content knowledge, and personal interests (p. 14).

In that study, Smith (2019) worked with a class that participated in a multimodal literary-analysis exercise based on an acclaimed 1990 novel on the Vietnam War by Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried*. That study investigated the similarities and differences in cases in order to understand a phenomenon better (pp. 15-16). To explore the context of the novel, students were first asked to design an informational Web page on a topic of their choice related to the Vietnam War or American culture during the war era. The second multimodal project involved students creating a PowerPoint in which they analyzed multiple layers of meaning reflected in the novel,

with relevant passages from the novel hyperlinked to key words and phrases, literary devices, intertextual connections, and personal reactions, as well as to visuals, sound, and movement chosen by the students. Third, the students used audio software to draw upon their knowledge of the novel as they multimodally recorded soundscapes with layers of voice narration, music, and sound effects designed to express the physical and emotional wartime experiences of characters in the novel (p. 16).

Smith's (2019) data collection included computer screen recordings from the participants' laptops as they worked on their projects, video observations (with field notes) of the students as they worked, written student reflections, and audio-recorded design interviews with students after completing each of their projects to learn more about their experiences with technology and perspectives on their respective composing processes (p. 17). Data analysis involved examination of screen-capture and video-observation data, with video logs that timestamped and detailed the students' compositional activities such as searching for images, writing, remixing media, and editing. Then the video logs, interview transcripts, and written student reflections were analyzed, seeking multidimensional understanding through a process of disassembling and reassembling data through several rounds of open coding and triangulation to identify preliminary themes (p. 17). Finally, the themes and patterns initially identified for separate cases were compared through multicase methods (Stake, 2006) that generated overall typologies for each collaborative partnership among the students (Smith, 2019, p. 17).

The study found that the most important determinant of power relations in the collaborative process was technological skill and experience with multimodal composing, shifting the balance of power in the projects toward students with such backgrounds to both physically construct project products and be more creatively visionary (Smith, 2019, p. 20).

Thus, inequalities in technical expertise and multimodal composing skills clearly and greatly constrained the less proficient students' ability to contribute meaningfully, while situations that balanced technical skills and multimodal-composing experience allowed multiple students opportunities to lead in project work (p. 20). Smith concluded those findings do not mean there should never be any variation allowed in the expertise of students working together on multimodal projects, but rather that teachers should seek to avoid students being left feeling so technically inadequate that they wind up relegated to the sidelines of projects, by teachers' being aware of students' out-of-school digital literacies, technical skills, multimodal-composing experience, and access to technology (pp. 20-21).

The Influential Multimodal Research on Adolescents of Kress et al.

Although as noted earlier, Kress did not focus on emojis in his research, he and scholars that he collaborated with very much were involved influentially in the type of studies that literacy researchers use in investigating adolescents' digital multimodal composing processes and products. A particularly good example of their work on adolescents' digital multimodal processes can be found in a study in which their method involved analyzing extensive recordings from classrooms in order to demonstrate the way a multimodal approach contributes to teaching and learning through semiotic resources (Kress et al., 2001, p. 10).

That study took place in science classrooms, but Kress and the other scholars involved emphasized that their ultimate focus was not on science instruction, but rather on the way the "regular use of action and image in the science classroom brings into immediate focus the issues raised in multimodal communication" (Kress et al., 2001, p. 10). They stressed fundamental theoretical points that have informed their conceptual framework of multimodal communication in the classroom, as well as the conceptual approaches of so many other scholars. First of those is

the assertion that communication media are “shaped and organized by a culture into a range of meaning-making systems,” which they call modes, “in order to articulate the meanings demanded by the practical social requirements of different communities” – through which the “use of different modes leads to meanings being made differently” (p. 11). Second, they propose, “the meanings made with language, whether as speech or as writing, are interwoven with the meanings made with other modes in the communicated contacts, and this interaction itself produces meaning” (p. 11). And third in this summary of their central theoretical premises, “the question of what is to be considered a communicative *mode* remains open,” because “modes of communication develop in response to the communicative needs of society; new modes are created, and existing modes are transformed” (p. 11). Therefore, “language-as-speech can thus be understood as the result of the working or ‘shaping’ by culture . . . into a cultural medium and then further shaped as the mode of speech” (pp. 11-12).

Beyond that, they argue, “like language, visual images, gesture and action have also been developed through their social usage into articulated or partially articulated resources for representation into modes” (Kress et al., 2001, p. 12). In their exploration of how multiple modes operate in science classrooms and contribute to teaching and learning, the authors of this book utilize Halliday’s (1985) concept of “grammar as a meaning making resource” (Kress et al., 2001, p. 12). They employ that familiar term in a different way, “to refer loosely to the structures of relations of elements in a specific mode, and between mode, which have become established over time rather than seeing grammar as a system of formal rules of correctness” (Kress et al., 2001, p. 12). That understanding of grammar, they contend, should now be extended to conceptualize the mode of the visual: “Just as grammars of language describe how words combined and clauses, sentences and texts, so our visual ‘grammar’ will describe the way in

which depicted people, places and things combined in visual ‘statements’ of greater or lesser complexity and extension” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 1).

Kress and coauthors explain that by their use of the term *rhetorics* they mean “a dialogic process in which teachers (and the school) provide the ideological/rhetorical frame within which students are active participants in a dynamic process” (Kress et al., 2001, p. 19). Thus, they draw upon the widely used concept of framing as a means to “both classify activities and interpret them, while serving to locate, perceive, identify and label the everyday,” in order to “draw attention to the ways in which teachers and students negotiate and structure the meaning of experience through the use of rhetorical frames” (p. 21).

So, in this study, classifying their data in analytical units of rhetorical framing enabled them to more effectively manage the data analytically, while developing a descriptive language of rhetorical framing (Kress et al., 2001, p. 23). That analytic approach was applied “to produce a map of the shifts and rhetoric across the lesson and series of lessons so as to reveal their *rhetorical architecture*” (p. 25). Through that sort of “mapping,” they were able to “describe instances of how rhetoric is constructed during a lesson and series of lessons and show the cumulative effect of rhetorical framing,” as well as to “explore how teachers and students differ in their organization of rhetorical frames, . . . in the *rhetorical architecture* of different classrooms’ effects” (p. 25).

A still more recent work by Jewitt (2009) provides further articulation of the essential contextual understanding of the theoretical relationship between language and multimodality. As broadly conceived, she emphasized that multimodality most basically “describes approaches that understand communication and representation to be more than about language,” by attending to “the full range of communicational forms people use – image, gesture, gaze, posture, and so on –

and the relationships between them” (p. 14). And that broad conception is built on four interconnected theoretical assumptions.

The first is the most involved, but begins with the assertion that language is “part of a multimodal ensemble” in which “representation and communication always draw on a multiplicity of modes, all of which have the potential to contribute equally to meaning,” (Jewitt, 2009, p. 14). That construct holds “that meanings are made, distributed, received, interpreted and remade in interpretation through many representational and communicative modes – not just through language,” with multimodal research casting doubt on notions that image exists in support to writing, and gaze, gesture, and posture in support to speech (p. 14). That is because, “from a multimodal perspective, language is therefore only ever one mode nestled among a multimodal ensemble of modes,” meaning that multimodality “does not take language as its starting point or as providing a prototypical model of all modes of communication” (p. 15).

Second, multimodal research assumes that each mode in a multimodal ensemble advances different communicative work, with all modes, including language, having been “shaped through their cultural, historical, and social uses to realize social functions.” Modes “take on specific roles in a specific context and moment in time,” however those roles “are not fixed but articulated and situated” (Jewitt, 2009, p. 15). The third theoretical assumption underpinning multimodality holds that “people orchestrate meaning through their selection and configuration of modes” in ways that the “meanings in any mode are always interwoven with the meanings made with those of all other modes” involved in the interaction (p. 15). Finally, the broad concept of multimodality relies upon “the assumption that the meanings of signs fashioned from multimodal semiotic resources are, like speech, social,” shaped by norms and rules of sign

making, influenced by motivations and interests of sign-makers in specific social contexts (pp. 15-16).

Scholars have debated how the theoretical frameworks used by literacy researchers investigating digital multimodal processes should consider linguistics and written texts. Although semiotics has historically treated language as a system of sign, Machin (2009) has asked, “if we are indeed staring at the end of the domination of monomodal linguistic communication should we then be using models that were designed to study language to think about everything else?” (p. 181). Others have argued that the fields of multimodality and New Literacy Studies should merge: “If both the multimodal and the socio-cultural are part of sustained meaning-making then they need to be brought together to explain modern communication,” with the key point being “that all texts are made in social ways and there is a need for more dialogues of this kind between multimodal and New Literacy Studies scholars in order to better understand contemporary literacy” (Street, Pahl, & Rowsell, 2009, p. 200). Jewitt (2003) has proposed that research on students’ interaction with the “resources of the screen” involved in using a computer programming system to build computer games indicates “the need to look beyond language and to re-think learning as a multimodal accomplishment” (p. 34). That research suggests the “transformation of pedagogy and knowledge from page to screen offers teachers and learners access to different representational and communicational resources,” many of which are not language based” (p. 53). Other research has concluded that the teaching of handwriting to children “promotes certain cultural patterns with regard to the writing process, spatiality, and directionality,” and that biliterate children learning to write in different language scripts “highlights the ways in which familiarity with the act of writing constitutes a key aspect

of children's representational resources" that better enable them to design multimodal texts (Kenner, 2003, p. 88).

Beyond Kress: Other Multimodal Composing Studies

A large body of literacy research has investigated adolescents' digital multimodal composing processes and products in a number of other ways. By engaging a theoretical lens of multimodality, for example, research has shown that learning new composing practices can help students author new literate identities in their classroom community (Vasudevan, Schultz, & Bateman, 2010, p. 443). By extending composing processes beyond those of print modalities, students' practices shifted significantly in relation to literacies, texts, and increased modes of participation and engagement with classroom curriculum (p. 443).

That study was grounded in sociocultural theories of identities and literacies, which provide tools for conceptualizing how students author literate identities in a multimodal storytelling landscape (Vasudevan, Schultz, & Bateman, 2010, p. 445). That theoretical school of thought holds that, rather than identities being intrinsic or separate from social contexts and interactions, people take on identities in relation to context and experience, and those identities are embodied and enacted in practice. Related research seeks to draw upon those concepts to improve engagement of youth in in-school literacy practices by helping them bring their out-of-school knowledge and interests into the classroom (p. 446). This study focused particularly on interrelationships among new composing practices, participation, and development of literate identities through curricular activities in school, with emphasis on students' composing practices and stories that emerged through multimodal engagement (p. 448).

That study introduced fifth-grade students to diverse visual and aural resources for composing various texts, with attention on multiple ways the adolescents selected from digital

modes including photography, video, audio recording, and video editing software to compose stories. Investigation concentrated on how students enacted identities through such varied and multimodal composing practices, while seeking throughout the project to recognize possibilities for better student engagement to bridge home and classroom worlds in language-arts classrooms (Vasudevan, Schultz, & Bateman, 2010, p. 448).

Interpretive methods were utilized to gather data, including detailed field notes, audio and video recordings of discussions in the classroom and outside of school, formal and informal interviews with students and their teacher, as well as student writing, a variety of multimodal artifacts produced by the students, and teacher memos. That proved challenging for the researchers, who were often leading activities with the students at the same time they were trying to document the process (Vasudevan, Schultz, & Bateman, 2010, p. 450). The data were analyzed using systematic document review to identify patterns and themes, which were checked among researchers and across data sources, and then drawn upon to construct case studies of students that illustrated themes of participation in the multimodal storytelling project (p. 450).

The authors concluded that the construction of boundaries between home, school, and community can no longer be considered useful in understanding adolescents' literacy practices – because those boundaries are ever more permeable and overlapping in adolescents' lives. Given the opportunity to compose using various digital technologies dramatizes that permeability and suggests ways that teachers with limited access to digital technologies may still tap into their students' literacy skills and practices grounded in their homes and communities (Vasudevan, Schultz, & Bateman, 2010, p. 462). By examining multimodal composing processes of youth as they relate to new literate identities, educators can rethink outdated understandings of composing practices and theory. By inviting students to bring their own knowledge and expertise with

composing tools from outside the classroom into the classroom, better understandings of who holds expertise can be discovered, and the ways that literate identities are understood shifts significantly (p. 464).

Other recent research on student multimodal composing utilized case studies of stance, a concept similar to perspective or point of view, but with more direct effort on interfacing with the world through design and compositional practices in deliberate, rhetorical, and expressive ways (Rowell, 2020, p. 628). Through case studies detailing the students' understandings of materials and multimodal compositional practices, the study showed how "modes of expression and representation" are "distributed across media and materials to present meanings," and how literacy teaching and assessments more broadly conceived to take greater account of dominant modes such as color, fabric, music, and moving images can greatly contemporize composition in the literacy classroom (pp. 635-636).

Another creative approach utilized iPad animations to help students better learn "a multimodal language of emotions" with digital technologies through a systematic framework focused on the "grammar of emotions" (Mills & Unsworth, 2017, p. 609). That approach was utilized to explore insights that "exaggerated facial expressions, gestures, and body language of characters in animations can serve as a springboard for students' development of literary characters in other forms of literary composition" (p. 610). The framework was based on Martin and White's (2005) appraisal theory, which specifically systematizes a linguistic approach for describing attitudes in discourse semantics. Its three interacting elements focus on the way feelings are attended, opinions are addressed, and meaning is amplified, on three axes of meaning to communicate interpersonal meaning (Mills & Unsworth, 2017, p. 611). It was implemented in the study through workshops that taught participating teachers how to apply it in

the classroom with students around 12 years of age, using lesson plans that helped students develop a multimodal language for the expression of emotions through words, images, facial expressions, gestures, and body language (p. 613). The authors concluded that the research demonstrated making animations for the multimodal expression of emotions is a powerful means for helping students expand their vocabulary for articulating feelings by orchestrating the use of semiotic elements such as choice of lines and colors, subtle facial expressions, body movements, and rhythms (p. 618).

A more traditionally structured study focused on a design-based research project for fourth-graders in a low socioeconomic status school in which a digital-composition program was based on teaching the creation of multimodal and digital texts across a range of genres and text types, including Web pages, online comics, video documentaries, and blogs (Mills & Exley, 2014, p. 441). It sought to respond to a developing situation in which digital composition had already become important in elementary education by 2014, but little research had demonstrated the kind of changes involved for teachers in digital-composition classrooms, or addressed changing requirements for evaluation of the learning involved (p. 436).

Conceptually, the study drew upon Bernstein's (1990) sociological theory of the pedagogic device as the analytic framework, which asserts that the pedagogic device involved is what constitutes the "intrinsic grammar or rules of pedagogic discourse in institutions" (Mills & Exley, 2014, p. 436). Specifically, this research utilized that theoretical framework to conceptualize "the symbolic and pedagogic struggles and resolutions observed as pedagogies for digital writing were introduced" into the English curriculum of the school involved, seeking to consider: "What are the pedagogic relations of time, space, and text when teachers and students take up writing in digital contexts of use?" (p. 437). In that context, "time" refers to "the

partitioning, sequencing, and pacing or rate of expected acquisition of a certain skill” such as digital composition; “space” in this case to “the social arrangement of bodies, movement, and interactions in a classroom;” and “text” to “the product of the instruction and its evaluation,” such as “the visible ways that students present themselves in classroom contexts and the digital compositions that they create” (p. 437).

In the study, students were taught how to compose multimodal and digitally written texts in multiple genres and text types. The students worked individually and in groups to produce Web pages featuring lengthy narratives and personal profiles, write scripts and record audiovisual podcasts to deliver information reports, create online comics, produce video documentaries involving literary characters from novels, and write Web logs recounting everyday events and learning experiences (Mills & Exley, 2014, p. 441). Data collection emphasized dialogue with participants, including researcher blogs, teacher focus groups, teacher-researcher semi-structured interviews, teacher-researcher planning meetings, and teacher focus groups, with artifact data including student print and digital artifacts such as writing samples collected before and during the project, student-created Web pages, drawings of different shot types, storyboards, movie scripts, podcasts, online comics, and micro-documentaries (pp. 443-445). For data analysis, a coding scheme was developed based on hierarchical coding (Carspecken, 1996) and categories of the pedagogic device (Bernstein, 1990).

The authors concluded that their research suggests multimodal and digital design may need to involve changes not only to instructional delivery systems, but to the very nature of the instruction involved (Mills & Exley, 2014, p. 436). Those changes are highlighted by the need for a reordering of time, space, and text that will embed multimodal design into conventional literacy instruction, with significant investments of time in the acquisition of digital skills and

multimodal textual knowledge, a reordering of classrooms to facilitate relevant media-production practices, and development of new rules and criteria for assessing students' digital creations (p. 464). Additionally, teachers will need expanded knowledge of multimodal semiotics, emphasizing visual, audio, spatial, gestural, and linguistic elements, so as to best guide students through the full range of design grammars involved in digital composition (p. 464).

Expansive Potential of Classroom Studies Involving Multimodal Texts

This section briefly provides insights into the ways that classroom studies in which scholars examine a range of further ways that students work with multimodal texts. Other research has been grounded in an approach to multimodality that aims to better recognize, for example, the ways students use texts in their everyday lives, amplifying the notion of multimodal literacy beyond a focus on interpretation and design of texts (Lenters, 2018, p. 646). One study, for example, utilized a 10-year-old participant's engagement with graphic novels to consider what students' interactions with multimodal texts can reveal about relationality in learning – focusing on elements such as ways that learning can be personal and collective, cognitive and embodied, rational and affective (p. 643). That approach asserted that the texts created by students should not be understood simply as preliterate productions, but rather as multimodal texts representing parts of a spectrum of literate communicative practices (p. 645). The author argued that becoming attuned in that way to “what makes literacy exciting to students” expands “our understanding of multimodality from one person interpreting and deploying signs and symbols” through modes of language, visuals, sound, space, and gesture. It pushes our thinking toward more broadly considering meaning-making and “the open-ended possibilities for what students can do with multimodal literacy” (p. 647).

Another interesting body of literacy research on adolescents' digital multimodal processes and products addresses the subject as explored in studies involving marginalized populations. A study focused on early literacy in narratives involving first- and second-grade students from unemployed and migrant families living on the borders of the city of Johannesburg sought to "illuminate a number of important issues concerning multimodality, materiality, and creativity within different social contexts of meaning-making" (Lancaster, 2003, pp. 123-124). The study's examining of doll/child figures produced by children in terms of semiotic multimodality was grounded in assumptions that multimodal pedagogies "represent a paradigm shift from language to mode," moving "in and out and across modes, in and out and beyond language." That enabled "learners to play with nameless and wordless concepts and 'fix' them in multiple variations of shapes, colors, patterns, weights, densities, cloths, words, images" (p. 136).

A study that examined the multimodal designs of lower tracked students with few opportunities for expanding literacy practices countered negative views of academically marginalized students' literacy practices through "demonstrating their authoritative stance taking and enacting of layered positionalities through multimodal designs in which they renegotiated ways of knowing and doing in their classroom" (Anderson et al., 2017, p. 104). The project focused on "academically marginalized" students, a category that references those "in lower tracks, . . . pulled out of mainstream instructional time for remediation," or identified with "racial, cultural, linguistic, or socioeconomic groups positioned outside the 'norm' in a given society" (pp. 106-107). In particular, it attended to instruction for students assigned to Singapore's lowest track – "normal technical" (NT), the lowest ranked 15 percent of secondary students in each year's cohort (p. 105). The study was part of an effort to develop language-arts

units for NT students that could expand opportunities for their creative and agentive engagement with texts (p. 107).

It utilized multimodal design because of the way it can require students to work across modes and provide different meaning-making opportunities to create, interpret, analyze, and evaluate texts in different ways from the expectations of traditional school literacy (Hull & Nelson, 2005; Unsworth, 2002). Also, engaging in multimodal design provides the potential to change the possibilities for learners to represent and position themselves by replacing competent performance with meaning-making as a sufficient sign of learning (Kress, 2010, p. 174). The theoretical framework drew upon the concepts of rhetorical force and authorial voice as lenses to “examine how students took up opportunities to negotiate complex positioning as author, knower, and performer” (Anderson et al., 2017, p. 113). Rhetorical force considers associations evoked by a text, through which “authors can achieve rhetorical force through attitude and evaluation toward a proposition rather than the simple representation of facts or the expository asserting of ‘truth’” (Wheeler, 2000). Authorial voice has been defined as “claiming a presence as an author and narrator of one’s own experiences” (Vasudevan et al., 2010, p. 461). It can provide a means to illuminate the relationship of students “as authors both to the audience and their topics in ways that contribute to newfound dispositions as meaning makers and designer” (Anderson et al., 2017, p. 112).

Data were collected through class sessions, field notes, student artifacts, curricular design materials, and interviews. Analysis focused on the multimodal texts created by students as part of a unit on persuasive multimodal composition emphasizing the identification of features that expanded beyond what was possible in the students’ typical classroom practices (Anderson et al., 2017, p. 113). In three stages, the multimodal texts first were open coded to “identify the range

of design choices interpreted as constituting ‘signs of success,’” followed by axial coding according to meta functions realized in the designs, and then presentation of three exemplar cases for additional examination as to “how expanding opportunities to authoritatively author disrupted ways of doing and being in this classroom” (p. 113).

The authors concluded that the study had “illuminated a consonant shift in focus” for the student participants “from a focus on forms and compliance to one of exploring positionalities and meaning making,” offering significant implications for “how students might renegotiate author-audience relations, thus expanding what might count as evidence of learning” (Anderson et al., 2017, p. 122). In the assessment of the researchers, through that process, students were empowered to transform their classroom activities, from “filling in blanks or following tightly scripted forms for making banal and impersonal meaning in the service of demonstrating awareness of grammar rules,” into becoming “designers of their own interests” and “makers of their own meaning” (p. 122).

In another study that utilized extensive work with a single participant, in which the researcher embarked on an eight-month multimodal “literacy journey” with a student who had been given a “low literate” label that “belied his creativity, expressive practices, and intellect, yet it continued to follow him” (Vasudevan, 2007, p. 252). Arguing that the standards on which such labels are based have fallen “out of sync with the worlds that youths currently navigate and the work and higher education worlds that they will have to navigate in the future,” the researcher explored “what happened when teacher and student moved beyond labels to learn, compose, and ‘know’ together” (p. 252). Conceptually, that approach was derived from the assertion that although many literacy practitioners consider literacy to be multimodal and seek ways to engage students’ out-of-school lives at school, “there continues to be little space in the school day for

adolescents' new texts," such as music videos, text messages, and podcasts, and practices such as playing video games, chatting online, and reading popular-culture magazines (pp. 253-254). The researcher focused on creating opportunities for the student "to bring his literacy practices and interests from outside the program into the space of our primarily classroom-based, teaching-learning relationship" (p. 254).

That involved the researcher recording and typing the students' words as they shared stories, using photographs and magazine images as prompts, then employing what had been typed to develop the students' reading fluency. That in time led to work in which the student "routinely and effortlessly orchestrated a variety of modalities—drawing, writing, oral narration—to convey his ideas about a particular event or topic" and "took risks in composing through writing" and "rewriting his stories, first by hand and then on the computer" (Vasudevan, 2007, p. 254). During the eight months that the researcher worked with the student, in a literacy program for youthful offenders on probation, the student developed "an impressive portfolio of work" but then was transferred away to a high school for the rest of his probation. The researcher sought to share a narrative of his growth as a learner with his probation officer, but was told only very limited and standardized information could be reported (p. 255). Although the researcher was not able to follow the student's later progress, "I do know that his experiences during the months we worked together tell us more about literacy in the lives of adolescents than attendance and test scores can" (p. 255). It led her to assert that "the ways in which teachers come to know adolescents in formal education spaces must change" to "create spaces – within schools, after-school programs, and education programs in the justice system – where adolescents' worlds are welcome so that we may better hear their words" (p. 255). Further, evidence shows that student's

story is “only one of many showing the possibilities of engaging in literacy across modalities that ought to inform practice and policy” (Hull & Nelson, 2005).

A study in which adolescent refugee and immigrant English learners participated in a digital storytelling project, emphasizing multimodal social sharing, showed such an approach can help students with such backgrounds, whose reading and writing skills often have been underdeveloped because of limited or interrupted formal education (Johnson & Kendrick, 2016, p. 667). It drew upon the way the theoretical concept of investment has been used to illuminate for educators “how the manner in which they position their culturally and linguistically diverse students can significantly influence the students’ willingness to participate in learning activities” (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Related to that, an emerging area of research provides practical recommendations for how teachers can better engage immigrant and refugee students in a dialogic process of meaning-making by utilizing multiple modes (Campano & Low, 2011; Early, Kendrick, & Potts, 2015).

That study showcased the ways multimodal pedagogies can express difficult knowledge by tracing the digital storytelling process of one student as he shared his journey as a young refugee from Iraq via Syria to Canada (Johnson & Kendrick, 2016, p. 668). Data collection included field notes, classroom observations, informal conversations with students, semi structured end-of-project interviews on students’ composing processes and the impact of multimodal creation on their identities, student artifacts such as storyboards and writing, and the students’ completed digital stories (p. 669). A multimodal framework was utilized to code the data according to the modes of communication involved and common themes (p. 669). Findings were further organized using an adaptation of Rose’s (2011) visual methodology. Analysis of the composing process was conducted from a synesthetic perspective that focuses on how meaning

in one mode instigates meaning in another (Kress, 1997). The emphasis was on helping students communicate their experiences by tapping into their full communicative repertoires of thinking visually, musically, and linguistically) to achieve a greater range of affective expression (Johnson & Kendrick, 2016, p. 669).

The authors concluded there is profound potential for meaningful expression in defining literacy more broadly as multimodal communication, asserting that the case study developed through their research demonstrates how students are able to richly communicate their experiences when encouraged to create meaning through the utilization of a full range of semiotic modes (Johnson & Kendrick, 2016, p. 669). Through multimodal instruction, teachers can gain much better understanding of their students' identities, strengths, learning needs, and conceptual understandings, and students are empowered to better access their communication skills and express themselves despite language barriers (p. 673).

The potential for gaining such understanding was also demonstrated in a study that involved 9- and 10-year-old students being directed to complete "mind maps" for the researchers, which were then analytically condensed into key defining features or "critical attributes" that communicate meanings effectively and economically (Mavers, 2003, p. 19). The results suggest that perceptual, experiential, and conceptual insights are "interwoven in the semiosis of drawing," and interviews with the students "indicate that their choice, representation, and arrangement of images in their mind maps are both a means of making meaning for themselves and of making themselves maximally understood by others" (p. 19). The researcher found that "the spatiality of the image on the page as against the linearity of writing affords particular possibilities in communication potential" (p. 19).

Students participating in the study were asked to communicate ideas and information by drawing and linking images on how they think about the subject of computer-system usage. After completing the drawings, the students were asked to write briefly on their mind maps to provide labeling and explanation as useful. The researcher concluded that the “children appear to have drawn in such a way as to make themselves maximally understood” and that the “nature of the drawing is of itself intensely meaningful” (Mavers, 2003, p. 31). More specifically, the maps of the students were characterized by typically showing “the reader the criterial attributes of specific items or exemplifications of the type they have deliberately selected out for representation” so as to “convey what is important to the individual at this time, in this context, and for this purpose” (p. 31).

The researcher described the mind maps as “not just illustrations; they are communicators of analytical thinking. These image-based maps have enabled the children to communicate succinctly and effectively that which would not have been so easy with words” (Mavers, 2003, p. 32). The ways in which students framed images, positioned them on the page, and related them to one another through links was found to “communicate salience, classify constituents into ‘families’ and provide reading paths” in ways that were “not accidental but suffused with meanings, meanings that are created with communicational and interpretational intentionality” (p. 32). Perhaps reflecting the way that communication possibilities in new technologies are extending communicative options and expanding the spectrum of available semiotic resources, it seems the students in this study were instinctively “maximizing on the modal potentials of the visual” so as “skillfully to communicate with researchers” in ways that demonstrated “an intelligent visual literacy where they have conveyed aspects of their knowing and complexities of their thinking with precision and clarity” (p. 32).

This extended discussion of relevant literature has reviewed a considerable number of studies focused on adolescents' multimodal composing processes and products, as well as related studies that have sought to broaden understandings of students' relationship with multimodal texts. Together, the preceding sections have provided insights into the depth and diversity of research focused on considerations that directly or indirectly explore the broad trend that Kress has proposed is under way: A societal shift in meaning and message production away from writing being the dominant mode in recent centuries toward a rising dominance of the mode of image and others (Kress, 2010, p. 6). It also provides indications that studies are continuing to provide new insights into how literacy researchers can best investigate and conceptualize adolescents' digital multimodal processes and products – through creatively structured and imagined approaches. The study developed for this dissertation strives to further add to that body of insights. This effort is aimed at helping students enhance their writing multimodally by utilizing words and emojis in narrative-oriented exercises aimed at heightening their consciousness of multimodal communication and its role in potentially developing more effective traditional language skills.

CHAPTER 3

STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

This study, focused on how students use emojis to multimodally contribute to and shape narrative messages, was influentially informed by the analytic guidance fundamental to Maxwell's qualitative research strategies. The analysis focused upon data generated through implementation of a multi-part lesson plan based on the work of McConnell, Conrad and Uhrmacher (2020), utilizing particularly their constructivist approach and its emphasis on individualized meaning-making (pp. 37-48). In such an approach, learners construct meaning by drawing upon knowledge they possess and new information they receive (Brooks, 2004). It offers "teachers and students the opportunity to make meaning around given concepts and content" (McConnell, Conrad, & Uhrmacher, 2020, p. 37). The psychological and philosophical concept of constructivism as a theory of cognitive development in children seeks to explain how children construct mental models of the world in individual ways by applying new information to stored knowledge and experiences (p. 38). Constructivist learning has become a widely embraced philosophical approach to teaching, learning, and curriculum development, emphasizing emergent understandings and individual meaning-making: "How will the student put their own stamp on the learning?" (pp. 38-39).

The multi-part lesson plan designed to generate the data for this study included (1) an introductory lesson based on information shared with students on the growing use and

importance of emojis in modern communication process and encouraging them to spontaneously discuss how they think about emojis; (2) a survey that explored students' use and basic understandings of emojis before participating in this study, (3) a writing assignment that asked students to combine forms of directed and structured narrative writing with emojis in short responses to prompts, (4) a writing assignment that asked students to go back through the previous assignment and express how they would translate the emojis they used in it into words, phrases, and/or sentences, and (5) a reflective essay that asked students to assess what they learned about the use of emojis and their thoughts on how emojis can be helpful in making written communication more effective.

The respective components of that multi-part lesson plan are expanded upon in full in Appendix A.

The data gathered through those structured steps was further enhanced through additional data gathering shaped by Maxwell's emphasis on structuring methods in advance but not to the degree that it "leads to a lack of flexibility to respond to emergent insights" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 88). Marshall and Rossman (2016) also emphasize the value of incorporating in qualitative research design some elements that are "emerging and evolving rather than tightly prefigured" (p. 2). The aim is "to preserve the flexibility of design that is a hallmark of qualitative methods" (p. 99). So as the lesson plan described above was implemented, additional insights were added through – as proved fruitful – classroom interactions, extended interactions with selected students, and teacher reflections.

The lesson plan was thus grounded in use of social semiotics through forms of meaning-making that multimodally utilized linguistic and visual modes interacting dynamically with one another in communication ensembles that synergized new messages in ways single modes alone

cannot express (Jewitt, 2009). This reflected the way that multimodal research has shown such projects can create semiotic opportunities for adolescents to more compellingly express their identities and interests (Jewitt, 2008). This study's approach also was grounded in what such research has shown about the way adolescents are often able to recognize, label, and leverage the particular semiotic resources of various modes in advancing their goals and modal designs (Ho et al., 2011; Pantaleo, 2012; Towndrow, Nelson, & Yusuf, 2013).

As discussed in more detail in the previous chapter concerning many studies that have focused on lesson plans involving multimodal composing in the classroom, for example, Smith (2018) utilized analysis of students' work in a literary analysis unit, with data gathered through classroom observations, student questionnaires, and consultation with their teacher, to reveal the ways that students compose in such work for multiple purposes and audiences (pp. 206-210). Smith examined multimodal composing as a distinctive merging of sociocultural, emotional, content-related, and personal dimensions, and provided "a nuanced understanding of the interrelated dimensions shaping adolescents' modal usage in response to literature," highlighting the pedagogical potential for multimodal composing to be leveraged in the classroom (pp. 208-209). Kress and other scholars analyzed recordings from classrooms in order to demonstrate the way a multimodal approach contributes to teaching and learning through semiotic resources (Kress et al., 2001, p. 10). Through that study they proposed "the meanings made with language, whether as speech or as writing, are interwoven with the meanings made with other modes in the communicated contacts, and this interaction itself produces meaning" (p. 11).

The study of multimodality in the classroom by Vasudevan and other scholars showed that learning new composing practices involving visual and aural resources for composing texts can help students author new literate identities in their classroom community (Vasudevan,

Schultz, & Bateman, 2010, p. 443). By extending composing processes beyond those of print modalities, students' practices in that study shifted significantly in relation to literacies, texts, and increased modes of participation and engagement with classroom curriculum (p. 443). A study by Lenters analyzed a student's engagement with graphic novels to better recognize the ways students use texts in their everyday lives (Lenters, 2018, pp. 643, 646). The author argued that such research expands understandings of "the open-ended possibilities for what students can do with multimodal literacy" (p. 647).

Additionally, perhaps the largest survey of studies involving multimodal composition instruction – which assessed 10 years of such research in secondary English courses – identified three major areas of focus (Nash, 2018, p. 344). Those areas included studies focused on composition that mixed print and non-print modes, composition in which printed text and non-print modes were incorporated in supporting ways, and studies that emphasized composing processes in which students drew upon multiple modes as they composed (p. 345). So, the study developed for this dissertation can be considered as part of the third group. That group's findings were summarized as highlighting shifting understandings of communication across modes, increased student engagement, collaboration and composition for audiences beyond the teacher, and the inclusion of student interests, experiences and identities (p. 345).

In that group, for example, studies found that students responded more emotionally when multiple modes were involved in assignments (McClean & Rowsell, 2015) and that students demonstrated the ability to move fluidly among different modes (Schwartz, 2015). None in that survey – or in additional literature review on multimodality studies for this dissertation – has been identified as focused specifically on bridging the gap between the everyday realities of classroom interactions and efforts to explain them in terms of the conceptual framework of

multimodality ((Kress, Jewitt, et al., 2001, p. 17).) – by narrowing its focus to the use of emojis in structured multimodal writing exercises, as discussed in Chapter One.

Also, a recent survey of twenty years of research on emojis from all fields found that in relative terms, education research involving emojis lags behind fields like computer science and communication (Bai et al., 2019, pp. 2-3). The most common topic in education research involving emojis has been focused on the impact of emojis on learning efficiency (p. 10). One study highlighted in that survey found that the use of emojis in classroom activities will help students better understand what they have learned (Brody & Caldwell, 2019). Broadly, this study too represents an effort to enhance student learning through the use of multimodal composing exercises utilizing emojis. However, no study in that survey identified research focused specifically on addressing what this study seeks to contribute most distinctly – by developing a proposed response to the way analysis of multimodality in the classroom has been characterized as inherently and structurally challenging (Kress, Jewitt, et al., 2001, p. 17).

Data Collection and Analysis

Those exercises represent part of the plan in this dissertation that focuses on collection of data generated through implementing the lesson plan that included the students' multimodal message construction, writing, survey responses, and discussions in class. The exercises focusing upon multimodal message construction were structured to provide data organized in forms that could be considered analytically in terms of their narrative creation, purposely structured with a focus on short narrative responses. That approach reflects growing scholarly interest in a key “strategy used by humans to make sense of, and create order in, their worlds” (Freeman, 2017, p. 30). This “unending flow of meaning-making” (Freeman, 2017, p. 31) has been characterized as

“so much a part of our ordinary experience that we are usually not aware of its operation, but only of the experience of reality that it produces” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 160).

For this study, the focus is on how students used emojis to multimodally contribute to and shape the short, structured narrative forms of the core multimodal exercises. Pictorial elements themselves – such as a single frame in a comic strip or a painting, drawing, or photograph that captures a moment in time – generally are distinguished from narratives that contain a sequence of events that take place over some kind of time period (Berger, 1997, pp. 4-7). However, visual elements such as those can contribute parts of narratives and thus help shape narrative content of texts (Berger, 1997, p. 6). So key components of the multi-part lesson plan involved students contributing to meaning-making by using emojis to multimodally contribute to and shape short, structured narratives in response to provided prompts employed in the exercises. Thus, the work of the student participants was structurally narrowed to focus through their individual meaning-making work on what is considered “the particular semiotic substance” of narrativity through use of language and image (Ryan, 2004, p. 1). That enhancement of the language of narrative through the use of visual elements like emojis can be compared, for example, to the way a “seemingly disconnected sequence of cinematic images” utilized in a movie “can become a narrative sequence” through the way that visuals add meaning to the broader narrative text (Ryan, 2004, p. 6).

The process of multimodally shaping a written text with emojis also can perhaps be compared to the way words and pictures are used in a relationship in picture books that depends most fully on the “intersecting relationships of both with each other” (Nodelman, 1988, p. 20). Words and emojis could not be said to have the same sort of relationship as words and pictures in a picture book, but to share similarities with the way that the pictures in picture books “exist

primarily so that they can assist in the telling of stories” – particularly in the way the relationship “confirms and makes more specific a story” through “images that explain or clarify words and each other” (Nodelman, 1988, pp. vii-viii).

The overall approach of the prompt-by-prompt narrative analysis in Chapter Five was specifically informed by Maxwell’s articulation of qualitative categorizing and connecting strategies to help identify relationships among elements of the data “that connect statements and events within a context into a coherent whole” (Maxwell, 2013, pp. 112-113). Such strategies helped identify themes that emerged from the narrative data, as did contextualizing strategies designed to help develop summaries that could be integrated to arrive at deeper understanding of the data (Maxwell, 2013, pp. 113-114).

That process was utilized to identify themes that emerge in the multimodal exercises, relying upon Maxwell’s emphasis on the qualitative goal not “primarily to count things but to ‘fracture’ (Strauss, 1987, p. 29) the data and rearrange them into categories that facilitate comparison between things in the same category and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts. Another form of categorizing involves organizing the data into broader themes and issues” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 107).

Additionally, a form of profile matrix was utilized in Chapter Six to analytically consider the data from a perspective broader than the prompt-by-prompt narrative analysis, as well as providing patterned formatting for addressing the research questions. It drew upon fractured data from Chapter Five for interpretation and formatting into a relatively systematic, categorized format, in relation to each research question. That approach was employed in order to organize the data for additional perspective on “categories that facilitate comparison between things in the same category,” as well as providing for comparison another “form of categorizing [that]

involves organizing the data into broader themes and issues” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 107). The use of the profile matrix is “fundamental to qualitative text analysis” and often includes topics or themes as structuring elements organized in columns, so it can also be referred to as a thematic matrix (Kuckarts, 2014, p. 3).

Research questions

To re-emphasize, the focus in framing research questions for this study was not in terms of variance questions that emphasize difference and correlation, but on process questions that emphasize “*how* things happen, rather than *whether* there is a particular relationship or how much it is explained by other variables” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 82). That involved three particular elements that, according to Maxwell, are much better suited to process questions than to variance questions: Those that focus on the *meaning* of events and activities for people involved in them, those concerning the influence of physical and social *context* on such events and activities, and those concerned with the *processes* through which such events and activities and their outcomes occurred (Maxwell, 2013, p. 83).

In that context, this study focused on these research questions:

RQ1: What broad patterns of meaning emerge recurrently in the data gathered in this study?

RQ2: What evidence of shared meaning among participants relative to specific emojis is reflected in the data gathered in this study?

RQ3: What commonalities and contrasts emerge in the data gathered in this study?

RQ4: What insights relevant to multimodal meaning-making can be developed from the data gathered in this study?

The Participants and the Study Basics

The participants were 20 twelfth-grade English students at a North Georgia high school. I worked with their teacher as I developed the specifics of putting this plan into effect in her class, and she provided me class time with her students to fully complete all the parts of the study. In considering the researcher as the research instrument, in terms of Maxwell's conceptualization, I took advantage of related skills I developed as a classroom teacher who highly emphasized actively making interpersonal connections with the students as a crucial component of my pedagogical philosophy. Maxwell's approach of the researcher in qualitative research as the research instrument, in which "eyes and ears are the tools" used "to gather information and to make sense of what is going on" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 88), was utilized in order to help students draw upon and express meanings they associate with emoji use.

So, the basic approach for the multi-part lesson plan generated the data for this study involved me as the researcher working with the class of student participants, generating data through the respective parts of the lesson plan. The teacher of the class generously allowed me as a researcher to have complete use of a full week of class sessions with the students in the class to implement the study as detailed here and in Appendix B. The lesson plan did not involve any formal interfacing with the overall classroom instruction in this English course, beyond both being concerned with language arts. More detail is provided in the next section on what that overall classroom instruction focuses on. For the purposes of this study, the participants simply represented students involved in high school language-arts instruction, whose teacher was willing to allow her students to be involved in this study. The students and their parents then agreed to participate through their completion of the assent and consent forms included in Appendix A.

The parts of the lesson plan were structured so as to guide the students in their multimodal composition to focus on the topics of the study. The manner in which I interacted with the students was purposefully structured to approximate basically that of a teacher interacting with the students in her class on this type of lesson plan – given the limitations inherent in the researcher not actually being the teacher of the class involved, but being a guest teacher given permission by the actual teacher to temporarily interact with the students for the purposes of the study’s lesson plan.

As discussed in preceding pages of this chapter, that lesson plan began with an introductory session in which information was shared with students on the growing use and importance of emojis in modern communication processes. The focus was on helping them think of emoji usage in a broader context than their own usage and encouraging them to provide feedback in different ways on how they think about emojis and emoji usage. Before the student participants worked through the different steps of the multi-part lesson plan, their use and basic understandings of emojis was explored in a more structured, systematic way through a survey focused on those topics. That provided excellent insights into the participants in terms of those understandings at the time they began their work in the study – as discussed at more length later in this chapter.

The core elements of the multi-part lesson plan began with implementing a multimodal writing assignment in which students were asked to develop short narrative responses to prompts using words and emojis as directed through instructions on that exercise. In the exercise that followed that one, students were asked to go back through the previous assignment and show how they would translate the emojis they used in the previous multimodal exercise into words, phrases, and/or sentences. After that, still another writing assignment had the students complete a

reflective essay on the impact of what they felt they learned about the use of emojis and expression of their thoughts on how emojis may be helpful in improving written communication.

The considerable qualitative data generated through those structured steps was further enhanced to some extent through my classroom interactions as they arose, extending interactions with students and their teacher when possible. So, the data generated included the students' various writing efforts, their survey responses, and discussions as they occurred. That considerable data was then considered more deeply through the analytic process discussed in the preceding section of this chapter and presented in the following chapters.

Because the study design purposefully focused on the data generated by the students composing multimodally in classroom exercises – rather than student interpersonal digital communication – the fact that some students used Chromebooks (just as they regularly did in that and other classes) to complete the prompts with short multimodal constructions and some did so on their cellphones (also regularly used by all students in the class) did not alter their respective responses in any material way. Whichever device they used, the student participants only had to produce short multimodal constructions – equally simple on either Chromebooks or on cellphones for these digitally-native participants, given that all were accessing the same standard set of emojis.

Indeed, with each student using devices with which they were most comfortable to access the standard body of emojis, it reduced the syndrome Smith detailed concerning the distortion that can be produced by inequalities in technical expertise and digital literacies. Smith found that differences in technological familiarity with devices or platforms could constrain the less proficient students from participating meaningfully (Smith, 2019, pp. 20-21). Because all the student participants in this study were equally familiar with Chromebooks and cellphones, and

with accessing the standard set of emojis, the approach implemented in this study virtually eliminated those potential inequalities.

The Study Participants: More Details and Insights

The student participants in this study were part of a senior British Literature English class, a course that is required of twelfth-graders at a high school in northern Georgia. Before participating in this study, the students in the class were near the end of a unit on literature from the Victorian period and had been focusing on the novel *Frankenstein*. According to the teacher of their class, almost all students in the school system come from working-class families, with some lower on the socioeconomic scale. Very few are middle class, and very few go on to attend college, she said. Most go from high school to full-time jobs, the teacher said, and some start working before they finish high school, often for a large construction company in the area.

She characterizes their level of interest in their language-arts classes as less than half the students typically being interested in some of the content covered. She qualified that by saying that “interested” might be too strong a term for their actual level of interest, and that it might be more accurate to say that percentage of the students “don’t hate” at least some of the course material. She categorized *Frankenstein* as a part of the course those students “don’t hate.” Their teacher also said, “They’re definitely more interested in the automotive classes and the band classes and the agriculture classes than they are English.” A successful culinary-arts program at the school is also more popular with most students. The English course sequence at that high school in northern Georgia begins with ninth-grade Literature and Composition, which emphasizes world literature, followed by the next level of that course in the tenth grade. In the eleventh grade, students take American literature, and in the twelfth grade, British Literature. In

the eleventh grade, Advanced Placement Language and Composition is also offered, and Advanced Placement Literature and Composition in the twelfth grade.

She said her teaching approach is to emphasize fairness and being a facilitator who offers them opportunities to learn and strictly enforces deadlines. She believes maintaining consistent accountability is one way to help students learn to deal with the adversity of the world beyond high school, so they learn to develop some self-discipline before they finish high school. She hopes to help them with that, if they do go to college, so they won't be "sitting in a dorm room as a freshman in college and procrastinating everything." Or if they join the work force, where their boss won't tell them, "Get off your phone, get off your phone – they will just fire them." She describes those efforts as among "the soft skills that we kind of try to work on in my classroom, just because I do teach seniors."

The teacher said that class discussions have become much more challenging in recent years because students talk to each other and different people in their lives much more through texting and social media than through conversation. "Classes are less and less chatty every semester because students just don't talk anymore," she said. "They don't talk to one another. They don't talk to me. They just don't talk in general." That trend has become so pronounced now that "the noise level in classrooms is not like it was when I first started teaching, because students spend so much time on their phones." That is the case, she said, even with students sitting next to each other in class, communicating with each other via their phones. "So it does hinder some class discussion," she observed, adding that in some class discussions about the trend, students report, they "feel like they don't know how to talk to people anymore, that they've lost a lot of that face-to-face interaction."

In general, I felt the discussions that I had with the class for this study were reasonably good, although there were a group of young women in the class who participated in the discussion much more than some of the others. It seemed to help that several in the class apparently did genuinely find the subject of emojis interesting, and that was reflected in the essays they wrote as the last part of the exercises that the class completed for this study – as will be discussed in detail in Chapter Seven.

Exploring the Study Participants Through Their Own Multimodal Profiles

This study provided a way to get to know still more about the participating students on another level particularly relevant to this study – through their multimodal utilization of the basic semiotic communication tools that emojis as visual elements with communicative properties represent. That process began with the first step of this study, a survey exploring students’ characterization of their use and basic understandings of emojis before participating in the composition exercises of this research. So here, this part of the discussion will provide preliminary insights that were reflected in the first interactions with the student participants – before they completed the core of the multi-part lesson plan that formed the core components of this study – as reflected in the initial survey conducted at the beginning of this study.

Highlighting the picture of this group of students that emerged through their responses to the initial survey before the multi-part lesson plan was administered, we can see that as a group they are regular users of emojis, although individual usage frequencies varied. Regardless each students’ respective usage frequency, the responses to this survey indicated they have developed relatively strong views on the purpose and functions of emojis. As will be discussed in this chapter, their body of responses to this survey offered both challenges and reasons for optimism regarding this study’s interest in helping students enhance their writing multimodally by utilizing

words and emojis in exercises aimed at raising their consciousness of multimodal communication and its role in developing more effective language skills.

To emphasize again, as part of introducing readers to the study participants before discussing the study's analysis and findings in later chapters, this section provides more insight into the participating students (before completing the multimodal composition exercises involved in this study) through their own descriptions of how they used and understood the basic semiotic communication tools that emojis as visual elements with communicative properties represent. Twenty students participated in this pre-study survey. The full survey questions are included in Appendix B. It is important to emphasize that this was not the sort of large-scale survey designed to be reliably generalizable to a wider population. The purpose for this study was to provide a relatively greater level of understanding as to this particular group of students' thinking on the subject of emoji usage before beginning the core components of this study.

The students' estimates of the frequency of their daily usage of emojis varied widely (in response to the question, "How many times a day would you estimate you use emojis?"). At the low end of their estimates, one reported daily usage of emojis of zero; another said between zero and two; another said two. At the high end, the top estimate was 50, followed by "easily more than 20." Almost half (nine) reported estimates that could be considered as frequent usage, either estimating they used emojis 10 or more times a day, or characterizing their use in ways that suggested high frequency, such as "just about every time I text," and "almost every time I am texting someone."

As far as which emojis the students used most often (in response to the question, "What would you say are the three emojis you use the most?"), one of the laughing emojis (😄) was by far the most common, with almost three-quarters of the students listing it as one of the three

emojis that they use most frequently. The second most common was closely related semiotically, with close to a third of the students listing the crying-from-laughing emoji (😂). Next most common were a group of emojis that were cited by at least a fifth of the students: The heart emoji (❤️), the thumbs-up emoji (👍), the crying emoji (😭), and the skull emoji (💀), with the straight-face emoji (😐) being cited by almost a fifth of the students. Emojis cited by at least two students included the happy/smiley face emoji (😊), the heart-hands emoji (💕), and the shaking-head emoji (🙄). Other emojis cited at least once included the sunglasses-dude emoji (😎), the cowboy-hat dude emoji (🤠), the middle-finger emoji (🖕), the check emoji (✅), the kissing with heart emoji (😘), the glasses emoji (👓), the black-heart emoji (🖤), the purple-heart emoji (💜), the questioning emoji (😕), the saluting emoji (👊), and the heart-eyes emoji (😍).

That sampling provides something of a proximate representation of the palette from which this group of students most often drew upon in their usage of emojis. For example, considering the complete selection of emojis mentioned by the students as the three they used most often, slightly more than a third of the total group of emojis cited by the students involved laughing. A sixth of the emojis mentioned in that complete selection involved hearts. That provides some insight into the way this group of students' emoji usage – apart from their work in this study – appears to be most frequently characterized by semiotic references to humor and affection.

More than half of the emojis mentioned by the students as the ones they use most often can be reasonably characterized as indications of positive emotions, while a little over a fifth of those mentioned can be characterized as potential indications of negative emotions. This suggests that this group of students may be more likely to add semiotic indications that reinforce

or clarify the positive intention of text messages. Only four students listed the crying emoji as one of the three they use most often, and no students listed emojis that reflect anger.

The indications suggested by those responses were reinforced in other ways by many of the students' responses to other questions in the survey conducted at the beginning of this study. When asked to describe in words the meaning of the three emojis they reported using most often, those responses also overwhelmingly reflected more positive than negative emotions. The laughing emoji (😄) was described as meaning in words with terms such as *"laughing," "laughing at what someone said," "it's funny," "funny," "something is funny," "when I think something is funny,"* and *"I'm happy laughing."* The crying-from-laughing emoji (😂) was described by some students as meaning in words with terms similarly to those used to describe the laughing emoji, but in at least some cases with terms such as *"really funny"* and *"that's hilarious"* – indicating that some selection of emojis reflects distinctive gradations in meaning by the users. Even the skull emoji was described by some students as meaning *"funny," "some kind of laughing,"* or *"lol I'm dead."* The thumbs-up emoji (👍) was described as indicating *"showing I understand something."* The use of the heart emoji (❤️) was reported as meaning in words such terms as *"love," "showing love,"* and *"I love whoever is on the other side of the screen,"* while the purple and black heart emojis (💜, 🖤) were reported as emphasizing such meanings even more strongly, as in *"a lot of emotion and love behind it"* and *"much emo love."*

In those descriptions in words the meaning of the three emojis participants reported using most often, the responses reflected very few negative emotions. The strongest negative emotions reflected in that reporting came in describing in words, for example, the lone citing of the middle-finger emoji (👉) as *"F*ck off,"* the cowboy-hat dude emoji (🤠) as *"is for redneck stuff and being sarcastic,"* the skull emoji (💀) as potentially meaning *"the audacity,"* and the

questioning emoji (🤔) as “*confused,*” and the shaking-head emoji (🙄) as “*when I would shake my head at something I don't like or when someone says something dumb.*”

The responses to that question did reflect relatively frequent agreement on the meaning in words of many emojis. However, they also began to offer some indications of how that level of agreement is not universal. For example, in describing in words the meaning of the straight-face emoji (😬), the responses included “*what, are you serious, really...,*” and “*when I'm serious.*” Describing in words the meaning of the shaking-head emoji (🙄) was reported as “*when I would shake my head at something I don't like,*” as well as “*when someone says something dumb.*” Those were small indications of differing perceptions as to the meaning of particular emojis that were seen in other ways in other parts of this study.

What could be interpreted as this study's group of student participants' relatively narrow views on their understanding of the purpose of emojis emerged in multiple questions on this survey conducted at the beginning of this study, beginning with their responses to being asked about their reasons for using emojis. Those responses (to the survey question, “What would you say are reasons why you use emojis?”) were characterized by far the most often in terms of emojis as a means to incorporate emotion in their messaging. More than half the students either specifically used the word “emotion” in some way in their responses or used other terms (such as “*sad,*” “*funny,*” “*cringy*”) reflecting types of emotion: “*to show emotions;*” “*to put tone or emotions towards a message;*” “*to add emotions;*” “*to show emotions;*” “*to show tone and emotion;*” “*because I'm emo;*” “*to show emotions over text;*” “*to display my emotions or reaction through a short click;*” and “*to help people understand exactly what emotion I'm feeling.*”

The second most common reason that the students cited for why they use emojis centered around adding context to their messaging: *“to put what I’m saying into context,”* and *“to show the context on what my words are saying.”* But the students found other ways to express their reasons for using emojis. For at least one student the purpose was *“to not use words.”* For another it was simply *“because everyone else does it.”* Another responded only with the single word *“bored.”*

On the subject of whether emojis are just for fun or can help with communication, only a relative few in their responses indicated they considered emojis to be limited only to fun (in response to the survey question, “Would you say you think of emojis as just for fun – or can they help with communication?”): *“for fun;”* *“they are goofy;”* and *“they are mostly for fun.”* More of the responses indicated they saw emojis as: *“a little bit of both;”* *“they can help with both;”* *“for both;”* and *“both actually.”*

Almost three quarters of the students in the survey reflected a belief that emojis can *“definitely help with communication.”* In elaborating on their reasons for those views, responses indicated: *“sometimes emojis liven up the conversations and help get true emotions across so people don’t think you’re being rude;”* *“because sometimes it is hard to get the context on what a sentence says; so sometimes using emojis can clarify;”* *“emojis most definitely help with setting the tone and emotion so I would personally say that they do help with communication;”* *“a lot of times it can help with communication especially if your words come off different to the other person and can show the emotions that are being displayed;”* *“since they are quick and easy to type and understand;”* and *“if we didn’t have them it would make understanding people a little more difficult.”*

As for whether they use emojis more with writing, or by themselves (in response to the survey question, “Would you say you use emojis more with writing, or by themselves?”), only four responses indicated instances of using emojis by themselves, with a few explaining, “*Most of the time I use them by themselves just for a simple response;*” “*I usually use emojis at the end of a sentence, the only person who I do send them by themselves to is my girlfriend;*” and “*I use them more in my writing I’d say, but there are at times where I use them by themselves if need be.*” More common were responses such as simply “*both*” or “*with writing*” or “*more with writing;*” or emphasizing “*more with writing; I never respond with just emojis;*” “*more with writing to let the person know how I am reacting to their comment;*” and “*they help more with writing because the words show exactly what you’re talking about, and the emoji adds the tone to what you’re saying.*”

As to specifically what the students would say is their purpose when they use emojis with writing (in response to the survey question, “When you use emojis with writing, what would you say your purpose is in doing that?”), they offered a range of useful purposes. Indeed some spoke in terms of multimodal purposes that were consistent with the basic objectives of traditional composition: “*To clarify what I’m talking about or to express what I am talking about;*” “*To help the person on the other side of the screen understand my point or what I’m getting at;*” “*so someone can better understand the context I’m writing in;*” and “*to add tone to what I’m saying.*” Others seemed more focused specifically on the particular conventions of text-messaging: “*To help get the point across that it’s not serious and the statement is meant to be a joke as well as the emojis are part of the joke;*” “*to show that I’m either not mad or to show my mood;*” “*In agreement to proceed to a plan, or letting someone know I got the message;*” and “*In a debate or funny conversation to display my emotions or reactions on the topic.*” To be

sure, some students' responses reflected a lack of interest in considering matters such as the purpose of their use of emojis, such as those who responded only with *"I have no idea"* and *"idk"* (the common text/instant-message abbreviation for "I don't know"). The expressed purpose, however, for using emojis with writing could also be very practical and personal: *"I use them a lot of times to convey I'm not angry, agitated, or being a smart mouth, 'cause I know a lot of times what I say can come off that way."*

Concerning how useful these students think emojis are in written communication (in response to the survey question, "How useful do you think emoji are in written communication?"), only three students indicated they were not useful in that way, observing *"Overall not too useful,"* and *"I don't think they are useful at all unless you are trying to show that something is a joke."* Among the large majority who said they consider text messages useful in writing, some explained their reasoning as: *"They can be pretty useful because some people take a certain tone while reading messages;"* *"They are just as useful as they are by themselves;"* *"I feel like they are very useful they can make a conversation fun or just lighten the mood;"* and *"I feel as if they are very useful because a lot of times texting you can't tell whether or not they are happy or mad."* One response provided a particularly detailed rationale: *"They are very useful when I'm communicating in writing because a lot of times I'm sarcastic and only my closer friends and family know I do that to be funny, but other people can take it wrong. Very useful. A lot of times I use them to let the other person know exactly how I feel instead of them questioning if I am mad at them or not."* Another saw even greater promise in the unfolding environment of digitally networked communication: *"Really useful since they are easily understood. I could see them being used as a universal language in the future."*

And yet, this group of students reflected unanimous agreement on the subject of times when emojis should not be used. Although not every response elaborated further, every one affirmed that there are such times, in their view (in response to the survey question, “Are there times when you think emojis should not be used?”). Most who did elaborate focused on emojis not being appropriate for “serious” contexts. Such contexts when the students reported emojis should not be used included: *“during serious conversations,” “school or important documents,” “during serious moments,” “arguments with adults, serious conversations, and sad conversations,”* and *“when something is getting serious or upsetting.”* Some responses emphasized work and school settings, such as: *“I think they should not be used when you’re writing an essay or texting your boss. I feel as that is unprofessional,”* and *“When it comes to writing essays for school or talking to a boss of yours you need to be professional.”* Some focused on being sensitive to situations in which emojis could potentially be upsetting to other participants: *“During serious matters or during family matters I think it would be inappropriate,”* and *“If you are having a serious conversation with someone I don’t think they should be used because someone could be going through something or are wanting to talk about something serious and should not be used when doing so.”*

With a few exceptions, their views regarding that question seemed to largely carry over to the subject of possible ways the use of emojis in schoolwork could advance learning. Most expressed little optimism about that possibility (in response to the survey question, “What are some possible ways that using emojis in your schoolwork could help with learning?”): *“There is not a possible way that I can think of;” “I really don’t think they can be;” “I don’t think they would be helpful;” “They shouldn’t be used, it’s not gonna help me learn by looking at a little face;”* and *“Can’t see any real use with them.”*

However, just over half the students in the survey were willing to consider the possibility of emojis in schoolwork helping with learning. Some of the possibilities offered included: *“To make it more fun,” “To show maybe the understanding of what you are thinking or feeling;” “to help stay engaged;” “It can help add context to what you could be writing;” “They could be used to figure out how a student is doing on a certain subject or to describe how they are feeling that day;” “To display emotions that are hard to describe through text in writing;”* and *“Maybe if you are writing a narrative essay and are wanting to display the emotions of a character in said writing.”* A few offered qualified assessments of the potential for emojis in schoolwork helping with learning: *“Some kids could stay more focused and learn better this way, but others may find it odd;”* and *“I don’t [think we could] use emojis in school because we have not been taught how to properly do that. If we ever did I think that would be the time we start using emojis in school.”*

The students in this group expressed much more widely held optimism in regard to the matter of combining emojis with written communication in order to make messages clearer and less confusing. Without exception, every student in this group indicated that combining emojis with written communication at least *could* make messages clearer (in response to the survey question, “Do you believe combining emojis with written communication makes the message clearer or more confusing?”). More than half affirmatively declared that combining emojis with written communication makes the message clearer, observing, *“more clear because the other person knows exactly how you feel;”* and *“I think that it makes it clearer depending on what emoji you use where.”* Several others expressed their view on the subject in more qualified terms: *“Sometimes confusing but sometimes clearer;” “It does a bit of both;” “They can be, or you can be direct with your conversation;”* and *“It depends on the*

writing and what emojis are being used in the writing on whether it's confusing or more clear."

In considering their reasons for the way they answered the previous question, some again articulated doubts (in response to the survey question, "What would you say is the reason you believe what you answered for the previous question?"): *"Because it is just sometimes people just make it clear [but] most of the time they make it confusing;" "It can help with certain things, but it could also not make sense while writing;" "Sometimes it works, sometimes it does not;" "I say that because you could just be using random emojis that have a meaning to you, but could have a completely different meaning to someone else;" and "Because I don't use them unless it's a part of a joke. I really only use them ironically."*

However, the reasoning of those expressing optimism in the potential of combining emojis with written communication for clearer messages reflected confidence, and in some cases particularly insightful rationales. Some simply drew upon their own experience to confirm the value of combining emojis with written communication for greater clarity: *"Because I have used emojis to help with communication;" "Because I have experienced it before;" and "Because I use emojis every day, so I think I would know how I feel about it, you know."* Others grounded their views in a belief in the ability of emoji usage to add needed meaning to words: *"If you're not understanding the tone of the text then the emoji can help;" "Because sometimes as I'm reading I don't know the tone, but after seeing the emoji I can see the tone;" "Because when you're saying something it could come off rude or aggressive, but with emojis it comes off more clear;" and "To display emotions that are hard to display through words."* Others suggested an understanding of emojis as a communication form whose time has simply come: *"Everyone uses emojis almost the same as each other, so you*

kind of have a ground level understanding of them;” and “Emojis represent indirect communication.”

So this survey provided a range of helpful insights into not only how these students were thinking about emoji usage – before beginning work on the multimodal composition exercises they completed for this study – but indeed potential insights into more about who these students are. On one level – in regard to the interest of this study in helping students enhance their writing multimodally by utilizing words and emojis in exercises aimed at raising their consciousness of multimodal communication and its role in developing more effective language skills – it could be seen as unfavorable that the responses of the students in this group indicated so strongly a view of emojis not being appropriate for “serious” contexts and relatively little optimism that emojis could be used in schoolwork to advance learning. However, in considering the overall body of data generated by this initial survey of these students, it is very arguably possible to see hopeful signs of potential for the objective of utilizing words and emojis in the effort to enhance language-arts instruction.

Even if these students did not instinctively see the possibilities for that sort of language-arts instruction, their responses to other questions in this initial survey suggested they do also believe that emoji usage can go beyond just fun and help with communication, suggesting that they are potentially receptive to efforts to raise their consciousness of multimodal communication and its possible role in developing more effective language skills. For example, when asked to consider how useful emojis can be in written communication, thinking about the subject in that way produced responses that indicated a large majority of this group of students see emojis as useful in written communication in a number of ways, particularly in providing context and clarification and reducing misinterpretation.

Conceptualizing their overall views in that manner suggests that the teaching opportunity for educators today and in the future will be in helping students become more consciously aware of how they are already using the multimodal semiotic resource that emojis (and other forms of digital visual communication) in useful ways – and to help them then connect that usage with structured efforts to help with learning in their schoolwork. Indeed, that potential, grounded in the call for “a thoroughgoing review of what the features of this new world are likely to be and what curricular and pedagogic responses are likely to be possible and most useful” (Kress, 2000, p. 140), lies at the heart of what inspired this research study. At least one student in this initial survey of this group, as discussed above, expressed a level of understanding of the great potential for “easily understood” semiotic elements like emojis to contribute to the unfolding multimodal “universal language” of the ever more digitally networked future.

The preceding section of this chapter has helped introduce readers to the study participants before the dissertation continues on in the pages ahead to the study’s analysis and findings in later chapters. This section provided insight into the thoughts of the participating students before completing the multimodal composition exercises involved in this study – through their own descriptions of how they used and understood the basic semiotic communication tools that emojis as visual elements with communicative properties represent. In the following chapters, this study embraces the challenge to expand upon the optimistic potential expressed by the student in the previous paragraph for more students going forward, through analysis of the work on the multimodal composition exercises the student participants in this study completed after the survey discussed in this section.

CHAPTER 4

MEANING-MAKING REFLECTED IN FOCAL NARRATIVE COMPOSITIONS

Introduction

A metaphoric framework that seems relevant in introducing the chapters involving analysis of the data generated for this study comes from one more useful assertion in the body of literature from which this study was developed. In discussing the limiting realities at play in the process of social semiotics in action, Jewitt and Kress (2003) have assessed the example of someone making a sign of a car. They declare that a person is able to “only ever represent some aspects of what it is they want to represent” because they “can never fully represent all that . . . a car might mean to them.” In such a situation, the person must “make a selection, based on their interest, from all the features that could signal *car*,” such as “aspects of its performance – its sleekness, shine, color, rather than its speed, its power, its petrol consumption.” What anyone selects to signify *car* “depends on their ‘interest’ at that moment” – how they wish to represent speed and power, for instance; or the intensity, the depth, the sheen of the color on the bodywork” (p. 12).

They extend that analogy to researchers attempting to analyze aspects of the sign-making process of social semiotics. Researchers must attempt to read the data that they obtain in terms of how it “represents the interests of its maker” and the hypothetical inferences that can potentially be made, utilizing the sign as “evidence of the interests of its maker in the moment of representation” and “the sign-maker’s engagement with the world to be

represented.” Further, “the sign is also evidence of its maker’s interests in communication, their engagement with the social world in which the sign is a (part of a) message,” and from “the representation of the *car*, for example, we can infer (‘trace’) the interests of the sign-maker in what matters to her or him about ‘car’” (Jewitt & Kress, 2003, p. 12).

And just as in the example of someone making a sign of a car, the maker of a dissertation focused on data generated by the multimodal composition of the study participants comes to sense that it may not be possible to fully represent all the meaning-making that might be potentially considered – and all the ways that meaning-making might be potentially understood by the author, by her committee, by her readers, and by others.

In an effort to address those fundamental limitations, this study will assess the multimodal meaning-making that may be understood from the work of the study participants in this chapter and the two that follow in different ways. They are structured to provide a sort of triangulation, to consider the data generated by this study through multiple analytic approaches and multiple interpretive perspectives. This chapter will focus on meaning-making through analysis of selected focal narrative texts composed by individual participants. Chapter Five will more expansively detail through an analytic process of qualitative “fracturing” of the data gathered, as emphasized by Maxwell (2013, p. 107). Chapter Six will be devoted to consideration of the data through the perspective provided by a form of thematic matrices.

Because this study involves a considerable degree of theoretical and methodological complexity, discussed at some length in the preceding chapters, some key points are highlighted here, to help provide clarity and refocus key points as the analytic chapters begin:

- As detailed in the preceding chapters, this is a study of multimodal composition. It is not an ethnographic study. It was purposefully designed to focus on a process of generating

data relevant to assessing patterns in multimodal composing by the participants through completing the administration of the lesson plan detailed in Chapter Three.

- Because the study design purposefully focused on the data generated by the students composing multimodally in classroom exercises, this is also not a study of student interpersonal digital communication. Through the classroom exercises focused on composing short multimodal narratives and translating them into words-only, and essays by the students reflecting on their involvement and learning in the lesson plan, the study design highlighted direction Kress has provided that emphasizes research asking “What *meaning* is being made here?” as well as “*How* is meaning being made?” as well as, “What are the *meaning potentials* of the *resources* that have been used?” (Kress, 2010, p. 57). In this case, the resources most relevant to the meaning and meaning potentials of concern to this study were the set of standardized emojis that students used in their multimodal compositions.

- Although the multimodal constructions were short, they very much represent constructed narratives. They involve characters and action and outcomes, characters who are in short form oriented, developed and moved toward a form of climactic outcome. The characters do surprising things. They play parts in humorous vignettes. As Freeman characterized it, all narrative involves an “unending flow of meaning-making.” This study dips into that unending flow through a structured approach in which all participants were asked to complete short narratives in response to a set of prompts, generating a body of data more ideally and consistently suited for comparison – than would be lengthy, free-form narratives. This study’s approach enabled the analysis to focus more clearly on “the particular semiotic substance” that each of the participant’s multimodal constructions produced. The systematic, narrowly focused

approach thus moderated the “inherent squishiness” that some studies of digital literacy have been criticized for (Chase & Laufenberg, 2011, p. 535).

- This chapter’s assessment of participant meaning-making, through analysis of selected focal narrative texts composed by individual participants, provides insight into how some individuals completed the multimodal constructions in ways that relate to theoretical constructs involved in the development of this study and which were discussed in most detail in Chapter Two. In order to maximize anonymity, each of these will be referred to simply and neutrally as “Participant A,” etc., avoiding any hints of gender, ethnicity, etc., that readers might infer even from pseudonyms.

- One other qualification that is relevant to this chapter and the following two relates to the researcher’s role in this study that has drawn upon Maxwell’s approach of the researcher in qualitative research as the research instrument, in which “eyes and ears are the tools” used “to gather information and to make sense of what is going on” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 88). Thus, in some components of the analysis, the author’s role as research instrument involved unavoidable degrees of subjectivity, as will be acknowledged as much as possible in the language and phrasing of the analysis. In effect, the analytic function of the researcher in this study was similar to the way a teacher might assess, for example, a multimodal composition exercise like this if implemented in her class. And as with that form of assessment, the researcher in this study prioritized fairness and open-mindedness to multiple interpretive possibilities throughout. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that one limitation of this study is the fact that the qualitative assessment of meaning presented in this study could potentially vary among different readers of different backgrounds.

Semiotic Opportunities for Compelling Expression of Identities and Interests

This discussion of meaning-making in selected focal texts by individual participants highlights many ways that the participants in this study worked with “already shaped material” that Kress called “semiotic modes with grammars” such as writing and image so as to “constantly reshape them, remake them, in line with the characteristics” of each individual’s “designs” (Kress, 2000, p. 142). We first consider the multimodal compositions of Participant A, which reflected a relatively strong degree of the way that multimodal research has shown such projects can create semiotic opportunities for adolescents to more compellingly express their identities and interests (Jewitt, 2008).

For example, Participant A completed the prompt, “When Aubrey realized she had lost her phone again, ___.” by multimodally composing: “*she* 🙄📱 *her* 🛏️ *and it* ✅ *there.*” In that short narrative, the multimodal construction utilizes words and emojis to orient the imaginary Aubrey as searching for her phone, with emojis indicate her looking down beneath her bed – represented by an emoji rather than the word “bed” – and then the climactic moment represented simply by an emoji of a checkmark in a box. Thus, the narrative tells the reader that Aubrey’s search was completed, successfully, with the locating of the missing phone beneath the bed.

Participant A also engaged in a relatively high level of multimodal semiotic synergy involving words and emojis working together in completing the prompt, ““Liam could never convince his parents that ___.” by constructing the multimodal message: “*he could* 🏗️ *a* 🏠 *until* 🧑🏫➡️🧑🏫.” That narrative orients the imaginary Liam as proceeding through a span of time in which he works – building houses, as symbolically conveyed by an emoji of a construction crane and another of houses – with the time element introduced by the word “until” and then

climactically the character of the narrative becoming a construction worker, as symbolized by an individual wearing a hard hat and safety vest. (Although that multimodal construction used the singular article “a,” the emoji featured more than one house, and in addition, the translation by this participant from multimodal message into words-only on that part of the exercise was: “*he could build houses until he became a construction worker.*”)

In completing the prompt, “The best way to understand me, Malique always said, is to ____.” Participant A multimodally composed the narrative: “🤔 of 🏠🚗 because she 🛑🛑.”

That provided a vivid example of the relatively extensive creative potential even within such a short narrative that is available through multimodal meaning-making. An emoji was used to symbolize thoughtful reflection connected prepositionally to a pair of emojis symbolizing an automobile, and then proceeding through explanatory to a climactic revelation using emojis to communicate that the imaginary Malique never stops. As discussed further in Chapters Five and Six, that was one example of how the participants’ multimodal compositions in a number of cases could reasonably be subject to varied interpretations as to the meaning of the message – but with a high degree of frequency were clarified through participant’s words-only translation, on the part of the exercise in which the instructions were to take the multimodal construction and then “go back and this time replace the emojis with words, phrases, or sentences that best represent the meaning of the emojis translated into words.” In this instance, the participant’s words-only translation was: “*think of a fast car because she never stops.*”

In that case, and many others – as detailed through the fracturing analysis in Chapter Five and through the thematic matrices in Chapter Six – considerable evidence was provided supporting the value of exercises like the ones employed in this study, aimed at heightening the students’ consciousness of multimodal composition and its role in potentially developing

more effective traditional language skills. In cases like this, the exercises helped raise participants' consciousness of specifically what was meant to be communicated multimodally and how to clarify that through traditional language skills.

In completing the exercises that comprised the core of this study, Participant A also provided one of the best examples of the capacity for highly effective communicative power that can be produced through multimodally simple compositions. In completing the prompt, "Once again for Aaliyah, the break for lunch meant ____." Participant A constructed the multimodal narrative: "🍕⌚." Although no words were employed, the multimodal use of image and color in a synergized messaging involving two emojis. While the meaning made – "it's pizza time," as confirmed by the participant's translation into words – was not complex, it was compellingly clear and rich in narrative meaning.

This participant also produced one of the best examples of the capacity for narrative originality and humor that can be available through multimodal compositions like these. Participant A completed the prompt, "I hate to tell you this, Jordan said, but ____." multimodally with the short narrative "there is 🚫FREE🦀." In that relatively simple construction, two words and three adjacent emojis were used in an effort to make meaning that was conveyed by the imaginary Jordan (in the words-only translation) as: "there is no free seafood buffet." In the degree of originality and surprise generated to provide narrative closure to that prompt, "there is 🚫FREE🦀" provided a delightfully vivid example of what other research has shown about how classroom projects like this multimodal-composition lesson plan can create semiotic opportunities for adolescents to more compellingly express their identities and interests (Jewitt, 2008).

Gap Between What They Meant To Mean and What They Have To Use To Mean

As detailed more comprehensively in the analysis presented in Chapters Five and Six, important categories that emerged and were tracked involving the contrasting examples of what this study refers to as “approximate emoji-to-word equivalency” and “emoji-to-word disproportionality.” The former – *approximate emoji-to-word equivalency* – describes the degree to which meaning conveyed by a multimodal message constructed with words and emojis can be categorized as conveying approximately the same meaning as that message when translated into words-only on that part of the exercises. The latter – *emoji-to-word disproportionality* – describes the degree to which meaning conveyed by a multimodal message composed with words and emojis can be categorized as disproportionate in some way to the meaning conveyed by that message when translated into words-only on that part of the exercises. In such instances, the two forms of the message conveyed relatively different meanings.

This can be considered in terms of “a more profound way of seeing the process of semiosis (of making meaning) as a process of learning” (Jewitt & Kress, 2003, p. 13). Because “in making a representation a person is making a new sign out of what they want to signify, with existing signifier materials,” and “chooses the signifier that is most apt . . . to represent that which they wish to signify.” Yet, because “there is never an exact fit,” that means “in the gap between what they meant to mean and what they have to use to mean,” there “exists the possibility of . . . a sign that wrenches their meaning in unpredictable directions” (p. 13).

That can be seen, in the work of Participant B, for example, in completing the prompt “When Aubrey realized she had lost her phone again, ____.” with the multimodal narrative:

“👁️👁️🙄.” On one level, that construction actively synergizes the image and color work of three emojis in order to make meaning multimodally. However, on another level, the degree of emoji-to-word disproportionality represented by that construction is very high. That can be distinctively seen by considering that participant’s translation into words-only of that multimodal message: *“I can’t believe I lost my phone again.”* One can imagine that multimodal messaging likely being typical of the sort of comment potentially made by the participant in interpersonal shorthand concerning the loss of a phone. However, when proceeding to translate it into words in this study’s composing exercises, it appears Participant B in some sense experienced a relatively higher level of consciousness concerning specifically what had been meant to be communicated multimodally and then how to clarify that through traditional language skills.

Other work by Participant B demonstrated a similar process of composing relatively compelling and modally synergistic multimodal messages – with a high degree of emoji-to-word disproportionality– on that exercise, and then in the words-only translation providing greater clarity of meaning. The prompt, “Liam could never convince his parents that ____.” was completed multimodally by Participant B multimodally with “😡🙅🎮” – which was translated into words-only as *“he should be allowed to play videogames longer,”* making clearer what the semiotic emoji connotations of anger, crossed arms blocking permission, and the literal image of a videogame controller were intended to narratively contend on behalf of the imagined Liam.

The prompt, “Madison preferred to spend weekends ____.” was completed multimodally by that participant multimodally with “😊😍🙄” – which was translated into words-only as *“at her boyfriend’s house,”* providing needed explanation of what those

semiotic expressions of love and happiness were intended to narratively convey regarding the imaginary Madison's weekend preferences. And the prompt, "The best way to understand me, Malique always said, is to ____." was completed by that participant multimodally with simply "👁️" – which was translated into words-only as "*look at me when I'm talking to you,*" greatly clarifying how very much more the semiotic emoji connotations of a staring-eye emoji were meant to command in terms of a higher level of listening and observation.

To be sure, other multimodal compositions by Participant B reflected relatively less emoji-to-word disproportionality. That can be seen in the way that participant's multimodal completion of the prompt, "The minute school was over for the day, Noah ____." – "🚪🏃" – conveyed relatively closer to the same meaning as that message did when translated into words-only as "*ran out the doors.*" That was similarly the case with that participant's multimodal completion of the prompt, "No matter what anyone said, Nora ____." – "🚀🌕" – translated into words-only as "*wanted to go to the moon.*" And also with that participant's multimodal completion of the prompt, "I hate to tell you this, Jordan said, but ____." – "🚲❌" – translated into words-only as "*I don't wanna go ride bikes.*"

So those last three examples multimodally conveyed relatively closer to the same meaning as that message did when translated into words-only, though none quite could be understood as representing approximate emoji-to-word equivalency. Some degree of meaning remained unclear in each. For example, "🚪🏃" certainly suggests running toward a door, but the narrative element of running *out* the doors is somewhat ambiguous. Similarly, "🚀🌕" can be reasonably understood as going to the moon, but the narrative element of the imaginary Nora *wanting* to go there is absent in the multimodal message. And while "🚲❌" conveys

some negative meaning related to a bicycle, it does not advance the narrative component that the imaginary Jordan *does not want* to ride bicycles.

The work of Participant B demonstrates what has been described theoretically as multimodal composers – in this case, those utilizing emojis – “making a new sign out of what they want to signify, with existing signifier materials” (Jewitt & Kress, 2003, p. 13). To that end, this study sought to help students consider more consciously and purposefully ways that their use of existing signifier materials – in particular emojis– may influence their intended meaning, such as the challenge in best fitting “what they meant to mean with “what they have to use to mean” (p. 13). This overall approach also is consistent with related literature that finds potential for non-traditional literacy instruction in ELA classrooms focused on New Literacies to “clarify the intended tone of a message” (Kaye et al., 2017, p. 66) and to help students “re-say . . . what they mean, and therefore come to see more deeply what they mean” (Gee, 2015, p. 69).

A Toolkit for Clarifying Emotional Concepts

The work of other participants in this study reflected the way that the use of emojis can “reduce discourse ambiguity” and “aid expression through establishing an emotional tone,” providing emoji users “with a toolkit for clarifying emotional concepts” (Kaye et al., 2017, pp. 66-67). As discussed in the literature review in Chapter Two, because of the growth in online communication lacking the subtle nonverbal cues of face-to-face interaction, “compensatory mechanisms have quickly developed to counter the diminished nonverbal channels,” with emojis and other visual elements being prominent among those mechanisms (p. 66). Such symbols have become “a frequently used expression of emotion and communicative intent,” portraying “a wide breadth of emotions far beyond those of simple smiles and frowns” (p. 66).

As examples of that, the work of Participant C provided a number of ways that the prompts could be completed with multimodal constructions that synergized the respective modes less substantially but added in varying degrees emotional tones to the construction. For example, that participant completed the prompt, “When Aubrey realized she had lost her phone again, ____.” with the multimodal narrative, “*she freaked out* 😞.” There the emoji can be understood as clearly seeking to heighten the sense of distress present in the climactic outcome of discovering a phone being lost again, without employing any substantial level of the meaning-making potential available by more fully synergizing the modes.

Most of Participant C’s work reflected that approach to multimodal composing. That participant completed the prompt, “The minute school was over for the day, Noah ____.” multimodally with “*rushed home and jumped into bed* 😴,” enhancing with the emoji used to emphasize that sleep was the climactic goal of that narrative. The prompt, “For Aiden, the big question about life was ____.” was multimodally completed by that participant with “*what happens when we die* 🤔,” adding a degree of narrative emphasis on the thoughtful reflection involved for the imaginary Aiden. That participant multimodally completed the prompt, “No matter what anyone said, Nora ____.” with “*is still my best friend* 😊,” imbuing the narrative sentiment with a note of the affection felt for the best friend. The prompt, “There was this one day when Kaylee ____.” was completed multimodally with “*broke her leg* 🤕,” employing the emoji to enhance the narrative sense of emotional horror experienced by the imaginary Kaylee in breaking her leg. For the prompt, “I hate to tell you this, Jordan said, but ____.” Participant C’s multimodal composition was “*your grandma passed away this morning* 😞,” with the emoji adding a touch of sadness and empathy concerning the loss of the grandmother. That

participant completed the prompt, “I should be President, Alexis thought, and first of all I would ____.” multimodally with “*make school lunches free* 😊,” in which case the emoji suggests the degree of happiness the maker of the narrative imagined at having such power to eliminate the financial cost involved in a daily feature of student life. And also, the prompt, “No one expected Ezra to walk in the house and announce ____.” was completed by that participant multimodally with “*that she was getting married.* 🍷,” employing an emoji that helped enhance just how truly unexpected was that short narrative’s climactic outcome.

Such uses of emojis in multimodal narratives reflect generally effective forms of meaning-making that convey feelings or put forth a representation that could be considered more metaphoric or figurative than literal. Many such uses in this study also reflected frequently higher degrees of shared meaning – indications that seem to specifically suggest evidence of shared meaning among participants, in terms of their usage of emojis that participants in this study were found to commonly employ when invoking similar meanings. Additionally, these types of usages by Participant C reflected the type of multimodal messages that quite frequently were constructed by participants in this study, using only one emoji combined with varying number of words. Although that type of multimodal construction reflected less multimodal complexity and synergy among modes, at the same time that type most often achieved relatively clear meaning-construction, in which readers could reasonably feel relatively confident that they had understood the intended meaning of the multimodal message in question.

Seeking Insight Into The Interests Of The Maker

All those themes and dynamics will be discussed in much more detail and from different perspectives regarding the overall work of the participants through the analytic approaches that are drawn upon in Chapters Five and Six. As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, it and the following two chapters are structured to provide a sort of triangulation, considering the data generated by this study through multiple analytic approaches and multiple interpretive perspectives.

All those approaches and perspectives highlight in different ways this study's addressing of Jewitt and Kress's (2003) theoretical proposal that schools should no longer ask, "How does what is here match what a teacher *expected and wanted* to be there?" But rather, "How does what is here give a teacher insight into the *interests of the maker* of what is here?" (p. 12) In plain language, that would mean less emphasis on traditional exams and exercises that ask students to provide answers or other work that matches "what a teacher expected and wanted to be there," and more emphasis on involving students in work that enables them as meaning makers to express "the interests of the maker" – and which then provides teachers the opportunity to develop insights into those interests. As further discussed in Chapter Seven's focus on the findings of the study, Jewitt and Kress's revolutionary concept contends that through focusing on exercises that provide insight into what they call "the interests of the maker," educators "could see the sign as a clue about the learning engaged in by the maker-of-the-sign-as-learner." By doing that, "a teacher could focus on how the interests of her or his students have engaged with the teacher's interest as expressed through the (curricular materials that they have presented in lessons)" (p. 12).

That theoretical proposition, as with all such propositions drawn upon to develop this study, must be considered in the context of the way Kress (2010) articulated a fundamental reality of the scholarly process: “Theories, of course, are just that, *theories*: multiple, competing, often internally contradictory,” he wrote. “Theories specify their domain, more or less explicitly and precisely; they provide categories to describe and analyze the phenomenon which they construct” (p. 60). It is the theories of Kress and others discussed in this dissertation that have provided the categories used herein to describe and analyze the study constructed as one means of attempting to test and understand the propositions from which their work and this work springs.

CHAPTER 5

PROMPT-BY-PROMPT ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVE RESPONSES

Introduction

It is in this chapter that the way the essential rationale behind this dissertation – as most fully grounded in Kress’s (2010) basic assertions on how “writing and image and color lend themselves to doing different kinds of semiotic work” (p. 1) – provided the basis for the core components of the study’s data gathering and analysis. Particularly through the involved exercises focused upon in this chapter, this study most directly sought to reveal useful patterns regarding how students multimodally utilize the semiotic communication tools that visual elements like emojis represent. This effort was aimed first at helping students enhance their writing multimodally by utilizing words and emojis in exercises aimed at heightening their consciousness of multimodal communication and its role in potentially developing more effective traditional language skills. Secondly, it sought insights into how students compose multimodally utilizing the semiotic communication tools that emoji represent and the degree to which students may already be in a process of becoming multimodally strategic in their use of emojis.

As emphasized, the structure of this study was designed most specifically to explore a proposed response to the way analysis of multimodality in the classroom has been characterized as inherently and structurally challenging (Kress, Jewitt, et al., 2001, p. 17). In the way that they put it, “One difficulty with our analytical approach to classroom

communication as a multimodal event is that it makes the most prosaic classroom interactions appear enormously complex,” because in such analysis of talk in classrooms, “language appears as the product of a myriad of complex social decisions, something which does not reflect the ease with which the majority of people engage in the everyday task of speaking” (p. 17). As emphasized in the introduction to this dissertation, the design of this study proposes an approach for potentially minimizing that gap between the everyday realities of classroom interactions and efforts to explain them in terms of the conceptual framework of multimodality.

The design most fundamentally utilized emojis in structured writing exercises – not as an object of study in and of themselves but to leverage their function as a familiar, standardized, and easily utilized form of multimodal communication. That approach was discussed in more detail in Chapter Three (Study Design and Methodological Framework). I humbly offer that in conceptualizing this approach as a possible way to address the specific problem Kress posed regarding the difficulty he had encountered in analysis of classroom communication, I am advancing an insight of my own. I developed it through years of reading and engagement with the overall ideas discussed in this dissertation, in class papers, in my comprehensive doctoral exams, and in my prospectus. And now in the study conducted for this dissertation, I have sought to test my insight in practice, through the way that it was structured to gather relevant data, and then the analysis of that data.

Those exercises were structured to provide data organized in forms that could be considered analytically in terms of their narrative creation, purposely structured with a focus on short narrative responses. And the responses very literally and fundamentally must be understood as narrative responses – in the way that each student completes each prompt, they

advance a story, a story that is not present in the prompt, but which is a product of their completion of the prompt. It cannot be emphasized too strongly how that structure is strategically central to the objectives of this study, to address the inherent challenge Kress and Jewitt (2001) emphasized regarding analysis of multimodality in the classroom: By having the student participants in this study generate small, discrete units of multimodal narrative (as opposed to lengthy, complex, open-ended narratives), that provided compact units for analysis that were less obscured by the complexity Kress lamented (p. 17).

That is in significant part because all the multimodal responses utilize the same set of familiar, standardized, and easily utilized form of multimodal communication that emoji in fact are. Thus, through their individual meaning-making on these exercises from the multi-part lesson plan utilized in this study – using emojis to multimodally contribute to and shape narratives in response to provided prompts – the work of the student participants was structurally narrowed to focus on what is considered “the particular semiotic substance” of narrativity through use of language and image (Ryan, 2004, p. 1). This approach is grounded in growing scholarly interest in narrative creation as a “strategy used by humans to make sense of, and create order in, their worlds” (Freeman, 2017, p. 30).

The data gathered through that process were considered in terms of the way visual elements can multimodally shape configuration of narrative content (Berger, 1997, p. 6). The overall approach of the analysis was informed by Maxwell’s articulation of qualitative analytic strategies that prioritize rearranging data into “categories that facilitate comparison between things in the same category and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 107). Connecting strategies were also employed to help identify relationships among elements of the data “that connect statements and events within a context into a coherent

whole” (Maxwell, 2013, pp. 112-113). Such strategies helped identify themes that emerged from the narrative data, as did contextualizing strategies designed to help develop summaries that can be integrated to arrive at deeper understanding of the data (Maxwell, 2013, pp. 113-114).

Through that overall process, this research project sought to contribute to better understanding of emoji usage by identifying patterns, commonalities, and contrasts in the ways that students employ emoji in a multimodal semiotic process to construct meaning – and to help them heighten their awareness of that meaning-making process.

As discussed in Study Design and Methodological Framework chapter, the analytic process was guided by these research questions:

RQ1: What broad patterns of meaning emerge recurrently in the data gathered in this study?

RQ2: What evidence of shared meaning among participants relative to specific emojis is reflected in the data gathered in this study?

RQ3: What commonalities and contrasts emerge in the data gathered in this study?

RQ4: What insights relevant to multimodal meaning-making can be developed from the data gathered in this study?

In order to help set up presentation of the analysis of the data gathered through these exercises, the next section in this chapter will provide an introductory overview of the basic types of multimodal composing that were reflected most commonly in the student participants’ response to the prompts in these two exercises. That section is provided as a more general overview of the composing styles that were reflected in the ways that students completed the exercises in practice, compared to the ideal manner hoped for in the conceptualization of the exercises. The chapter then proceeds with prompt-by-prompt fracturing analysis focused more

directly upon identifying patterns, themes, commonalities, contrasts, and other insights regarding the ways that students employed specific emojis in a multimodal semiotic process to construct meaning in terms of these exercises in this study. Such qualitative “fracturing” is emphasized by Maxwell (2013, p. 107). It can be understood as a breaking apart into the component pieces of each of the multimodal narrative compositions for comparison to all the others. This chapter will focus on analysis at that level, with findings primarily discussed in Chapter Seven.

Overview of Students’ Basic Approaches to Multimodal Composing

To emphasize, this section of this chapter provides *not* the prompt-by-prompt analysis that will follow in later sections of the chapter, but a relatively general overview of the composing styles that were reflected in the ways that students turned out to actually complete the exercises. The first of the main multimodal composing exercises provided the student participants a set of 15 prompts and asked them to complete each (“Complete the prompts below by adding a combination of words and emojis for each one.” The full assignments are included in Appendix A.) Each prompt consisted of the beginning of an unfinished sentence, with a blank space left for the students to complete the sentence multimodally in the basic manner noted in the instructions. In the next exercise, the student participants were each provided a copy of their completed work on the first assignment and asked to translate the emojis they used on the first exercise into words. (“In this copy of your previous writing with words and emojis, go back and this time replace the emojis with words, phrases, or sentences that best represent the meaning of the emojis translated into words.”)

In their work on the first of the prompts (“When Aubrey realized she had lost her phone again, ____.”), the students composed multimodally in different ways that even in

overview seemed to suggest that a process of becoming multimodally strategic in their respective individual use of emojis seemed to be at work. In many instances, for example, the response reflected the instructions being followed exactly and the prompt completed with a combination of words and emojis – in a way so that the multiple modes were integrated to work together in constructing the meaning they sought to make. However, in other instances, some used words in a way so that in most cases they could have been understood with a degree of constructed meaning independently, with emojis added as more complementary than integral to the meaning – still multimodal, but synergizing the respective modes less substantially. Further, some used no words and only a single emoji to complete the prompt. And some used no words and a combination of emojis that worked together to construct meaning.


For example, in composing multimodally in a manner consistent with the instructions, the first prompt (“When Aubrey realized she had lost her phone again, ____.”) was completed with “*she* 👁️👁️📩 *her* 🛏️ *and it* ✅ *there.*” That represented the ideal type of response, in particular because the meaning constructed therein required a reader to process both words and emojis – to engage in a relatively high level of multimodal semiotic processing. Further, that sort of response on the first exercise meant that in completing the second exercise regarding that same prompt, the student had to engage in significant translation from an integrated multimodal response into one of words alone. In that case, the response on the second exercise was “*She looked under her bed and it was there.*” We can see the student participant in that type of response, for example, engaging with the exercise in the way closest to its intended design – to have learners engage consciously with construction of narrative meaning through

multimodal communication and then construction of similar meaning through the use of traditional language skills.

So, the research design of these exercises was most maximally successful when responses to the prompts were completed in that manner. As could have been expected, however – given that the participants were high school students with many other things on their minds, and whose voluntary work on these exercises with a graduate-student researcher would not affect their grade in the class or offer any other reward particularly tangible to a small-town teenager – not every response was completed that consistently with the instructions. Nevertheless, most were completed in ways that, in varying degrees, still contributed to the purpose of the study – to reveal useful patterns regarding how students multimodally utilize the semiotic communication tools that visual elements like emojis represent and help students more consciously enhance their writing multimodally by utilizing words and emojis.

Different types of examples of completing that first prompt in a way that was still multimodal, but that synergized the respective modes less substantially, can be seen in responses such as: “*she freaked out* 😭” and “*she was very mad* 😡.” Those types provided brief narrative completion of the prompt in words, complemented with emoji imagery that reinforced the constructed message of the words – so, multimodal in fact, if not employing a particularly substantial level of the meaning-making potential available by more fully synergizing the modes. Other related examples of completing that first prompt in a similar way with some variation included “*she looked everywhere she had it last and she was happy when she found it* 😊” and “*she sighed* 😞, ‘*I forgot it again... this is so lame* 😞.’” In instances like those, the response to the prompt similarly reflected meeting the basic threshold for being

considered multimodal, with the mode represented by the chosen emoji adding only mildly complementary meaning, but a more involved use of words to construct relatively more complex narrative meaning. In some of those cases, the response on the second exercise added only still a bit more narrative meaning when the first response was fully translated into words: “she looked everywhere she had it last and she was happy when she found it (*happy*).” But in the latter of those two examples, the response reflected a relatively more substantial degree of narrative meaning-making through language skills: “*she sighed, ‘I forgot it again... ,WHY! this is so lame. Why did this have to happen.’*”

Two other types of composing recurred among the student participants’ responses to the prompts in these exercises, some using no words and only a single emoji to complete the prompt, and some using no words and a combination of emojis that worked together to construct meaning. The use of emojis without words could still be considered a form of multimodal composing, since image and color have been discussed as contributing modes in the meaning-making process (Kress, 2010, p. 1). That would be even more the case in the latter of those two types of composing, with the combining of multiple emojis and their respective image and color elements producing a more complex level of synergized meaning construction. For example, responding to that first prompt (“When Aubrey realized she had lost her phone again, ____.”) with a single emoji () can reflect the multiple modes of an image containing a facial expression conveying a recognizable emotion of anger, with the red color one relatively commonly associated with anger, and in that particular emoji, the additional semiotic communication element of a set of typographic symbols also often associated with angry profanities. So, while that sort of multimodal communication is not relatively complex, it does utilize multiple modes to enhance the complexity of the meaning-

making to some degree – as was reflected by the translation of that response into a message reflecting heightened intensity using only words: “*she was very pissed off.*”

Finally, an example of student participants responding to that first prompt (“When Aubrey realized she had lost her phone again, ____.”) by using no words but a combination of emojis working together would be: “👻👻😭.” The multiple image and color elements working together in that way could be considered a more substantial use of multimodal composing and a more complex level of synergized meaning construction. Even if that multimodal construction arguably could present challenges for most readers to determine the intended meaning, at least for the student who composed that particular multimodal message, the translation into only words suggested an insightful degree of emotional narrative meaning on the part of the imagined Aubrey: “*I can’t believe I lost my phone again.*”

Those examples provide an introductory overview sampling of the different basic types of multimodal composing that were reflected most frequently in the student participants’ response to the prompts in these two exercises. The discussion in this chapter will now proceed with analysis focused more directly upon identifying narrative patterns, themes, commonalities, contrasts, and other insights regarding the ways that students employed emojis in a multimodal semiotic process to construct meaning in terms of these exercises in this study.

In each of the following prompt-by-prompt analyses, the close qualitative forms of analysis summarized in Chapter Three were utilized, focused more on qualitative fracturing than quantitative counting, as emphasized by Maxwell. The fractured data will be presented in more systematic format in Chapter Six, utilizing insights derived through Maxwell’s process to contribute to a thematic matrix for each research question, in order to organize and assess the fractured data more clearly in terms of useful categories, themes, patterns, commonalities, and

insights for the development of theoretical assertions, guided by the research questions. The discussion of that analysis for each prompt follows this section.

Multimodal Writing Assignment Prompt 1 Fracturing Analysis

Narrative responses that expressed themes of anxiety, anger, sadness, humor, and action most characterized the ways that students completed the first prompt (“When Aubrey realized she had lost her phone again, ____.”) from the exercise involving the multimodal writing assignment. That exercise asked them to “Complete the prompts below by adding a combination of words and emojis for each one.” The narrative meaning that they constructed in response to being asked to speculate upon the imaginary Aubrey’s reaction to another loss of her phone was conveyed first through multimodal responses that utilized in varying ways and degrees emojis and words. From their work on this first prompt of the assignment, the students’ work demonstrated the considerable range of narrative possibilities potentially available through the instructed combinations of words and the semiotic communication tools that emojis represent.

The narrative expressions reflecting themes suggesting anxiety included completing that prompt with “*she froze* 😬. *Aubrey started to panic* 😬;” “*she freaked out* 😬;” “*she began to freak out* 😬;” “*and she doesn’t remember where she put it* 😬;” and “*she sighed* 😞, ‘*I forgot it again... this is so lame* 😞.’” In that group of multimodal narratives alone, one begins to see the way that shared meaning among participants relative to specific emojis is evident – for example, in the way multiple responses used the “😬” to help construct meaning related to anxiety. And at the same time, one sees examples of how that shared meaning is not universally shared, with the emojis “😬,” “😞,” and “😬” among those also used to help

construct meaning related to anxiety. This pattern recurred throughout the data generated by these exercises, highlighting both the potential for successful meaning enhancement through multimodal composing – by tapping into shared meaning associated with visual elements like emojis, as well as the potential pitfalls of multiple associated meanings, even among a cohort with relatively similar backgrounds, such as these students. However, in most cases, the words utilized in those multimodal compositions helped clarify and reconcile the use of varying emojis to advance similar themes.

The narrative expressions reflecting themes suggesting anger included completing that prompt with “*she was very mad* 😡” and “*she* 😡,” while those reflecting themes that suggested sadness included “*she sighed with a passive aggressive tone* 😞;” “*she* 🤯😭” (employing multiple emojis in combination to intensify the expression of sadness); and “*she was sad about it* 😞.” Completing that prompt with “Dang she lost her phone again 😂” indicated a narrative choice suggesting humor, while the choice to construct a narrative response suggesting action (to improve the situation) included “*she* 👁️📱 *her* 🚪 *and it* ✅ *there*” and “*she looked everywhere she had it last and she was happy when she found it* 😊.”

The second part of the exercise related to that prompt (“When Aubrey realized she had lost her phone again, ____.”) produced mixed success regarding the students’ translation of their multimodal narrative responses into expression utilizing only words. Some successfully demonstrated the student participants engaging consciously with both construction of narrative meaning through multimodal communication and then similarly engaging with construction of similar meaning through the use of traditional language skills. That was quite evidently the case of the response noted above in which the first prompt was completed with “*she* 👁️📱 *her*

📱 and it ✅ there,” and then was translated into only words on the second exercise as: “*She looked under her bed and it was there.*” Similarly, for one multimodal narrative response with no words but only a combination of emojis working together, such as “👁️👁️😞,” utilizing the modes represented by the emojis’ image and color elements, the student creator proposed through the translation into words a relatively imaginative narrative meaning. That translation evoked more than a direct character-by-character transposing of each emoji into words and some considerably inventive projection of combined meaning greater than the mere sum of the parts: “*I can’t believe I lost my phone again.*” Though relatively not as inventive, “*she sighed 😞, ‘I forgot it again... this is so lame 😞’*” being translated into “*she sighed, ‘I forgot it again... , WHY! this is so lame. Why did this have to happen’*” still reflected the sort of engagement with the translation process that was an objective of the exercise – developing a more involved use of words to construct relatively more complex narrative meaning.

Examples of essentially meeting the objective of the exercise with somewhat lesser degrees of engagement with the translation process into words included “*she freaked out 😞*” being translated into “*she got scared (fearful);*” and “*she began to freak out 😊*” translated into “*she decided to get a friend to call it!*” Some students also completed that exercise simply by using the same words used to complete the prompt in the first exercise while leaving off the emoji used with those words in the first exercise. As noted, such varying degrees of effort reflect a practical reality that had been correctly anticipated from this group of high school students, whose participation was totally voluntary and unrelated to their grade for the class in which they were recruited for this study.

Multimodal Writing Assignment Prompt 2 Fracturing Analysis

Narrative responses with which students multimodally completed the second of the fifteen prompts (“Liam could never convince his parents that ____.”) produced an array of insights into the sorts of matters this group of high school students imagined might be challenging to convince parents to accept, at least regarding the imaginary Liam. On that prompt from the exercise involving the multimodal writing assignment, there was relatively less thematic narrative commonality among the overall responses, except for concerns related to school and broader concern with various traditional differences between parents and high school students, such as getting chores done and how young people should get to spend their time.

The single clearest topical theme among the way that prompt was completed multimodally in the responses concerned school matters, particularly homework: “*he had finished his homework 🤨*”; “*he got all of his homework done without showing them, He was very annoyed 😡*”; and “*he made a good grade on his test 📄*.” Within that group, the emojis chosen varied considerably, with one of those suggesting anger or annoyance (“🤨”); another employing the straight-face emoji (“😐,” described in the pre-survey of these students as meaning “*what, are you serious, really...*,” or “*when I’m serious*,” and an image representing a test from school (“📄”). When the students translated those multimodal statements into all words, the one utilizing the “🤨” emoji was translated as: “*he had finished his homework (mad/angry)*.” And the one that used the “📄” emoji was translated as: “*he made a good grade on his test (paper test)*.” So, in those two instances, the exercise having the students translate their multimodal messages into words-only led them to work through the meaning of the

emojis used, to some extent, and to provide some additional clarifying meaning in the words-only translation.

However, the student creator that used the “😞” emoji in the multimodal message translated it only as: “*he got all of his homework done without showing them, he was very annoyed,*” thus adding no additional meaning. Such comparisons provide pedagogical insights into how the effectiveness of exercises like these utilizing words and emojis to help students work more consciously through how they are using both may be increased – by working closely with students who may need more help during the exercises to more informatively translate images into words.

Among other multimodal responses to that prompt (“Liam could never convince his parents that ___.”) were a number that reflected a focus on narrative topics that could be of the sort one might anticipate from high school students still likely negotiating in situations involving parents: “*he finished his chores 😞;*” “*he was mature 🧑;*” “*he could go out with his friends 😊;*” “*he needed money 💰;*” “*to let him go see the movie 🎬;*” and “*he isn’t lying 😞.*” In that group can be seen examples of a pattern that emerged recurringly in which the many students could be seen to be regularly choosing to utilize the semiotic resource that emojis offer to either reflect the feelings or behavior of a person in the narrative, or to as literally as possible add a visual representation of some element of the narrative. The former can be seen, for example, in that group’s “*he was mature 🧑;*” translated into words as he was mature, “I can be mature, I have a suit;” and “*he could go out with his friends 😊;*” translated into words as “he could go out with his friends and be okay!” By contrast, the latter can be seen in “*he needed money 💰*” and “*to let him go see the movie 🎬;*” both of which utilized literal emoji

images associated with money and movies, and the words-only translations of both added no additional meaning.

The students' work on this second prompt of the assignment again demonstrated the diverse range of narrative possibilities potentially available through the instructed combinations of words and the semiotic communication tools that emojis represent. Among the other multimodal responses to that prompt ("Liam could never convince his parents that ___.") were: "he could 🏗️ a 🏠 until 👷➡️👷;" "😡👤🎮;" "basketball 🏀 was better than soccer ⚽;" "he hit the neighbors dog 🐕;" and "boneless wings are just nuggets 🦴." The first of those provides another example of meaning being constructed on the first exercise that requires the reader to engage in a relatively high level of multimodal semiotic processing involving words and emojis working together synergistically. That multimodal response ("he could 🏗️ a 🏠 until 👷➡️👷;" "😡👤🎮") meant that the student had to engage in significant translation from it into words alone: "he could build houses until he became a construction worker." The second in that group of diverse multimodal narratives did not employ words but constructed multiple image and color elements working together in a relatively complex level of narrative meaning construction ("😡👤🎮"). The translation into only words drew upon the semiotic emoji connotations of anger, crossed arms blocking permission, and the literal image of a videogame controller to narrative contend on behalf of the imagined Liam: "he should be allowed to play videogames longer." The others in that group represented relatively less complex multimodal narratives – "basketball 🏀 was better than soccer ⚽;" "he hit the neighbors dog 🐕;" and "boneless wings are just nuggets 🦴" – but each one contained a

somewhat unexpected sentiments, suggesting the randomness of teen-age spirit when driving multimodal meaning-making.

Multimodal Writing Assignment Prompt 3 Fracturing Analysis

Narrative responses that overwhelmingly expressed topical themes of friends, along with water getaways and extra time in bed most characterized the ways that students completed the third prompt (“Madison preferred to spend weekends ____.”) on the exercise involving the multimodal writing assignment. The narrative meaning that they constructed in their efforts to offer possibilities for the imaginary Madison’s weekend preferences strongly suggested they associated ideal weekends with time among friends.

All but a few of the multimodal responses to the third prompt involved spending time with friends, most of them emphasizing how much more enjoyable that was than other options, including: “with her friends since she had much more fun with them 😄;” “with her friends 🎨🐱;” “with her bestfriends 🧑🏻🧑🏻;” “with her friends because they made her happy 😊;” and “at her friends house 🏠.” The semiotic emphasis throughout all those was not particularly complex in structure but strongly associated substantial happiness and time with friends as the ideal way to spend weekends. The translations into words further reinforced that thematic pattern, respectively: “with her friends since she had much more fun with them (excited) ;” “with her friends, ‘We can have fun, get our nails done and go dancing;’ ” “with her bestfriends (her and her friend);” and “with her friends because they make her happy.” (For the last semiotic narrative in that group, there was no translation in words completed.) Another multimodal response to that prompt constructed a variation on the friend narrative, using only emojis: “😄😍😘.” Although that represented one of the most relatively complex in terms of

semiotic meaning from that prompt, the translation into words offered additional meaning from the creator that probably was not likely to make clearly apparent to most readers the location of where imaginary Madison preferred to spend weekends: “*at her boyfriend’s house.*”

The second most frequent multimodal narrative themes expressed for that prompt focused on spending extra time in bed – “😴 in 🛏️” and “on the lake 😊” – and spending time on water-related getaways – “*at the beach* 🏖️, *tanning* 🌴” and “on the lake 😊.” The semiotic meaning of those multimodal narratives seems relatively straightforward, and the translations into words for that group offered no elaboration or insights inconsistent with that understanding. Although it was more often the case that translations from the multimodal responses into words provided substantial additional insights concerning the intended meaning of the creators, possible ways to enrich and maximize the requested types of responses on exercises like these will be focused upon in the conclusions discussion in the final chapter.

One other narrative theme was among those in the multimodal responses to the third prompt. Although it was not at all complex in its multimodal construction, it was arguably one of the most semiotically clear and direct in its meaning-making, consisting only of a single emoji to articulate how imaginary Madison preferred to spend weekends: “🍺.” The translation into only words was similarly succinct and to the point: “*drinking.*” While not fully consistent with the instructions for the multimodal responses to the prompt, such concise bits of narrative construction may be considered as suggesting in another way how a process of students becoming multimodally strategic in their respective individual use of emojis is likely at work. Although the anonymity of all the students participating has been maintained throughout this

study, the relatively low frequency of such single-emoji responses to the prompts – usually just one per group of prompt responses – and the thread of commonality of their tone of mildly insubordinate antiauthoritarianism indicated many of them likely being generated by one creator. The use of the single “🙄” emoji in response to the first prompt, discussed above, offers a similar example, and others with such similarities will be discussed in response to other prompts. They suggest a pattern of strategic multimodal choices utilized recurringly in response to these prompts to distinguish the meaning-making from relatively more benign and socially acceptable responses.

Multimodal Writing Assignment Prompt 4 Fracturing Analysis

Narrative responses that expressed themes that encouraged listening and observing closely characterized almost all the ways that students completed the fourth prompt (“The best way to understand me, Malique always said, is to ____.”) on the exercise involving the multimodal writing assignment. The narrative meaning that the student participants constructed in their efforts to offer possibilities for how to best understand the imaginary Malique provided indications that multimodal communication offered a means to more strongly convey feelings of not being listened to or paid attention to well enough. That thematic interpretation was supported by the multiple ways that the students’ multimodal work on this prompt advanced narrative meaning of how crucial better listening and observing is to understanding another person.

The students’ multimodal work on this prompt emphasized the making of such meanings in ways that directly focused on listening such as: “*listen to me talk and be there for me 😊*,” “*listen to what I say 💡*,” “*listen to what I say and not twist my words 🙄*,” and “*be quiet and listen 😬*,” and directly focused on observing closely such as “*observe how I treat*

others 😊;” and “*look at my facial expressions* 😬.” Such themes were reflected indirectly in others: “*get to know me* 🗨️;” and “*read my mind* 📖🧠;” both suggesting a level of personal interaction that would necessitate relatively intense listening and observing of another individual in order to best understand them. Along those lines, another multimodal response to that prompt seemed to at least potentially suggest an even more intense level of listening and observing by completing the prompt with “*control my temper* 😡.” If one reads that as narratively advancing the meaning that one can best understand Malique by helping control the imaginary character’s temper – which at least in theory would likely require a considerably high level of listening and observing to achieve such control.

In a number of instances, the multimodal construction utilized by students was significantly enhanced and clarified through those students’ translation of their multimodal message into words only. For example, one multimodal message that indirectly reflected the theme of better listening and observing narratively completed this prompt with: “*understand my humor* 😂👁️.” That alone suggested a narrative advancing the theme of better listening and observing, but did so much more strongly when considering the students’ words-only translation of “*I make the best faces that make people die laughing.*” That represented one of the better examples of the potential for work like this two-part exercise to help students both communicate more multimodally than with words only, but also to heighten their consciousness of meanings advanced through multimodal communication by utilizing language skills to enhance those meanings with words. It also provided another example suggesting ways in which students may already be in a process of becoming multimodally strategic in their use of emoji.







In another instance of the multimodal construction utilized by students being significantly enhanced and clarified through their translation of their multimodal message into words only, the multimodal message of “👁️” could be understood as a concise narrative directive of perhaps simply “look” or “watch.” But when the student translated that message’s very basic multimodality (in the sense of utilizing modes of image, shape, color) into words only of “*look at me when I’m talking to you,*” it reflects a much richer and more compelling statement, almost commanding a higher level of listening and observation. That represented another of the better examples of the potential for class assignments structured along the lines of this two-part exercise to help students communicate more multimodally than with words only, as well as to heighten their consciousness of meanings advanced through multimodal communication by utilizing language skills to enhance those meanings with words. It can also offer potentially another example that suggests ways in which students may already be in a process of becoming multimodally strategic in their use of emoji.

In one other instance, the response to the prompt arguably even more fully demonstrated the potential for exercises like this one to help develop multimodal and traditional language skills by heightening their focused consciousness on the meanings they are making and how they are making them. In that one, that prompt (“The best way to understand me, Malique always said, is to ____.”) was completed with: “🤔 of 🇺🇸 because she ❌👁️,” which while certainly interesting multimodally, also could be subject to a variety of interpretations as to the meaning of the message. Thus, the student’s words-only translation both greatly clarified the intended meaning, in addition to as fully as possible completing both exercises consistently with the instructions to first complete the prompts “by adding a combination of words and emojis for each one,” and then in the second exercise to “go back

and this time replace the emojis with words, phrases, or sentences that best represent the meaning of the emojis translated into words.” In this instance, the student on the second exercise provided this words-only translation: *“think of a fast car because she never stops.”* While it stood apart thematically from the narratives focused on listening and observation, it provided the most extensively creative use of multimodal meaning-making on the first exercise. And then in thinking through that meaning in words-only for the second part of the exercise, it demonstrated what rich opportunities emojis can provide meaning-makers to combine with words in surprisingly vivid multimodal constructions.

Multimodal Writing Assignment Prompt 5 Fracturing Analysis

The themes reflected in the narrative responses with which students completed the fifth prompt (“The minute school was over for the day, Noah ____.”), were relatively dispersed among an array of meaning-making advanced on the exercise involving the multimodal writing assignment. They constructed a range of meanings in their narrative advancement of what the imaginary Noah did immediately after school, with some degree of common focus on activities involving entertainment, food, sleep, and escape. Given the potential for the students to draw upon their own lives in the way that they completed the prompts, these narrative responses may offer some insight for teachers as to what their students may be likely to do the minute the students are out of their sight and beyond their supervision at the end of the school day.

The narratives involving entertainment most often highlighted video games: *“played ;”* *“was ready to get home , and play some video games ;”* *“went and played video games ;”* and *“ran home to play games , .* The emojis utilized in those multimodal constructions provide some indication of how well different aspects of video game playing are

represented in the current set of emojis available to users. Another theme represented in the multimodal constructions was a quest for food after school: “*went and got food 🍔;*” and “*went to go get ice cream and shop 🍦.*” The emojis utilized in all those constructions reflected relatively literal representations of obvious elements of the respective multimodal messages, rather than any metaphorical or otherwise complex narrative meaning-making.

That was also true of narratives involving themes focused upon sleep: “*took a nap 😴;*” “*rushed home and jumped into bed 😴;*” and “*went home to go to sleep 🛏.*” Similarly, narratives that advanced themes involving forms of escape also utilized emojis that reflected what can generally be understood as relatively literal representations of obvious elements of the respective multimodal messages, rather than employing emojis to advance any particularly metaphorical or other forms of more complex narrative meaning-making: “*ran to get on the bus 🏃;*” “*rushed home 🚗;*” and “*🏠 🏃.*” It was also the case that in response to this prompt, the translations into words offered little enhanced meaning or clarification, although in one case, that translation did indicate that the student creator of the multimodal message seemed to potentially interpret that message in terms of a relatively richer understanding. In that case, the student who constructed the multimodal message of “*was ready to get home 🏠, and play some video games 🎮*” translated that into words-only as: “*was ready to get home to my quaint little house and play some video games like, Minecraft or Black Ops.*”

Considering all the multimodal narratives constructed in response to this prompt at another level, one can see evidence of relatively common shared meaning among the emojis utilized most often. That can be seen in the way multiple responses used the “😴” emoji to help construct meaning related to sleep, the “🏃” emoji regarding meaning related to running,

and the “🎮” emoji in relation to meaning related to playing video games. Regarding the latter though, it offered an example of how multiple emojis related to similar meaning, with “👾” and “🎮” to convey such meaning, along with “🎮.” All of those emojis would likely have relatively similarly shared meaning for people familiar with video games – which would include most students in the demographic of the students who participated in this study. It does raise the question of whether different emojis utilized with the intent of conveying similar meaning would be understood the same way by people not familiar with a subject area such as video games.

Multimodal Writing Assignment Prompt 6 Fracturing Analysis

Narrative responses that expressed serious and thoughtful themes concerning the meaning of life, the challenges of life, and what happens after death most characterized the ways that students completed the sixth prompt (“For Aiden, the big question about life was ____.”) on the exercise involving the multimodal writing assignment. The narrative meaning that they constructed in their efforts to offer possibilities for what the big question about life could be for the imaginary Aiden strongly suggested commonality among the students completing this study – particularly regarding the way they associated potential meanings represented by this prompt with matters of great consequence.

The essential tone of the overall responses to this prompt was reflected in the multimodal narratives “*how do I do this?* 🤔” and “*why it’s so confusing so he prayed* 😊🙏,” both conveying some degree of concern and stress over how challenging the imaginary Aiden might well find the source of “the big question about life.” The emojis utilized in the construction of those narrative responses added different types of meaning enhancement,

conveying concern and stress in terms of apparent pain and anguish (“😞”) in the case of the first, but perhaps an uneasy puzzlement calling for prayer and perhaps guidance from a higher power (“😌🙏”) in terms of the latter. Other multimodal narratives were constructed more specifically in terms of challenges related to school and what is to come after school: “*what to do after high school 📖*,” “*what he was going to do after high school 🙋*,” and “*if he would pass high school with all A’s 📖*.” In that case, the potential meaning enhancement offered by the emojis utilized ranged from the minimally evocative association of school with book imagery (“📖”) to a plaintive sense of shrugging bewilderment (“🙋”).

Another narrative theme reflected in a group of the responses to this prompt indicated deep interest in seeking some greater meaning of life and humanity’s place in the big picture beyond earth: “*what is in 🌌*,” “*finding spiritual happiness 🧘*,” and “*why are we here 🤔*.” In those cases, the emojis reflected a range of enhanced meaning, ranging from a relatively literal image of space (“🌌”) (clearly confirmed in that case by the student’s corresponding words-only translation of “*what’s out in space*,”) to a similarly representative image of an activity (meditation) involving a familiar form of spiritual quest potentially associated with happiness (“🧘”); and possibly an apparent effort to make the question of why we are here less foreboding – or perhaps a bit of nervous levity in the face of such foreboding (“🤔”). Concerns about what happens after death were represented quite clearly by the multimodal narrative responses of: “*what happens when we die 🤔*” and “*what happens after death 🦴*,” with each enhanced quite differently with emojis – the former suggesting deep thought about the matter (“🤔”) and the latter the relative darkness of the skull-and-bones symbol (“🦴”).

For this prompt, narrative responses with themes seeking the secrets of life on earth and what may lie beyond provided the best examples of the potential for class assignments structured along the lines of this two-part exercise to help students – with learning about more consciously communicating multimodally through drawing upon language skills to heighten awareness of multimodal meanings by translating them into words only. For example, one message was constructed to pose multimodally an enduring philosophical question: “*How can I make it a good 😊 one 🤔?*” That response was translated by its student creator into words-only as: “*How can I make it the best life I’ve lived without questioning certain decisions?*” suggesting the student found relatively rich meaning in that multimodal narrative. In another multimodal response that used only emojis without words, the multimodal message of “🌌🔭👁️🧠” likely could be subject to varied interpretation by readers, but the student creator translated it into words-only as: “what was the secret to the universe?” Both of those examples also potentially suggest ways in which students may already be in a process of becoming multimodally strategic in their use of emoji.

Multimodal Writing Assignment Prompt 7 Fracturing Analysis

Narrative responses that expressed themes disparaging reading and physical exercise characterized the more common ways that students completed the seventh prompt (“The last place anyone would ever find Claire was ____.”), on the study’s exercise involving the multimodal writing assignment. The narrative meaning that they constructed in their efforts to offer possibilities for such locations – ones that would generate so much dislike from the imaginary Claire for her never to be found there – suggested that it provided multimodal opportunities for them to highlight activities they found unappealing.

If so, some examples of that thematic interpretation characterized narratively involved activities related to school and reading: “*school* 🏫;” “*the library* 📖 *because she never liked reading* 😞.” “*curled up under a tree with a good book* 📖;” and “*in a book store*. 😊.” In those cases, the emojis did not seem to add significant additional meaning, with some providing relatively literal representations of school and books (“🏫,” “📖”) and a librarian (“👩”). In one case, the emoji did enhance communication of the negative association of boredom with reading (“😞”). The translation into words by the student creator of that multimodal message supported that interpretation concerning the meaning added by the emoji: “*the library where students usually studied because she never liked reading, she thought it was boring.*” Another introduced a somewhat puzzling element (“👑”) that seemed to in some way contradict construction of the message that imaginary Claire would not have found in a bookstore. The translation into words by the student creator of that multimodal message, however, did not provide any clarification regarding that particular emoji, stating in the translation only: “*in a bookstore.*”

Another group of multimodal narrative completions of that prompt involved activities related to exercise as places the imaginary Claire would not be found: “*at the gym* 🏋️;” “*the gym* 🤸;” and “*a* 🏏.” The communicative element associated with the emoji in the instance of the first two of those seems straightforward, relatively literally representing weightlifting and gymnastics as two forms of exercise. The third could be considered relatively less clear, although the words-only translation indicated plainly what the student creator intended for it to represent: “*at a golf course.*” That particular emoji is more commonly considered to represent the stick and ball used in field hockey (Burge, 2015). However, the student’s use of it to

represent golf provided another indication of how individual interpretations of what visual elements like emojis represent potentially can vary among actual users.

Beyond those thematic categories, other responses to that particular prompt produced one of the least patterned groups of multimodal narratives of any prompt on this exercise – providing a diverse range of meaning-making, such as “*would be sitting at home doing nothing* 🏠;” and “*at work* 🧑.” Those could be reasonably understood as constructing meanings in which the imaginary Claire could be someone who doesn’t like to be idle, or conversely, someone who doesn’t like work. Others suggested relatively random, whimsical multimodal narrative completions of that prompt: “*in a box* 📦;” and “*🌲.*” Others provided examples of how exercises like this one can be successful to some extent in helping students learn about consciously communicating multimodally, as well as helping heighten their sense of meanings advanced multimodally through utilizing language skills in ways that can help enhance and/or clarify those meanings with words. The narrative response “*in her bathroom* 🚻,” for example, was revealed to have more complex – if somewhat narratively enigmatic – meaning for the student creator of the message, in terms of the student’s translation into words: “*in her bathroom (hiding in the bathroom).*”

This group of multimodal narratives also included one of the most revelatory examples of how a creator’s intended meaning in the use of an emoji can potentially shift quite dramatically when translated into words, as in the second part of this exercise. For the first part of this exercise, one student completed the prompt that began (“The last place anyone would ever find Claire was ___” with the single emoji “🇯🇵.” Many readers could likely understand the place being referenced to be the nation of Japan, which is actually the only country to have

its own emoji map. However, the student’s completion of the words-only translation revealed a very different intended meaning: “*in a different country.*” This again highlighted the potential for visual elements like emojis to enhance and clarify meaning in some usages, but to have the capacity for multiple meanings in others. One might understand the map of Japan to mean literally that nation, when the creator of the message might instead have read its meaning to reference any *different* nation other than that of the message creator.

Multimodal Writing Assignment Prompt 8 Fracturing Analysis

Narrative responses that expressed themes involving school were the most common ways that students completed the first prompt (“As the morning sun rose, Jacob opened his eyes and remembered ____.”) from the exercise involving the multimodal writing assignment. The narrative meaning that they constructed – in response to being asked to speculate in multimodal narrative upon what the imaginary Jacob might first remember upon opening his eyes at daybreak – for the most part reflected somewhat negative thoughts involving his relation to school or negative thoughts about other matters the study participants seemed to consider less than pleasant. Given the potential for the students to draw upon their own lives in the way that they completed the prompts, these narrative responses may provide some indication for teachers of just how much school is on their students’ minds when the first thoughts of a new day begin to form.

Among those reflecting thematically school-related multimodal narratives were: “*he has school 🧑;*” “*he had to go to school 😞;*” “*he was late to school 🕒;*” “*he doesn’t have school 😊;*” “*he had an exam 📖;*” and “*he forgot to do his homework 🙄, he knew he would be in deep trouble for sure 😞.*” While the emojis utilized added expressions of unequivocal

positivity only when characterizing Jacob not having school that morning (“😄”), the others generally were only mildly negative (“😞”) or more neutral (“🕒,” “📖”). The most negative meaning-making was generated in the construction of a narrative in which Jacob had forgotten to do his homework. Enhancing that meaning further were two emojis clearly suggesting unhappiness (“😱” and “😓”). The words-only translation of that multimodal narrative went even further in reflecting specifics concerning the worry intended to be conveyed: *“he forgot to do his homework which is due today, he knew he would be in deep trouble for sure because his grade would be lowered.”*

Another group of responses to that prompt also reflected multimodal narratives constructed to characterize other activities represented as ones the imaginary Jacob would not be likely to look forward to. For example, other ways the prompt was completed by these students included: *“about all the chores he had to do 🧹;”* *“remembered he has a funeral to attend 🪦.”* and *“he had to have company over 😞.”* The translations into words of those multimodal narratives provided little additional communicative insights, other than *“about all the chores he had to do (sweeping the house).”* The students who created the other two multimodal messages in that group did not submit words-only translations for either. Another could potentially be categorized in that group – *“how much work he was missing 📅”* – but less definitely so, in that the intended narrative meaning could potentially have been a lament over possibly falling behind or losing pay from missing work, or it could have been expressed in happiness at *getting* to miss work. The words-only translation by the student creator of that multimodal narrative did not offer any additional insight, offering as translation of the multimodal version into words only *“how much work he was missing”* with no additional

language providing any elaboration on the emoji used or emotions it may have been intended to suggest.

Two other multimodal narratives constructed in response to this prompt provided somewhat creative expressions of what the imaginary Jacob might first remember upon opening his eyes at daybreak, though potentially ambiguous ones. In the instance of the multimodal response to this prompt that consisted only of “🌅,” the student creator’s translation into words indicated that emoji conveyed: “*he’s not in kansas anymore.*” So, one explanation is that for the student creator, emoji imagery of a new dawn brought to mind some association with the general feeling of a new day representing another new start in another new place, or something along that line. But that is also potentially too generous an interpretation, because that words-only translation perhaps also could have potentially been the result of just a hurried response that was not really thought through very well or actually drawing upon any deep emotional connection to the imagery. And all that helps provide another tangible example of the general reality that many expressions of multimodal messaging can potentially be too subject to diverse, even random interpretations to be helpful in accurately conveying the thoughts of the creator to readers.

Also, creatively interesting to some extent, was the multimodal response to this prompt that consisted of: “❤️🥚,” in terms of the student creator’s intention as indicated by the translation into words: “*how much he loves chickens.*” That translation offered no elaboration or insight into why the egg emoji was chosen over one of the available emojis that potentially could more directly represent “chickens” (🐔, 🐣, 🐤, 🐥, 🐦, 🐧, or 🍳). It is possible in this analysis to speculate upon that question, but beyond any such speculation, that response also

can be considered another tangible example of the way that multimodal messaging may often be too subject to multiple, unknown interpretations.

Multimodal Writing Assignment Prompt 9 Fracturing Analysis

Narrative responses that advanced themes concerning, in particular, social pursuits and food most characterized the ways that students completed the ninth prompt (“Once again for Aaliyah, the break for lunch meant ____.”) on the exercise involving the multimodal writing assignment. So generally, the topical focus of the responses was what might be expected regarding such a prompt – relative commonality among the students completing this study in terms of the ways they were more likely to consider narratively relevant forms of activity for lunch breaks. The narrative meaning that they constructed in their efforts to offer possibilities for what the imaginary Aaliyah’s lunch break meant for her did utilize a relatively creative level of multimodal messaging, in a number of instances.

Among those that centered on social pursuits in constructing multimodal narratives exploring possibilities the lunch break in question were: “*party time* 🎉;” “*social hour* 🗣️;” “*she was able to talk to her friends* 👯;” and possibly “*smoke break* 🚬,” given that smokers often gather with other smokers and interact with them socially when taking such breaks. The translation into words did not provide any further indications of whether the student creator considered smoke breaks to be social activities, since it only stated “*smoke break*” without adding further elaboration. The creator of the multimodal narrative “*she was able to talk to her friends* 👯” did add more emphasis on the lunch break as a social activity, translating it into words as “*she was able to talk to her friends (hanging out with others).*” Another narrative response on the multimodal exercise was relatively concise – “🕒📱” – but somewhat richer in

the understanding of the student creator who offered as the translation into words: “*she could spend more time on her phone instead of not working.*” That offered another example of how students can be seen as potentially becoming more multimodally strategic in their messaging, seeking in this case to communicate what would be a lengthier message (in words) concisely with a pair of emojis – though potentially with less clarity of meaning for readers.

Another group of responses involved narrative multimodal constructions that were focused topically on food and in some cases utilized relatively more complex emoji messaging. The multimodal construction of “*she only had a few minutes to eat 🕒;*” “*to eat 🍲;*” “*🍔;*” and “*she could eat food 😊*” employed emojis to provide visual enhancements relating to the time element, food imagery, and the happiness associated with eating. Another utilized emojis in a way that was multimodally simple – “*🍕🕒*” – but quite clear and effective communicatively, at least in terms of the translation into words: “*it’s pizza time.*” Another involving food utilized one of the more complex multimodal constructions – “*not only being on her phone 📱👁️, but and have a delicious meal 🍔🍟😊*” – which the creator found to be even more narratively evocative in the words-only translation: “*not only being on her phone and check up on a few messages but and have a delicious meal a burger and fries which she picked up before work, she knew it would be good.*”

A few other responses focused on spending the lunch hour “*studying for her exam 📖;*” or alternatively, “*anxiety about getting a test grade back 😬.*” In both of those constructions, the utilized emoji provided a degree of complementary visual reinforcement of the books involved in studying and the nail-biting tension associated with waiting for a test grade.

Multimodal Writing Assignment Prompt 10 Fracturing Analysis

The themes reflected in the narrative responses with which students completed the tenth prompt (“No matter what anyone said, Nora ____.”), were more dispersed among the various meanings they advanced on exercise involving the multimodal writing assignment. They constructed a range of meanings in their narrative advancement of what might remain true concerning the imaginary Nora, regardless of what others said, with some degree of common focus on activities involving school. But even more commonality – whatever topic might be nominally focused upon – was reflected in the way the responses almost all maintained a tone of determination to stay true to one’s values, no matter what others might say. Given the potential for the students to draw upon their own lives in the way that they completed the prompts, these narrative responses may offer some rather hopeful insight into the personal values of this group of students, as suggested by the sorts of things they may believe or feel concerning how one chooses to hold true to important beliefs, regardless of what other people might say.

As with many of the other prompts, a number of them topically involved school: “*was busy studying 📖*,” “*never cheats on tests 📝*,” and “*finish school and got her degree 🎓*,” all of which utilized simple but communicatively effective emojis often commonly associated with, respectively, studiousness (“📖”), tests (“📝”), and academic degrees (“🎓”). There was some overlap among those sorts of responses, particularly the last of those three, and others focused more topically on forms of accomplishment such as: “*never gave up on the sport she loved so much 🏐*” and “*still went skydiving 🪂*,” both of which also straightforwardly and effectively utilized emojis featuring literal representations of a softball (“🏐”) and a skydiver (“🪂”). And

then beyond that, there was some overlap among those sorts of accomplishment-themed responses and others concerned more broadly with pride and self-esteem: “*was proud of her self* 😊;” “*didn’t really care what other people thought* 🙄;” “*is still my best friend* 😊;” “*was still happy* 😊;” “*would always be happy* 😊 😊.” All of those also utilized emojis that must be considered as providing elements of meaning that are more complementing than enhancing – adding to one degree or another visual reinforcement of the message expressed in the accompanying words: the pleasure of self-pride (“😊”), an image commonly understood as one way to indicate disregard for various matters (“🙄”), feelings of pride in true friendship (“😊”), vivid happiness (“😊😊”), and still more emojis commonly associated with happiness (“😊😊”).

While that does not represent the sorts of ideal use of multimodal messaging sought in this study, it does nevertheless provide indications of ways that this group of students seems to commonly utilize emojis. And ultimately, all insights relevant to multimodal meaning-making that can be developed from the data gathered in this study broadly contribute to the objectives of the study.

Among the responses to this prompt that most substantially went beyond the relatively complementary, self-evident sorts of meaning in their multimodal constructions were a small number that were topically in great contrast with all of those discussed above. In one instance, the multimodal messaging that narratively completed prompt was relatively simple, but each element contributed to the meaning made, doing different kinds of semiotic work, in asserting despite what anyone said, Nora: “*hates* 🍋.” The word in that simple multimodal construction provides the action verb and then the emoji provides the object for the verb – visually

identifying what Nora hates. Though that messaging is relatively clear, the student creator's translation into words still further confirms the meaning intended: "*really hates pickles.*"

Even more multimodally complex, though less communicatively clear, was the response to this prompt that utilized emojis only to state: "🚀👁️." While the student creator drew upon emojis rather creatively in that message construction, most recipients of the message likely will be unsure as to what the intended meaning might be. For the student creator, the translation into words declared the intended meaning to be that, no matter what others said, Nora: "*wanted to go to the moon.*" So, the student utilized a relatively higher degree of multimodal complexity in constructing that particular message, but still could have more effectively constructed it to make the meaning clearer. Indeed, even simply utilizing the single word "*wanted*" before the two emojis likely would have clarified the intended meaning – an example of one specific way the instructor in an actual classroom lesson plan of this sort could help students develop more effective multimodal skills. Identifying such insights also contribute to the objectives of this study.

Multimodal Writing Assignment Prompt 11 Fracturing Analysis

The themes reflected in the narrative responses with which students completed the eleventh prompt ("There was this one day when Kaylee ____."), were even more dispersed among the various meanings they advanced on the exercise involving the multimodal writing assignment, as well as topically. They constructed a range of meanings in their narrative advancement of what the imaginary Kaylee might have done on that one day, with little commonality of topic areas but nevertheless some commonality in emoji usage. The various experiences included both pleasant and unpleasant ones, but more of the latter, suggesting that in response to such a prompt that contained no cues as to what might have happened to the

imaginary Kaylee that day, the responses from this group of students trended more toward the unfortunate, embarrassing, or silly.

In terms of the unfortunate, this prompt also produced a small group of narrative multimodal constructions that involved leg injuries: “*twisted her ankle and had to go see a doctor* 🧑;” “*broke her leg* 🦵;” and “*broke her leg* 🤯.” The emoji choices for the last of those provided a degree of visual enhancement to the message made, utilizing imagery of a female and the symbol for medical practitioners, though none specifically related to the ankle or twisting an ankle. The student’s translation for that multimodal message into words added somewhat more information but no insights into the absence of any ankle-associated emojis: “*twisted her ankle and had to go see a doctor (a doctor she had seen)*.” The emojis chosen for the other two multimodal responses in that group provided another example of how different student creators can choose varying semiotic messaging construction for exactly the same verbal messaging (“*broke her leg*”) – in one case choosing to represent the body part that had been injured (“🦵”), and in the other to visually convey the feelings of trauma (“🤯”) potentially associated with such an injury. In both cases, the translations into words offered nothing beyond the same words utilized on the multimodal part of the exercise.

Two other responses provided narrative multimodal constructions that involved unpleasant experiences of a lesser degree than leg injuries: “*was* ⌚ *for* ⚽” and “*fell into a cactus* 🌵.” The first of those provided the best from the responses to this prompt in terms of an effort to utilize both words and emojis in the sort of multimodally interactive messaging most sought on this part of the exercises, choosing to combine with the words two emojis that provided a time element suggesting lateness (“⌚”) and some indication of the activity

involved (“🕒”). The first of those likely was more effective semiotically, utilizing an hourglass with the sand emptied into the bottom chamber potentially communicating time having run out, but the soccer ball potentially open to interpretations involving soccer other than practice. However, the translation into words made clear the intent of the student creator: “*was late for soccer practice.*” The other multimodal messaging of those two offered no clarification or insights concerning “*fell into a cactus*” other than the same words.

Among the responses to this prompt that focused on embarrassing or silly experiences for the imaginary Kaylee were: “*laughed at a serious conversation 😂😏*” and “*made the funniest face 😏, and everyone started to 🤔😂.*” The first relatively effectively utilized a pair of emojis that semiotically provided visual representation of both laughter and seriousness (“😂😏”) but added no additional information with the translation into words. The latter of those responses utilized relatively complex and semiotically rich emojis – with one of the goofiest of face emojis (“😏”) and a combination of two others suggesting intense laughter (“🤔😂”). That student creator also provided clear confirmation of the messaging intent with the translation into words: “*made the funniest face usually sticking her tongue out and crossing her eyes, and everyone started to die laughing.*”

Another interesting insight from the responses to this prompt involved the utilization of the same emoji (“😞”) with two relatively different verbal messages: “*was very sad 😞*” and “*forgot to feed her dog 😞.*” That emoji seems to suggest a semiotically logical association with the first of those messages, in adding a note of visual sadness to the verbal statement. The latter usage could, in contrast, seem perhaps surprising that a note of visual sadness would be utilized with such a different message. However, it could also be understood as an indication

of the imaginary Kaylee’s (and perhaps the student creator’s) sincere feeling of sadness invoked by failing to feed a beloved pet. The translation into words in that instance, however, did not offer additional elaboration or insight.

A range of different emojis were utilized in the multimodal construction of a group of other narrative responses involving happier experiences: “*had a very good day 😊*”; “*was joyful about graduation being near 🎓*”; “*spent \$400 on clothes 💰*”; and “*🏖️*.” The first two of those utilized semiotically relevant emoji faces very commonly associated with happiness, (“😊, 🎓”). The third chose to utilize an emoji representing the money referenced verbally (“💰”). And the last of those perhaps represents a minimalist use of multimodal expression – in the sense of the emoji (“🏖️”) incorporating modes of image and color – that according to the translation into words was intended to communicate: “*wanted to go to the beach.*” For older generations long accustomed to more traditional message constructions, that emoji alone perhaps would not very clearly actually communicate that message. However, potentially for students like those in this study, more accustomed to the strategic shorthand potential of such multimodal construction, that single emoji could well convey the shared meaning of the wish to go to the beach.

Multimodal Writing Assignment Prompt 12 Fracturing Analysis

A creatively rich range of multimodal constructions were utilized in advancing the themes reflected in the narrative responses with which students completed the twelfth prompt (“I hate to tell you this, Jordan said, but ____.”) On the exercise involving the multimodal writing assignment, both topically and multimodally, the responses to this prompt overall provided a creative body of meanings in their narrative advancement of what the imaginary

Jordan might hate to tell someone. The array of responses possibly suggests that the opportunity to engage in fictionally conveying news that someone might hate to tell someone else provides something of a creative spark for students involved in such an exercise. The responses for this prompt were both topically inventive and multimodally compelling, in terms of utilizing words and emojis in relatively strong communicative combinations.

A number of the multimodal constructions in response to this prompt involved ending relationships: “*I can’t be your friend anymore 🤔;*” “*we aren’t friends anymore 💔;*” “*I’m breaking up with you. 💔;*” and “*he wants to end things with you 💔.*” So, a clear pattern emerged with those students of using the same emoji (“💔”) to add semiotic meaning to three different verbal assertions of relationships being ended: with a friend of the imaginary Jordan’s, with a romantic interest of Jordan’s, and with Jordan conveying third-person news. That provided some of the clearest evidence of shared meaning among participants relative to a specific emoji, suggesting relatively strong semiotic strength of the broken-heart emoji to be understood in association with feelings produced by the ending of relationships. This provides the sort of teaching opportunity that could be discussed more with students to help them become more conscious of which emojis can be considered to hold relatively more or less shared meaning when they are constructing multimodal messages. For example, the emoji utilized by the other student whose verbal response involved ending a relationship but who chose to combine that with another emoji (“🤔”) could well be subject potentially to other interpretations of meaning than would be the 💔 emoji.

Some of the other multimodal constructions produced in response to this prompt in which Jordan says something one would hate to tell someone involved moderately bad but less




than heartbreaking news: “*I’m not coming to school* 🤔;” “*the camera broke* 📺;” “*what do you think you are doing wearing that outfit you got on?* 😬;” and “*🚲*✖️.” All of those emojis could be understood as adding visual enhancement of semiotic relevance. For example, Jordan and/or whomever was being told of Jordan’s not coming to school could plausibly have feelings of sadness in relation to the news, as the translation into words asserted: “*I’m not coming to school. (feeling sad).*” While the multimodal narrative that a camera had broken was enhanced with a literal representation of a camera, the other two narratives in that group utilized relatively more evocative emojis.

For example, the raised-eyebrow emoji (“😬”) conjures up semiotically quite plausibly the sort of meaning that was well translated into words by that student creator: “*maybe don’t wear that crazy outfit, lol?!*” The semiotic intent in this response’s example of a student creator choosing to utilize only the colors and imagery of emojis without words in the multimodal construction “*🚲*✖️” likely would not be as clear to many readers who might seek to interpret it. But in some contexts, among groups like these students where a potentially higher level of multimodally strategic communication could well be more the norm today, that emoji-only messaging might be more likely to be understood in terms of the student creator’s translation into words: “*I don’t wanna go ride bikes.*” That could particularly be more likely to be understood if we assume hypothetically that the imaginary Jordan was in a conversation in which the subject of whether to ride bikes had already been raised prior to Jordan’s statement.

Other multimodal constructions produced in response to this prompt involved potentially more than just moderately bad news – perhaps depending on how upsetting any particular recipient might be upon receiving a message such as: “*I took your answers from the*








test 📝.” The translation into words did not provide any further narrative elaboration on the situation, stating only: “*I took your answers from the test (paper and pencil to represent the test).*” Other multimodal narratives in this group of responses involved potentially shocking and possibly devastating news: “*our bird died 🦜💀*” and “*your grandma passed away this morning. 😭*.” The emojis utilized in combination with the first of those two might not necessarily reflect the appropriate level of sensitivity that should be employed when telling someone their pet bird had died – but on the other hand, those emojis (“🦜💀”) would likely be semiotically quite clear as enhancement to the message’s basic meaning. The emoji utilized for the latter of those two multimodal narratives could be understood as providing a more sympathetic tone to the meaning-making for that message. As reflected in the responses to other prompts such as Prompt 11, the student creators’ multimodal work in this study suggests emojis such as those involving a face and single tear (😭) emoji have relatively strong levels of shared meaning among students like these as being associated with sadness.

Finally, some multimodal narratives constructed to incorporate some level of humor in completing this prompt (“I hate to tell you this, Jordan said, but ____.”): “*your jokes are not funny 😞, they are just cringy 😞 and they don’t make anyone laugh but yourself 😞*” and “*there is 🚫 FREE 🦀*.” The first of those provided one of the lengthiest and most involved multimodal messages from all the responses provided by students in this study. The translation into words also fully and ideally achieved the pedagogical objective of that part of the exercise, in the way the student creator thought through the meaning of the emojis utilized and helped make their meaning very clear: “*your jokes are not funny, I just have to sigh, they are just cringy, it makes me roll my eyes and they don’t make anyone laugh, but yourself and it’s*

just kind of sad.” In contrast, the latter of those multimodal constructions could be questioned as to how clear the intended meaning might come across with its use of just those three adjacent emojis (“  ”), but the translation into words reflects a degree of relatively strong originality in constructing multimodal humor: “*there is no free seafood buffet.*”

Multimodal Writing Assignment Prompt 13 Fracturing Analysis

The students’ creative impulse also seemed to be tapped into rather well in the way that they completed the thirteenth prompt (“I should be President, Alexis thought, and first of all I would ____.”) with an entertaining variety of multimodal constructions on this part of the multimodal writing assignment. It may be that multimodal writing assignments of this sort can be more likely to produce better efforts by students when the prompts are perceived by them as an opportunity to participate in creation of multimodal narratives that in some way involve what they may consider fun ideas.

As with many other prompts, a number of the responses to this one addressed subjects involving school: “*make school lunches free* ;” “*improve school lunch* ;” and “ .” That group provided additional evidence of shared meaning among participants relative to a specific emoji, with the “” emoji utilized to enhance and reinforce the feeling of happiness associated for two of those multimodal narrative responses. The latter of those constructed an emoji-only narrative (“ ”) that the translation into words indicated was intended to communicate: “*make school fun again.*” So that represented a creative, if less than communicatively clear multimodal construction. Semiotically, there would likely be problems for most readers of such messaging in definitively recognizing that building emoji as a school building, but probably even more significantly – even if it could be assumed to be commonly

associated with a school building – in identifying that the semiotic-meaning relationship between the school and the smiley face somehow signaled “*make school fun again.*” The other of those three responses utilized a relatively more literal representation of a hamburger in relation to the multimodal construction of “*improve school lunch 🍔.*” However, the translation into words provided the insight that the student creator intended for the emoji to suggest a bit more than just “lunch” or “food” in general, but specifically “good food” as the significance of the hamburger emoji: “*improve school lunch (having good food).*”

Other responses to this prompt involved relatively serious concerns beyond school, some more feasible than others in the specifics of what the narratives proposed: “*raise minimum wage 💰;*” “*I would improve gas prices 📈;*” “*fix prices of things 💰;*” and “*give everyone a car 🚗.*” While the emojis utilized in those multimodal constructions were mostly of the sort involving relatively literal representation of verbal elements – with the exception of the somewhat figurative use of a line chart (“📈”) indirectly symbolizing statistical improvement of gas prices – two of them did provide additional evidence of possible shared meaning among participants relative to a specific emoji. In those instances, the “💰” emoji was utilized to enhance and reinforce the money involved in different ways in the two responses, which completed the prompt by proposing the imaginary Alexis as president would engage in raising the minimum wage and fixing prices. The translation into words for the latter specifically elaborated: “*fix prices of things (money represents lowering prices).*”

And then a few other responses involved what can reasonably be characterized as various fantasies of the actions imaginary President Alexis might take, ranging from the nonsensical to the absurd: “*fix america because the one we have currently is dumber than my*

dog!! 😞;” “ban all homework 🙄👩🎓📄 and give people free money 😊👉💵💰;” and “💣🏠🚒🔥.” The first utilized a relatively simple but semiotically effective pained-face emoji (“😞”) to reinforce the narrator’s anguish produced by a president alleged to be “dumber than my dog.” The others all engaged in relatively more sophisticated combinations of emojis, seeking to communicate more complex narrative constructions. For example, the two combinations of three and four emojis fashioned together with two combinations of words (“ban all homework 🙄👩🎓📄 and give people free money 😊👉💵💰.”) creatively sequenced those two groups of emojis to enhance the words with imagery representing facial emotion, gesture of disdain, and homework plus further imagery of sly pleasure, giving, and two symbols of money. At the least, the rich abundance of the emoji utilization visually amplified the spirit of delight evoked by the idea of such an action by imaginary President Alexis. The student creator translated it all, using words only, as: “*I would ban all homework we would just push it all to the side and give people free money and hand out all the cash and coin people want.*” The other multimodal construction in that group, utilized a sequence of five adjacent emojis without any words (“💣🏠🚒🔥”) to make meaning that possibly would not be immediately clear to most readers of such a message, but which the student creator translated into words as: “*blow random stuff up.*”

Multimodal Writing Assignment Prompt 14 Fracturing Analysis

The students’ creative impulse similarly seemed to be relatively invigorated by the fourteenth prompt (“No one expected Ezra to walk in the house and announce ____.”), based on the relatively interesting variety and multimodal narratives that prompt produced. Although topically, the largest number of similar responses involved the imaginary Ezra announcing

unexpected pregnancies with which Ezra was apparently involved one way or another, a range of other topics were explored with often interesting uses of the components of the multimodal constructions. If indeed it is the case that prompts which may be perceived by students as an opportunity to participate in the creation of multimodal narratives involving ideas they find fun – as discussed in the section for the previous prompt – may potentially produce better efforts on multimodal writing assignments of this sort, this prompt seemed to come across as successful in that regard.

Five responses focused topically on an announcement of pregnancy in completing that prompt: “*she’s pregnant* 🍼;” “*that she was prego* 😬;” “*he got her pregnant* 🤰;” “*🤰;*” and “*🤰🤰.*” The first two of those multimodal constructions utilized similar words but relatively different emojis, with one representing a baby’s face (🍼) and the other an emoji face (😬) often recognized as making a kiss, but perhaps suggesting the making of an “ooh” sound through pursed lips upon finding out something secretive or shocking. That possible interpretation may be supported by the use of the slang “prego” instead of “pregnant.” The translation into words did not provide any further information or insights concerning that multimodal narrative. The other three multimodal constructions concerning pregnancy provided three different utilizations of virtually the same emoji in different ways. One (“*he got her pregnant* 🤰”) utilized a relatively simple and direct verbal component reinforced with a literal representation of a pregnant white woman – the “he” in question apparently being Ezra but not clarified by the translation into words (“*he was pregnant*”), or otherwise. Another utilized the same emoji as a black woman, without words in the multimodal narrative, but translated into words, for some unexplained reason, as “*he was pregnant.*” Still a third utilized

three emojis in combination without words – the same emoji as a white woman, but combined with an emoji face of a white woman and a baby-bottle emoji. The basic meaning intended by that construction likely would be relatively clear for most readers, which according to the translation into words was simply, “*she was pregnant.*”

A couple of other multimodal narratives utilized identical words in that mode but quite different emojis: “*that she was getting married.* 🥰” and “*that she was getting married* 👰🤵” So, the former utilized visual imagery to characterize the news as mind-blowing (“🥰”), while the latter did so to characterize the same news as a rosy expression of romantic love (“👰🤵”) – an excellent example of the semiotic power of emojis to significantly alter the meaning of identical words.

A group of other responses to this prompt focused on varied topical possibilities for what no one expected the imaginary Ezra to walk in and announce: “*he is going to college* 📖;” “*that he was gay* 🏳️‍🌈;” “*that she had forgot the birthday cake* 🎂;” “*he* 📖📖📖.” The first three utilized rather straightforward wording and emojis representing relatively literal imagery of, respectively, a bookish emoji face (“📖”) enhancing the announcement of going to college, the gay-pride flag (“🏳️‍🌈”) enhancing the news of coming out as gay, and a cake with candles (“🎂”) enhancing disclosure of a forgotten birthday cake. The translation of the last into words revealed the intent of the student creator to include interesting information that could not have been ascertained from the multimodal narrative: “*that she had forgot the birthday cake (the birthday cake she never bought).*” Such responses in a more extended classroom use of exercises like this could provide teaching opportunities to encourage students to engage in more rewriting of such multimodal narratives – so as, for example, to make the multimodal

narrative more communicatively consistent with the words-only narrative – ideally through more creative use of emojis or other visual modes. The other response in that group, which utilized one word and a visually interesting combination of three adjacent emojis (“*he* 🗑️🅐🚗”) was translated by the student creator into words as: “*that he bought a car on his own*” – another example of the sort of teaching opportunity that could be focused upon in a more extended classroom use of writing exercises like this to help students improve the communicative effectiveness of their multimodal writing.

Two other multimodal narratives constructed in response to this prompt seemed to interpret its phrasing as suggesting it should be completed narratively with something truly unexpected. One of those responses had the imaginary Ezra announcing, “*she believed in aliens* 😲👉👁️,” with the emojis providing visual elements representing surprise and symbols associated with alien life. For the student creator, that multimodal construction translated into words even more richly as: “*she believed in aliens and would always go outside to interact with them, she was absolutely amazed.*” The other response that involved a particularly unexpected sort of announcement declared in multimodal narrative: “*that he just got married to a monkey* 💍🐒.” In that case, however, the translation into words added nothing beyond the words utilized in the multimodal part of the exercise.

Multimodal Writing Assignment Prompt 15 Fracturing Analysis

The fifteenth prompt (“Logan believed that once upon a time ____.”) offered the student participants basically a blank slate to propose, in terms of what the imaginary Logan might believe, virtually anything that possibly happened “once upon a time.” The students did respond with an inventive range of such possibilities topically. However, compared to some of the other prompts, the strength and richness of their multimodal constructions was somewhat

less pronounced, as noted in the respective discussions on those prompts. One potential factor that conceivably could have come into play is the practical reality that this was the last prompt of the fifteen on the exercise – and by this point, at least some students could have been growing more distracted and anxious to finish class and move on to other activities in their day.

Several of the responses to this prompt proposed various multimodal narratives involving fairy-tale related scenarios: “*fairies were real* 🧚;” “*fairytales were real* 😞;” “*he was a unicorn* 🦄;” “*he would be a king and have a beautiful queen by his side* 😎;” and “*the tooth fairy was real* 🦷🧚.” That group’s multimodal constructions did not reflect any particularly complex emoji utilization, but did provide some examples of rather varied emoji choices for relatively similar verbal assertions. One that referenced “*fairies*,” for example, employed a literal representation of a fairy (🧚); but another making a “*fairytales*” reference employed a downcast emoji face (😞) that provided semiotic meaning apparently more related to the assertion that once upon a time such “*romance was real*” than to the “*fairytales*” element. Another verbal assertion referencing a “*unicorn*” utilized a literal representation of the mythical creature (🦄), while a verbal assertion referencing “*the tooth fairy*” combined the literal emoji fairy representation (🧚) with a literal emoji tooth representation (🦷). One other multimodal narrative from that group (“*he would be a king and have a beautiful queen by his side* 😎”) utilized an emoji sun-glassed face often associated with pleasure. It was translated into words as “*he would be married to a very beautiful princess*” – likely utilizing the emoji face with sunglasses as representing a coolness factor of having a hot chick at his side (the queen/princess) to make him even cooler as a king.

The other responses to this prompt could be loosely categorized topically into one group of somewhat tradition-related “once upon a time” imaginings and another of relatively more off-the-wall narrative musings. The first group included: “*Santa was real 🎁;*” and “*Finding Nemo actually spoke 🐟.*” Both utilized relatively straightforward visual representations of elements plainly related to the verbal modes, as made clear by the translations into words, respectively: “*Santa was real (presents);*” and “*Finding Nemo actually spoke (fish represent Nemo).*”

Then the range of more topically off-the-wall multimodal narrative responses included: “*his mower blew up 🚜;*” “*he was a part of a movie. 🎥;*” “*he could be a two-pronged leaf 🌱;*” “*🐷 could 🦋;*” and “*there was a 👻 that went to the 🪦 yard 🏠 and then saw a 🧟 and gave her a 🧸 and 🧠.*” In the instances involving references to a lawn mower, a movie, and a leaf, the emojis utilized were simply literal representations of a mower (“🚜”), a movie camera (“🎥”) and a leaf (“🌱”). The two multimodally richest constructions involved one that was relatively simple but communicatively effective: “*🐷 could 🦋,*” which most recipients of such a message could likely correctly interpret as meaning that once upon a time, “*pigs could fly,*” as the student creator’s translation into words explained. Much more complex and ambitious was the multimodal narrative: “*there was a 👻 that went to the 🪦 yard 🏠 and then saw a 🧟 and gave her a 🧸 and 🧠.*” In that instance, most readers would likely need some degree of assistance in reaching the interpretation that the student creator provided in the translation into words: “*there was a ghost that went to the graveyard, it was a bit decrepit, and then saw a zombie and gave her a teddy bear and brains as a gift.*”

Summary

This chapter has focused most of all on prompt-by-prompt narrative analyses of the student participants' responses to the core exercises of the lesson plan administered in this study to generate data. That analysis employed Maxwell's qualitative "fracturing" process in the manner discussed above.

As will be focused upon at more length in the discussion of findings in Chapter Seven, this analysis has helped provide a more nuanced assessment of theoretical propositions of multimodal semiotics, as asserted by the school of thought most associated with linguist and semiotician Gunther Kress. That was done through prompt-by-prompt fracturing analysis focused on identifying patterns, themes, commonalities, contrasts, and other insights regarding the ways that students employed specific emojis in their composition of multimodal narratives process to construct meaning in terms of these exercises in this study. In practice, as the multimodal composition work of the students in this study suggests, increased use of semiotic multimodal elements like emojis does not necessarily equate to increased uses that are consistently as complex as theory might suggest. In theory, semiotic multimodality "deals with all the means we have for making meanings – the *modes* of representation – and considers their specific way of configuring the world" (Kress, 2004, p. 110). That process derives its meaning-making through what Kress described as a "division of semiotic labor" in which "writing and image and color lend themselves to doing different kinds of semiotic work; each has its distinct potentials for meaning" (Kress, 2010, p. 1).

As discussed in the respective prompt-by-prompt analyses in this chapter, the strength and richness of the multimodal constructions that student participants developed in completing the exercises for this study often varied considerably. Certainly, there were examples in which

multimodal messages could be considered to have utilized all or many of “the means we have for making meanings,” and all or many of “the *modes* of representation” in order to configure the “world” comprised by the narrative prompts they were asked to complete. However, the analysis above also reflects a range of examples in which many of the multimodal messages fell short of that standard to one degree or another. All those findings will be discussed and organized more fully and placed in more theoretical context in Chapter Seven.

The students’ multimodal work completed for this study, which has been presented in this chapter through an approach emphasizing Maxwell’s fracturing of the data, next will be assessed from another perspective in Chapter Six. That approach will utilize a thematic matrix, in order to organize and assess the fractured data more clearly in terms of useful categories, themes, patterns, commonalities, and insights, guided by the research questions.

CHAPTER 6

THEMATIC MATRIX ASSESSMENT OF DATA

Introduction

Following upon the close qualitative forms of analysis utilized in the previous chapter, focused more on qualitative “fracturing” than quantitative counting, as emphasized by Maxwell (Maxwell, 2013, p. 107), a form of profile matrix will be utilized to begin this chapter. This will enable consideration of the data from a perspective broader than the prompt-by-prompt narrative analysis, as well as providing patterned formatting for addressing the research questions. In that process, the fractured data will be presented here in a relatively systematic format, utilizing insights derived through the development of a profile matrix for each research question. That approach will be employed in this chapter in order to organize the data into “categories that facilitate comparison between things in the same category,” a “form of categorizing [that] involves organizing the data into broader themes and issues” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 107).

The use of the profile matrix is “fundamental to qualitative text analysis” and often includes topics or themes as structuring elements organized in columns, so it can also be referred to as a thematic matrix (Kuckarts, 2014, p. 3). This technique for qualitative analysis “aims to create a clear and comprehensible interpretation of the information that is included” in the profile matrix, utilizing research questions to provide an organizing basis for category-based analysis and presentation of results. Thus, the thematic matrix is not a chart. It represents a tool for methodological sorting of data into categories for purposes of visual assessment and analytic insights. After the data are sorted through employing the thematic matrix, the relative presence of

the qualities focused upon in each of the thematic categories of the matrix can be better understood. Further, the researcher then has visually categorized examples of all the data relevant to each thematic category of the matrix.

As discussed, this study has focused on these qualitative research questions:

RQ1: What broad patterns of meaning emerge recurrently in the data gathered in this study?

RQ2: What evidence of shared meaning among participants relative to specific emoji is reflected in the data gathered in this study?

RQ3: What commonalities and contrasts emerge in the data gathered in this study?

RQ4: What insights relevant to multimodal meaning-making can be developed from the data gathered in this study?

This chapter will proceed to present data gathered through the exercises completed by the student participants in this study organized thematically into a matrix that contributes to addressing each research question in turn. For consistency, each matrix considers data in terms of four categories that through the process of data fracturing in Chapter Five were determined to be most relevant to exploring each of the research questions respectively. Each of the four matrices has an introductory passage that summarizes the key points and relevant insights revealed through the use of that particular matrix. Then following the summaries provided for each matrix will be the matrix itself, to allow readers to see exactly how that form of methodological sorting of data into categories arrived through visual assessment at the respective analytic insights.

Research Question 1 Matrix Assessment

This section considers RQ1 (What broad patterns of meaning emerge recurrently in the data gathered in this study?) in terms of four thematic categories:

- *Approximate emoji-to-word equivalency* – whether meaning conveyed by a multimodal message constructed with words and emojis can be categorized as conveying approximately the same meaning as that message when translated into words-only on that part of the exercises.

- *Emoji-to-word disproportionality* – whether meaning conveyed by a multimodal message constructed with words and emojis can be categorized as disproportionate in some way to the meaning conveyed by that message when translated into words-only on that part of the exercises. In such instances, the two forms of the message conveyed relatively different meanings.

- *Object / literal representation* – whether emojis were utilized to represent objects or some other relatively literal depiction of other elements of the natural world.

- *Feeling/metaphoric representation* – whether emojis were used to convey feelings or put forth a representation that could be considered more metaphoric or figurative than literal.

In the part of the matrix that includes words-only translations, each multimodal message is formatted in italics immediately above the student participant's words-only translation of that message, unitalicized. In those instances in which some students constructed multimodal messages without words, the words-only translations are presented immediately below those messages, unitalicized.

One issue encountered in this data-analysis phase of the study was that it turned out not all the students completed translations into words for all their multimodal messages. It could be that they were in a hurry, or perhaps that part of the exercise seemed to them to require more effort than they wished to make. Fortunately, most students did complete translations into words. And that offers guidance for how multimodal exercises like these could be best administered in

classes: The teacher should spend extra moving about the room encouraging and assisting all students in completing that part of the exercise.

As the still considerable data formatted into those columns of the matrix indicate, it was slightly more common among the work of the student participants in this study that meaning conveyed by multimodal messages constructed with words and emojis could be categorized as conveying approximately the same meaning as that message when translated into words-only on that part of the exercises – but only very slightly. In practical terms, that was the case barely more than half the time. So, it was almost as likely that meaning conveyed by a multimodal message constructed with words and emojis could be categorized as disproportionate in some way to the meaning conveyed by that message when translated into words-only on that part of the exercises. That indicates both the potential for multimodal messages to enhance successful communication, as well as the caution that such messages involving images cannot be automatically considered to be superior to words-only messages, as some literature on the subject suggests. However, that can be seen as one of the teaching components of using exercises like these in the classroom: Helping students become more consciously aware of how meaning can be enhanced through multimodal messaging, but that thoughtful consideration must be given to helping ensure intended meaning is accurately conveyed.

As the other columns of the matrix indicate, it was somewhat more likely for participants to utilize emojis that could be categorized as conveying feelings or putting forth a representation that could be considered more metaphoric or figurative than literal, with about 60 percent of emojis utilized in that category. But that still indicates how it was almost as common for the student participants in this study to utilize emojis representing objects or other relatively literal depictions of other elements from the natural world. That can be seen as one of the teaching

components of using exercises like these in the classroom: Helping students consider the way that multimodal messages, like words-only messages, can deal in literal narratives as well as metaphorical narratives.

One other qualification of this overall assessment involves my role in this study that has drawn upon Maxwell's approach of the researcher in qualitative research as the research instrument, in which "eyes and ears are the tools" used "to gather information and to make sense of what is going on" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 88). In considering, for example, the categorization above regarding emoji-to-word meaning equivalency versus disproportionality, my role as research instrument certainly was significant – similar to the way a teacher might assess that element of an exercise like this for her class. So, it must be acknowledged that for that categorization and for others in this study, such qualitative assessment of meaning could vary among different readers. For example, readers the age of the student-participants in this study, or readers older than I am, or anyone who is less familiar with emoji usage in general, and so on, could arrive at different meaning assessments than I have. As with other qualifications discussed, this one provides further insight into how exercises like this one could be better optimized in actual classroom implementation. In this case, one potential improvement could be having students not only create multimodal messages but also interpret and assess the messages of their classmates.

The thematic matrix assessment for RQ1 begins at the top of the next page in order to maintain the matrix formatting.

RQ1: What broad patterns of meaning emerge recurringly in the data gathered in this study?

Approximate emoji-to-word equivalency	Emoji-to-word disproportionality	Object / literal representation	Feeling/metaphoric representation
<p>she looked everywhere she had it last and she was happy when she found it 😊.</p> <p>she looked everywhere she had it last and she was happy when she found it (happy)</p> <p>she freaked out 😨 she got scared. (fearful)</p> <p>and she doesn't remember where she put it 😞.</p> <p>and she doesn't remember where she put it.</p> <p>she was very mad. 😡 she was very mad.</p> <p>he made a good grade on his test 📄 he made a good grade on his test (paper test)</p> <p>he needed money 💰 he needed money.</p> <p>he had finished his homework 😞 he had finished his homework (mad/angry).</p>	<p>she began to freak out 😊 she decided to get a friend to call it!</p> <p>he could go out with his friends 😊 he could go out with his friends and be okay!</p> <p>alone in her bed 😊 alone in her room watching youtube.</p> <p>at her friend's house 👤 her homies.</p> <p>played 🎮 went home to play video games.</p> <p>went home to go to sleep 🛏 went home and munched on some snacks.</p> <p>a 🏌 at a golf course.</p> <p>in her bathroom 🚻 in her bathroom (hiding in the bathroom)</p> <p>in a book store. 📖 in a bookstore.</p>	<p>basketball 🏀 was better than soccer ⚽</p> <p>he made a good grade on his test 📄</p> <p>he needed money 💰</p> <p>to let him go see the movie 🎬</p> <p>😨 in 🛏</p> <p>working out 🏋️</p> <p>what is in 📺?</p> <p>what to do after high school 📖</p> <p>if he would pass high school with all A's. 📖</p> <p>the gym 🏋️</p> <p>buy that expensive 💎</p> <p>played 🎮</p> <p>went to go get ice cream and shop 🍦</p> <p>was ready to get home 🏠, and play some video games 🎮</p> <p>ran to get on the bus 🏃</p>	<p>she froze 😨. Aubrey started to panic 😨.</p> <p>she freaked out 😨</p> <p>she looked everywhere she had it last and she was happy when she found it 😊.</p> <p>she sighed 😞, "I forgot it again... this is so lame. 😞"</p> <p>she was sad about it 😞.</p> <p>she freaked out 😨</p> <p>Dang she lost her phone again 😞</p> <p>she began to freak out 😊</p> <p>and she doesn't remember where she put it 😞.</p> <p>she was very mad. 😡</p> <p>she sighed with a passive aggressive tone 😞</p> <p>👁️👁️😨</p> <p>😡</p>

RQ1: What broad patterns of meaning emerge recurringly in the data gathered in this study?

Approximate emoji-to-word equivalency	Emoji-to-word disproportionality	Object / literal representation	Feeling/metaphoric representation
<p>he was mature 🧑</p> <p>he was mature, “I can be mature, I have a suit.”</p> <p>he got all of his homework done without showing them, He was very annoyed. 😞</p> <p>he got all of his homework done without showing them, he was very annoyed.</p> <p>with her friends since she had much more fun with them 😘</p> <p>with her friends since she had much more fun with them (excited).</p> <p>with her bestfriends 🐱</p> <p>with her bestfriends (her and her friend)</p> <p>with her friends because they made her happy. 😊</p> <p>with her friends because they make her happy.</p> <p>listen to me talk and be there for me 😊</p> <p>listen to me talk and be there for me (Calm).</p>	<p>didn't really care what other people thought 🧑</p> <p>wanted to go home and and spend time with her family.</p> <p>forgot to feed her dog 🐶</p> <p>went and bought herself a fish because why not?!</p> <p>he would be a king and have a beautiful queen by his side 😎</p> <p>he would be married to a very beautiful princess.</p> <p>😞 of 🚗 because she 🚫🚗</p> <p>think of a fast car because she never stops.</p> <p>understand my humor 😊👤</p> <p>is to understand my humor I make the best faces that make people die laughing</p>	<p>rushed home 🚗</p> <p>went and played video games 🎮</p> <p>went home to go to sleep 🛏</p> <p>went to the park to play 🏃</p> <p>ran home to play games 🏃🎮</p> <p>ran to his car 🏃🚗</p> <p>🏠🏃</p> <p>🐶</p> <p>how much work he was missing 📖</p> <p>she was able to talk to her friends 👯</p> <p>studying for her exam 📖</p> <p>🍔</p> <p>to eat 🍲</p> <p>hates 🥒</p> <p>never gave up on the sport she loved so much 🏐</p>	<p>he finished his chores 😞</p> <p>he had finished his homework 😞</p> <p>he was mature 🧑</p> <p>he hit the neighbor's dog 🐶</p> <p>boneless wings are just nuggets 🐶</p> <p>he could go out with his friends 😞</p> <p>he got all of his homework done without showing them, He was very annoyed. 😞</p> <p>he isn't lying 😞</p> <p>out with friends having fun 😊</p> <p>with her friends since she had much more fun with them 😘</p> <p>with her friends 🎸👯</p> <p>with her bestfriends 🐱</p> <p>on the lake 😊</p>

RQ1: What broad patterns of meaning emerge recurringly in the data gathered in this study?

Approximate emoji-to-word equivalency	Emoji-to-word disproportionality	Object / literal representation	Feeling/metaphoric representation
<p><i>listen to what I say</i> 🗣️ listen to what i say (listen closely)</p> <p><i>get to know me?</i> 🤔 get to know me.</p> <p><i>listen to what I say and not twist my words.</i> 🧐 listen to what I say and not twist my words.</p> <p><i>went to go get ice cream and shop</i> 🍦 went to go get ice cream and shop (vanilla ice cream).</p> <p><i>rushed home</i> 🚗 rushed home (driving fast)</p> <p><i>went and got food</i> 😊 went and got food</p> <p><i>ran to his car</i> 🏃 ran to his car.</p> <p><i>went to the park to play</i> 🏃 went to the park to play.</p> <p><i>what happens after death</i> 💀 what happens after death (death).</p>	<p><i>was ready to get home</i> 🏠, and play some video games 🎮 was ready to get home to my quaint little house and play some video games like, Minecraft or Black Ops.</p> <p><i>How can I make it a good</i> 😊 <i>one</i> 🤔?" "How can I make it the best life I've lived without questioning certain decisions?"</p> <p><i>the library</i> 📖 <i>because she never liked reading</i> 🤔 the library where students usually studied because she never liked reading, she thought it was boring.</p>	<p><i>finish school and got her degree</i> 🎓</p> <p><i>Nora never cheats on tests</i> 📝 .</p> <p>🚀🌑 🚗</p> <p><i>still went skydiving</i> 🪂</p> <p><i>broke her leg.</i> 🦵</p> <p><i>was</i> ⌚ <i>for</i> ⚽</p> <p><i>twisted her ankle and</i></p> <p><i>had to go see a doctor</i> 🩺</p> <p><i>fell into a cactus</i> 🌵</p> <p><i>spent \$400 on clothes</i> 🛍️</p> <p>🌴 🌍</p> <p><i>I'm breaking up with you</i> 💔</p> <p><i>there is</i> 🚫 FREE 🦀</p> <p><i>your grandma passed away this morning</i> 😭</p>	<p><i>alone in her bed</i> 😊</p> <p><i>at her friend's house</i> 👤</p> <p><i>with her friends because they made her happy.</i> 😊</p> <p><i>with her friends</i> 👤</p> <p><i>at the beach</i> 🏖️, <i>tanning</i> 🌴</p> <p><i>read my mind.</i> 📖🧠</p> <p>😬 of 📖 🚗 because she ❌ 🚗</p> <p><i>observe how I treat others</i> 😊</p> <p><i>listen to me talk and be there for me</i> 😊</p> <p><i>understand my humor</i> 😊🧠</p> <p><i>become friends with me</i> 👤</p> <p><i>listen to what I say</i> 🗣️</p> <p><i>control my temper</i> 😡</p> <p><i>get to know me?</i> 🤔</p> <p>👁️</p> <p><i>be quiet and listen</i> 🤫</p>

RQ1: What broad patterns of meaning emerge recurringly in the data gathered in this study?

Approximate emoji-to-word equivalency	Emoji-to-word disproportionality	Object / literal representation	Feeling/metaphoric representation
<p>why are we here? 😊 why are we here?</p> <p>what he was going to do after high school 🙋</p> <p>what he was going to do after high school</p> <p>what is in 🌌? what's out in space.</p> <p>what to do after high school 📖</p> <p>what to do after high school (books)</p> <p>if he would pass high school with all A's. 📖</p> <p>if he could pass high school with all A's.</p> <p>sitting at home doing nothing 🏠.</p> <p>sitting at home doing nothing (house).</p> <p>school 🏫 school</p> <p>about all the chores he had to do 🧹</p> <p>about all the chores he had to do (sweeping the house).</p> <p>he had an exam 📖 he had an exam (studying)</p>	<p>and remembered he forgot to do his homework 🙋, he knew he would be in deep trouble for sure 😞</p> <p>he forgot to do his homework which is due today, he knew he would be in deep trouble for sure because his grade would be lowered.</p> <p>not only being on her phone 🙋👁️, but and have a delicious meal 🍔 🍟 😊</p> <p>not only being on her phone and check up on a few messages but and have a delicious meal a burger and fries which she picked up before work, she knew it would be good.</p> <p>would always be happy 😊 😊.</p> <p>would always be happy, she was always smiling and laughing.</p>	<p>I took your answers from the test 📝</p> <p>your jokes are not funny 😞 they are just cringy 😞 and they don't make anyone laugh, but yourself 😞</p> <p>our bird died 🦜💀</p> <p>I'm not coming to school 😞</p> <p>the camera broke 📷</p> <p>what do you think you are doing wearing that outfit you got on? 😞</p> <p>he wants to end things with you ❤️</p> <p>🚲❌</p> <p>🙋</p> <p>we aren't friends anymore ❤️</p> <p>I can't be your friend anymore 🙋</p> <p>make more laws 📄</p> <p>fix prices of things 💵</p> <p>I would improve gas prices 📈</p>	<p>listen to what I say and not twist my words. 🙋</p> <p>took a nap 😴</p> <p>rushed home and jumped into bed 😴</p> <p>went and got food 🍔</p> <p>how do I do this? 😞</p> <p>what happens when we die? 🙋</p> <p>what happens after death 💀</p> <p>How can I make it a good 😊 one 😞?"</p> <p>finding spiritual happiness 🧘</p> <p>why are we here? 😞</p> <p>what he was going to do after high school 🙋</p> <p>🦠🦠</p> <p>why it's so confusing so he prayed 🙏</p> <p>at the gym. 🏋️</p> <p>a 🧹</p>

RQ1: What broad patterns of meaning emerge recurringly in the data gathered in this study?

Approximate emoji-to-word equivalency	Emoji-to-word disproportionality	Object / literal representation	Feeling/metaphoric representation
<p><i>he had to go to school.</i> 😞 he had to go to school</p> <p><i>he was late to school</i> 🕒 he was late to school</p> <p><i>how much work he was missing.</i> 📖 how much work he was missing.</p> <p><i>she was able to talk to her friends</i> 👯 she was able to talk to her friends (hanging out with others).</p> <p><i>studying for her exam</i> 📖 studying for her exam (studying)</p> <p><i>sleep time</i> 😴 sleeping!!!</p> <p><i>smoke break</i> 🚬 smoke break</p> <p><i>to eat</i> 🍲 to eat.</p> <p><i>never gave up on the sport she loved so much</i> 🏆 never gave up on the sport she loved so much (playing softball).</p>	<p><i>there is</i> 🚫🆓🦀 there is no free seafood buffet.</p> <p><i>your jokes are not funny</i> 😞 <i>they are just cringy</i> 😞 <i>and they don't make anyone laugh, but yourself</i> 😞 but your jokes are not funny I just have to sigh, they are just cringy, it makes me roll my eyes and they don't make anyone laugh, but yourself and it's just kind of sad.</p> <p><i>what do you think you are doing wearing that outfit you got on?</i> 😞 maybe don't wear that crazy outfit lol?!</p> <p><i>was</i> ⌚ <i>for</i> ⚽ was late for soccer practice.</p>	<p><i>improve school lunch</i> 🍔</p> <p><i>give everyone a car</i> 🚗</p> <p><i>raise minimum wage</i> 💰</p> <p><i>that he was gay</i> 🏳️‍🌈</p> <p><i>that she had forgot the birthday cake</i> 🍰</p> <p><i>she's pregnant</i> 🤰</p> <p><i>he got her pregnant</i> 🤰</p> <p>👩👩</p> <p>👩</p> <p><i>that he just got married to a monkey</i> 💍🐒</p> <p><i>the tooth fairy was real</i> 🦷🧚</p> <p>🐷 <i>could</i> 🗨️</p> <p><i>fairytale romance was real</i> 😞</p> <p><i>that finding nemo actually spoke</i> 🐟</p>	<p><i>curled up under a tree with a good book</i> 📖.</p> <p><i>sitting at home doing nothing</i> 🏠.</p> <p><i>the library</i> 📖 <i>because she never liked reading</i> 😞</p> <p><i>in a box</i> 📦.</p> <p><i>in her bathroom</i> 🚻</p> <p><i>the mall</i> 🛍️</p> <p><i>in a book store.</i> 📖</p> <p><i>school</i> 🏫</p> <p>🗺️</p> <p>🌲</p> <p><i>at work.</i> 👨‍💼</p> <p>❤️🥚</p> <p><i>he has school</i> 🏫</p> <p><i>he had to have company over</i> 😞</p> <p><i>about all the chores he had to do</i> 🧹</p>

RQ1: What broad patterns of meaning emerge recurringly in the data gathered in this study?

Approximate emoji-to-word equivalency	Emoji-to-word disproportionality	Object / literal representation	Feeling/metaphoric representation
<p><i>hates</i> 🥒 really hates pickles.</p> <p><i>was proud of her self</i> 😊 was proud of her self (feeling proud)</p> <p><i>never cheats on tests</i> 📖 never cheats on tests</p> <p><i>was still happy</i> 😊 was still happy.</p> <p><i>spent \$400 on clothes</i> 🛍️ spent \$400 on clothes</p> <p><i>had a very good day</i> 😊 had a very good day. (feeling good)</p> <p><i>was very sad</i> 😞 was very sad.</p> <p><i>I took your answers from the test</i> 📖 I took your answers from the test (paper and pencil to represent the test).</p> <p><i>I'm not coming to school</i> 😞 I'm not coming to school. (feeling sad)</p>	<p><i>twisted her ankle and had to go see a doctor</i> 🧑 twisted her ankle and had to go see a doctor (a doctor she had seen).</p> <p><i>made the funniest face</i> 😂, and everyone started to 🤪</p> <p><i>made the funniest face usually sticking her tongue out and crossing her eyes, and everyone started to die laughing.</i></p> <p>🏠 😊 make school fun again.</p> <p><i>ban all homework</i> 🙅 📖 and give people free money 🙅 📖 💰.</p> <p>I would ban all homework we would just push it all to the side and give people free money and hand out all the cash and coin people want.</p> <p><i>he</i> 🏠 📖 🚗 that he bought a car on his own.</p>	<p><i>there was a</i> 🧑 <i>that went to the</i> 🏠 <i>yard</i> 🏠 <i>and then saw a</i> 🧑 <i>and gave her a</i> 🧸 <i>and</i> 🧠</p> <p><i>he was a unicorn</i> 🦄</p> <p><i>Santa was real</i> 📺 <i>his mower blew up</i> 🚲</p> <p><i>he would be a king and have a beautiful queen by his side</i> 😎</p> <p><i>fairies were real</i> 🧚</p> <p>👁️ 🧑 🦎</p> <p>👑 <i>he was a part of a movie</i> 🎬</p> <p><i>he could be a two-pronged leaf</i> 🌱</p>	<p><i>and remembered he forgot to do his homework</i> 😞, <i>he knew he would be in deep trouble for sure</i> 😞</p> <p><i>remembered he has a funeral to attend</i> 📺 <i>he had an exam</i> 📖</p> <p>📺</p> <p><i>he had to go to school.</i> 😞 <i>he was late to school</i> ⌚</p> <p><i>he doesn't have school</i> 😊</p> <p><i>was busy studying</i> 🧐</p> <p><i>is still my best friend</i> 😊</p> <p><i>would always be happy</i> 😊 😊</p> <p><i>was proud of her self</i> 😊</p> <p><i>was still sad</i> 😞</p> <p><i>didn't really care what other people thought</i> 🧑</p> <p><i>was still happy</i> 😊</p>

RQ1: What broad patterns of meaning emerge recurringly in the data gathered in this study?

Approximate emoji-to-word equivalency	Emoji-to-word disproportionality	Object / literal representation	Feeling/metaphoric representation
<p><i>we aren't friends anymore</i> 📉 we aren't friends anymore.</p> <p><i>fix prices of things</i> 💰 fix prices of things (money represents lowering prices)</p> <p><i>improve school lunch</i> 🍔 improve school lunch (having good food)</p> <p><i>raise minimum wage</i> 💰 I would raise minimum wage</p> <p><i>that she had forgot the birthday cake</i> 🎂 that she had forgot the birthday cake (the birthday cake she never bought).</p> <p><i>he is going to college</i> 🎓 he is going to college (feeling smart)</p> <p><i>that she was prego...</i> 🤰 that she was prego</p> <p><i>he got her pregnant</i> 🤰 he got her pregnant</p>	<p><i>she believed in aliens</i> 👽 🙌 👁️ she believed in aliens and would always go outside to interact with them, she was absolutely amazed.</p> <p><i>there was a ghost that went to the graveyard and then saw a zombie and gave her a teddybear and brains as a gift.</i> 👻 🏠 🧟 🧸 🧠</p> <p>👁️ look at me when I'm talking to you.</p> <p>📍 in a different country.</p> <p>📍 He's not in Kansas anymore.</p> <p>🏖️ wanted to go to the beach.</p>		<p><i>party time</i> 🎉</p> <p>🍕 ⌚</p> <p><i>social hour</i> 🥴</p> <p><i>not only being on her phone</i> 📱 👁️, <i>but and have a delicious meal</i> 🍔 🍷 🤤</p> <p><i>she only had a few minutes to eat</i> ⌚</p> <p><i>anxiety about getting a test grade back</i> 😬</p> <p><i>studying for her exam</i> 📖</p> <p><i>sleep time</i> 😴</p> <p><i>smoke break</i> 🚬</p> <p>🕒 📱</p> <p><i>she could eat food</i> 🍴</p> <p><i>broke her leg</i> 🦵</p> <p><i>made the funniest face</i> 😜, <i>and everyone started to</i> 🤪</p> <p><i>had a very good day</i> 😄</p>

RQ1: What broad patterns of meaning emerge recurrently in the data gathered in this study?

Approximate emoji-to-word equivalency	Emoji-to-word disproportionality	Object / literal representation	Feeling/metaphoric representation
<p><i>he was a part of a movie</i> 🎬 he was a part of a movie.</p> <p><i>that finding nemo actually spoke</i> 🐟 that finding nemo actually spoke (fish represent nemo).</p> <p><i>Santa was real</i> 🎁 Santa was real (presents)</p> <p><i>fairies were real</i> 🧚 fairies were real</p> <p><i>she</i> 👁️👁️📺 <i>her</i> 🛏️ <i>and it</i> ✅ <i>there</i> She looked under her bed and it was there.</p> <p><i>she sighed</i> 😞, <i>“I forgot it again... this is so lame.”</i> 😞 she sighed, “I forgot it again..., WHY! this is so lame. Why did this have to happen”</p> <p><i>he could</i> 🏗️ <i>a</i> 🏠 <i>until</i> 🧑🏰 he could build houses until he became a construction worker.</p> <p>😴 <i>in</i> 🛏️ sleeping in bed.</p>	<p>👩 he was pregnant.</p> <p>💀💀😞 I can't believe I lost my phone again.</p> <p>😡🧑🎮 he should be allowed to play videogames longer.</p> <p>😍😍😞 at her boyfriend's house.</p> <p>🧬🦠 what was the secret to the universe.</p> <p>❤️🥚 how much he loves chickens.</p> <p>🕒📱 she could spend more time on her phone instead of not working.</p> <p>🚀🌕 wanted to go to the moon.</p> <p>🚲❌ I don't wanna go ride bikes.</p>		<p><i>was joyful about graduation being near</i> 😊 <i>forgot to feed her dog</i> 😞 <i>was very sad</i> 😞 <i>laughed at a serious conversation</i> 😂😞 <i>ban all homework</i> 🙅📄 <i>and give people free money</i> 😊👉 💰💰. <i>fix America because the one we have currently is dumber than my dog!!</i> 😞 🌍🏠🗳️🗳️🗳️ <i>I would love it</i> ❤️ 🏠😞 <i>make school lunches free</i> 😊 <i>he</i> 🏠📄🚗 <i>that she was getting married</i> 🤰 <i>she believed in aliens</i> 😞👉👁️</p>

RQ1: What broad patterns of meaning emerge recurringly in the data gathered in this study?

Approximate emoji-to-word equivalency	Emoji-to-word disproportionality	Object / literal representation	Feeling/metaphoric representation
<p><i>with her friends</i> 🍷👯</p> <p>with her friends, “We can have fun, get our nails done and go dancing.</p> <p><i>at work.</i> 👤</p> <p>at work.</p> <p><i>he wants to end things with you</i> 💔</p> <p>he wants to end things with you</p> <p><i>I would love it</i> ❤️</p> <p>I would love it.</p> <p>🐷 <i>could</i> 🦋</p> <p>that pigs could fly.</p> <p>😡</p> <p>she was very pissed off.</p> <p>🍺</p> <p>Drinking</p> <p>🚪🏃</p> <p>ran out the doors.</p> <p>🍕🕒</p> <p>its pizza time.</p> <p>👩🤰</p> <p>she was pregnant.</p>	<p>🌐🗨️📺🏠🔪</p> <p>blow random stuff up.</p> <p>👁️🔍🦖</p> <p>he could see dinosaurs.</p>		<p><i>he is going to college</i> 🤓</p> <p><i>that she was getting married</i> 💍</p> <p><i>that she was prego...</i> 🤰</p>

Research Question 2 Matrix Assessment

This section considers RQ2 (What evidence of shared meaning among participants relative to specific emojis is reflected in the data gathered in this study?) in terms of four thematic categories:

- *Shared meaning* – Indications that seem to specifically suggest evidence of shared meaning among participants, in terms of their usage of common emojis for similar meanings in construction of multimodal messages.

- *Not shared meaning* – Indications that seem to specifically suggest evidence of a lack of shared meaning among participants, in terms of their usage of different emojis for similar meanings in construction of multimodal messages.

- *Clarification by words-only exercise* – multimodal messages in which questions that readers could potentially have – as to some specific aspect of the intended meaning – that were clarified by the student-participant's words-only translation of the message on that part of the exercises. (These would be questions reasonably raised by the elements of the multimodal construction of the message specifically as to the intended meaning, not exploratory questions beyond those parameters that might occur to readers simply out of curiosity generated by the narrative involved in the message.)

- *Lack of clarification by words-only exercise* – multimodal messages in which questions that readers could potentially have – as to some specific aspect of the intended meaning – that were not clarified by the student-participant's words-only translation of the message on that part of the exercises.

Considering those columns of the matrix that indicate shared or not-shared meaning, there were roughly twice as many instances of shared meaning specifically indicated in the data

from the multimodal exercises as there were instances of lack of shared meaning. As with the other data in this qualitative study, these findings cannot be considered generalizable to broader populations. But they suggest that among the specific group of high-school seniors who participated in this study, a number of emojis have a relatively high level of shared meaning. And for the particular emojis highlighted in the matrix below for this research question, it could suggest potentially shared meaning beyond this study's participants.

The other columns of the matrix produced some of the strongest indications reflected in all of this segment of the data assessment. There were more than ten times as many instances that reasonably could be categorized as multimodal messages in which potential readers' questions were clarified by the student-participant's words-only translation as there were instances when such questions were not clarified by the words-only translation.

It was part of the pedagogical design of that exercise to encourage students – primarily through the cognitive process of translating their multimodal messages into words-only – to consider at some level whether their multimodal messages might leave questions in readers' minds. And then ideally that process would lead them to provide clarifying meaning through their words-only translations. The fact that it may well have done that in so many more of the instances highlighted below than not suggests the potential for the exercise to help students think through the multimodal-message construction process more deeply.

At the same time, it must be noted that overall, the student participants were more likely to construct multimodal messages in the first place that were relatively modest in terms of semantic complexity – rather than more complex messages with the potential in theory to be more likely to raise questions in readers' minds. That it did not produce even more of such instances may have been due to factors noted earlier in this dissertation that potentially affected

the degree of effort by some student participants regarding other aspects of these exercises – given that the participants were potentially distracted seniors almost finished with high school, whose voluntary work on these exercises would not affect their grade in the class and involved working with a graduate-student researcher for a relatively short time.

Nevertheless, as discussed in extensive detail in these three chapters of analysis, the data that were gathered for this study provide encouraging indications that exercises such as these, in which students create multimodal messages and then translate them into words have the potential to help heighten students’ consciousness of multimodal communication and its role in potentially developing more effective traditional language skills. That potential could be strengthened in such classroom implementation of exercises like these if part of the teacher’s efforts included working with students closely in the early stages of the unit to help them consider how they could construct more complex multimodal messages – and then later similarly more actively help students consider how they could explore possible questions their messages might have for readers.

RQ2: What evidence of shared meaning among participants relative to specific emojis is reflected in the data gathered in this study?

Shared meaning	Not shared meaning	Clarification by words-only exercise	Lack of clarification by words-only exercise
<p>Multiple responses used the “😬” to help construct meaning related to anxiety.</p> <p>Multiple uses of similar emojis (“😬”, “😬”) for meaning related to anger.</p> <p>Multiple uses of types of smiley-face emojis (“😊”, “😄”) to help construct meaning related to better understanding.</p> <p>Multiple uses of emojis related to video game playing utilized for related meaning, indicating some awareness on part of participants as to how well represented in the current set of emojis available to users: “played 🎮;” “was ready to get home 🏠 and play some video games 🎮;” “went and played video games 🎮;” “ran home to play games 🏃🎮.”</p>	<p>Differing emojis “😬,” “😬,” and “😬” were among those also used to help construct meaning related to anxiety.</p> <p>Differing emojis “😬,” “😬,” and “😬” were among those used to help construct meaning related to completion of assigned task.</p> <p>Use of the same emoji (“😬”) to construct meaning related to both finishing chores and not lying.</p> <p>Differing emojis “😬” and “💀” were among those also used to help construct meaning related to death.</p> <p>Differing emojis “📖,” “🎮,” and “👤” were among those also used to help construct meaning related to books/reading.</p>	<p><i>he could go out with his friends 😬</i> he could go out with his friends and be okay! [Clarified possible questions concerning the meaning of the expression-less face emoji, for example.]</p> <p><i>played 🎮</i> went home to play video games. [Clarified more fully the narrative action intended to be represented.]</p> <p><i>what is in 🌌?</i> what’s out in space. [Clarified that the emoji used was referencing space rather than perhaps the night, for example.]</p> <p><i>a 🏌️</i> at a golf course. [Clarified possible questions concerning an emoji that for many readers could represent a stick used in a sport other than golf, for example.]</p>	<p><i>in a book store. 🤠</i> in a bookstore. [The meaning of the smiling cowboy-hat emoji remains potentially unclear.]</p> <p><i>I’m not coming to school 😞</i> I’m not coming to school. (feeling sad) [The meaning of the crying emoji remains potentially unclear.]</p>





RQ2: What evidence of shared meaning among participants relative to specific emojis is reflected in the data gathered in this study?

Shared meaning	Not shared meaning	Clarification by words-only exercise	Lack of clarification by words-only exercise
<p>Multiple responses used the “😴” emoji to help construct meaning related to sleep.</p> <p>Multiple responses used the “📖” emoji to help construct meaning related to school.</p> <p>Multiple responses used the “🕒” emoji to help construct meaning related to time.</p> <p>Multiple responses used the “🍔” emoji to help construct meaning related to meals/food.</p> <p>Multiple uses of types of smiley-face emojis (“😄, 😊, 😁, 😂”) to help construct meaning related to happiness.</p> <p>Multiple responses used the “😞” emoji to help construct meaning related to sadness.</p>	<p>Differing emojis “👤,” “😭,” and “😁” were among those also used to help construct meaning related to school.</p>	<p><i>hates</i> 🥒 really hates pickles. [Clarified possible question as to whether the emoji could represent a cucumber, for example.]</p> <p><i>she</i> 👁️👁️📧 <i>her</i> 🛏️ <i>and it</i> ✅ <i>there</i> She looked under her bed and it was there. [Clarified possible questions concerning the exact meaning of that combination of emojis.]</p> <p>😞 <i>of</i> 📖 🚗 <i>because she</i> ❌ think of a fast car because she never stops. [Clarified possible questions concerning the exact meaning of that combination of emojis.]</p> <p><i>he</i> 💰 📖 🚗 that he bought a car on his own. [Clarified possible questions concerning the exact meaning of that combination of emojis.]</p>	





RQ2: What evidence of shared meaning among participants relative to specific emojis is reflected in the data gathered in this study?

Shared meaning	Not shared meaning	Clarification by words-only exercise	Lack of clarification by words-only exercise
<p>Multiple responses used the “❤️” emoji to help construct meaning related to ending a friendship or romantic relationship.</p> <p>Multiple responses used the “💰” emoji to help construct meaning related to money, prices, wages.</p> <p>Multiple responses used the “👶” emoji to help construct meaning related to pregnancy.</p> <p>Multiple responses used the “🏃” emoji to help construct meaning related to running.</p>		<p><i>made the funniest face 😄, and everyone started to 🤪</i></p> <p>made the funniest face usually sticking her tongue out and crossing her eyes, and everyone started to die laughing. [Clarified possible question as to the meaning of the skull emoji in relation to the two humorous emojis.]</p> <p><i>🐷 could 🦋</i></p> <p>that pigs could fly. [Clarified possible question as to the meaning of the wing emoji in relation to the pig emoji.]</p> <p>👁️</p> <p>look at me when I’m talking to you. [Clarified by elaborating upon the meaning of that emoji in this instance.]</p> <p>🇯🇵</p> <p>in a different country. [Clarified whether that emoji was referencing specifically Japan in that instance.]</p>	




RQ2: What evidence of shared meaning among participants relative to specific emojis is reflected in the data gathered in this study?

Shared meaning	Not shared meaning	Clarification by words-only exercise	Lack of clarification by words-only exercise
		<p> wanted to go to the beach. [Clarified by elaborating upon the meaning of that emoji in this instance.]</p> <p> I can't believe I lost my phone again. [Clarified possible questions concerning the exact meaning of that combination of emojis.]</p> <p> he should be allowed to play videogames longer. [Clarified possible questions concerning the exact meaning of that combination of emojis.]</p> <p> at her boyfriend's house. [Clarified possible questions concerning the exact meaning of that combination of emojis.]</p>	

RQ2: What evidence of shared meaning among participants relative to specific emojis is reflected in the data gathered in this study?

Shared meaning	Not shared meaning	Clarification by words-only exercise	Lack of clarification by words-only exercise
		<p> what was the secret to the universe. [Clarified possible questions concerning the exact meaning of that combination of emojis.]</p> <p> how much he loves chickens. [Clarified possible questions concerning the exact meaning of that combination of emojis.]</p> <p> she could spend more time on her phone instead of not working. [Clarified possible questions concerning the exact meaning of that combination of emojis.]</p> <p> wanted to go to the moon. [Clarified possible questions concerning the exact meaning of that combination of emojis.]</p>	

RQ2: What evidence of shared meaning among participants relative to specific emojis is reflected in the data gathered in this study?

Shared meaning	Not shared meaning	Clarification by words-only exercise	Lack of clarification by words-only exercise
		<p> I don't wanna go ride bikes. [Clarified possible questions concerning the exact meaning of that combination of emojis.]</p> <p> blow random stuff up. [Clarified possible questions concerning the exact meaning of that combination of emojis.]</p> <p> he could see dinosaurs. [Clarified possible questions concerning the exact meaning of that combination of emojis.]</p>	

Research Question 3 Matrix Assessment

This section considers RQ3 (What commonalities and contrasts emerge in the data gathered in this study?) in terms of four thematic categories:

- *Single emoji with words* – multimodal messages that were constructed by using only one emoji and any number of words.
- *Multiple emojis with words* – multimodal messages that were constructed by using more than one emoji and any number of words.
- *Single emoji without words* – multimodal messages that were constructed by using only one emoji and zero words.
- *Multiple emojis without words* – multimodal messages that were constructed by using more than one emoji and zero words.

So, the categorization for this matrix involved a more objective categorization process to determine the number of emojis utilized in each multimodal message construction and whether words were included or not. Therefore, it was quite clear that the greatest commonality and also the least subjectively determined one is the fact that students most often chose to utilize a single emoji with some number of words in their multimodal construction of meaning. There were roughly three times as many of those types of multimodal messages than there were the second most frequent choice made by students – utilizing multiple emojis with some number of words.

Perhaps the single most determining factor in that being the most common choice was the fact that it was consistent with the instructions for that part of the exercise: “Complete the prompts below by adding a combination of words and emojis for each one.” However, that doesn’t explain why it was so much more common for the participants to use a single emoji with words than it was to use multiple emojis with words. It’s undeniable that in most cases it was

simply easier to meet the minimum requirement of the instructions to use a single emoji with words than to use multiple emojis with words. Beyond that though, based on the comments made in different ways in the course of their participation in this study, it is likely that a single emoji with some number of words also represents the most common way that the students utilize emojis and words in their own text messaging and social-media message posting.

Less common than any number of emojis combined with any number of words in the students' work on the multimodal exercise for this study were messages constructed in response to the narrative prompts provided that included one or more emojis but zero words. Both of those choices occurred with roughly the same frequency, but one that was less than one third as common as multiple emojis with words – less than one-tenth as common as single emojis with words. (As discussed in Chapter Five, the use of emojis without words is still considered a form of multimodal composing, since image and color have been discussed as contributing modes in the meaning-making process (Kress, 2010, p. 1).

As the discussion above reflects, it's reasonable to consider those commonalities and contrasts reflect students for the most part following instructions, to some extent rationally finding a way to do that with relatively less effort than the second most common choice, and also to some extent maintaining multimodal practices in these exercises that were similar to their own text-messaging and social-media message posting practices.

Constructively, being aware of those commonalities and contrasts offers possible ways to potentially improve such exercises if used as part of course curriculum. The instructions could, for example, ask the students to complete the prompts by “adding a combination of multiple words and multiple emojis.” That could have the benefit of potentially producing relatively more complex and meaning-rich multimodal messages. Another possibility could be to offer a sliding

scale of points based on how many emojis were utilized in each multimodal message. In some cases, that could produce less effective or coherent multimodal messages if students tried to earn more points simply by arbitrarily inserting as many emojis into a group of words as possible, without making the effort to achieve comprehensible messaging. However, it could also incentivize at least some students to produce effective messaging constructed with greater numbers of emojis.

RQ3: What commonalities and contrasts emerge in the data gathered in this study?

Single emoji with words	Multiple emojis with words	Single emoji without words	Multiple emojis without words
<p>she freaked out 😬</p> <p>she looked everywhere she had it last and she was happy when she found it 😊.</p> <p>she was sad about it 😞.</p> <p>she freaked out 😬</p> <p>Dang she lost her phone again 😂</p> <p>she began to freak out 😊</p> <p>and she doesn't remember where she put it 😞.</p> <p>she was very mad. 😡</p> <p>she sighed with a passive aggressive tone 😞</p> <p>he made a good grade on his test 📄</p> <p>he needed money 💰</p> <p>to let him go see the movie 🎬</p> <p>he finished his chores 😞</p>	<p>she 👁️👁️👉 her 🏠 and it ✅ there</p> <p>she froze 😬. Aubrey started to panic 😬.</p> <p>she sighed 😞, "I forgot it again... this is so lame. 😞"</p> <p>basketball 🏀 was better than soccer ⚽</p> <p>he could 🏗️ a 🏠 until 👷👉👷</p> <p>😞 in 🏠</p> <p>with her friends 🎉</p> <p>at the beach 🩴, tanning 🏖️</p> <p>read my mind. 📖🧠</p> <p>😞 of 📖🚗 because she ❌🚗</p> <p>understand my humor 😂👤</p> <p>was ready to get home 🏠, and play some video games 🎮</p> <p>ran home to play games 🏃🎮</p>	<p>👤</p> <p>🍺</p> <p>👁️</p> <p>🗺️</p> <p>🌲</p> <p>🌅</p> <p>🚗</p> <p>🏖️</p> <p>🌍</p> <p>👤</p> <p>🗑️</p> <p>👤</p> <p>👤</p> <p>👤</p>	<p>👤👤😞</p> <p>😡👤🎮</p> <p>😊😞😞</p> <p>🏠🏃</p> <p>🧬🦠</p> <p>❤️🥚</p> <p>🐕</p> <p>🕒📱</p> <p>🍕🕒</p> <p>🚀👤</p> <p>🚲❌</p> <p>👤🏠🗺️🏠🚗</p> <p>👤👤</p> <p>👁️👉🦖</p>

RQ3: What commonalities and contrasts emerge in the data gathered in this study?

Single emoji with words	Multiple emojis with words	Single emoji without words	Multiple emojis without words
<p>he had finished his homework 😞</p> <p>he was mature 🧑</p> <p>he hit the neighbor's dog 🐕</p> <p>boneless wings are just nuggets 🐔</p> <p>he could go out with his friends 😊</p> <p>he got all of his homework done without showing them, He was very annoyed. 😞</p> <p>he isn't lying 😊</p> <p>out with friends having fun 😊</p> <p>with her friends since she had much more fun with them 😊</p> <p>with her bestfriends 🧑</p> <p>on the lake 😊</p> <p>working out 🏋️</p>	<p>How can I make it a good 🧑 one 😊?"</p> <p>why it's so confusing so he prayed 😊🙏</p> <p>at work. 🧑</p> <p>the library 📖</p> <p>because she never liked reading 😞</p> <p>the blackbird he saw yesterday morning. 🐦</p> <p>and remembered he forgot to do his homework 🧑, he knew he would be in deep trouble for sure 😞</p> <p>remembered he has a funeral to attend 🧑</p> <p>not only being on her phone 📱👁️, but and have a delicious meal 🍔🍟😞</p> <p>would always be happy 😊😊.</p> <p>there is 🚫FREE🦀</p>		

RQ3: What commonalities and contrasts emerge in the data gathered in this study?

Single emoji with words	Multiple emojis with words	Single emoji without words	Multiple emojis without words
<p>alone in her bed 😊</p> <p>at her friend's house 👤</p> <p>with her friends because they made her happy. 😊</p> <p>with her friends 👤</p> <p>observe how I treat others 😊</p> <p>listen to me talk and be there for me 😊</p> <p>become friends with me 👤</p> <p>listen to what I say 🙄</p> <p>control my temper 😡</p> <p>get to know me? 🤔</p> <p>be quiet and listen 🤫</p> <p>listen to what I say and not twist my words. 🙄</p> <p>took a nap 😴</p> <p>played 🎮</p>	<p>your jokes are not funny 😞 they are just cringy 😞 and they don't make anyone laugh, but yourself 😞</p> <p>our bird died 🦜💀</p> <p>what do you think you are doing wearing that outfit you got on? 😞</p> <p>he wants to end things with you 💔</p> <p>was ⏳ for ⚽</p> <p>twisted her ankle and had to go see a doctor 🩺</p> <p>made the funniest face 😂, and everyone started to 🤡</p> <p>laughed at a serious conversation 😂😞</p> <p>🏠 😊</p> <p>ban all homework 🙅👉📝 and give people free money 😊👉💵💰.</p>		

RQ3: What commonalities and contrasts emerge in the data gathered in this study?

Single emoji with words	Multiple emojis with words	Single emoji without words	Multiple emojis without words
<p>rushed home and jumped into bed 😊</p> <p>went to go get ice cream and shop 🍦</p> <p>ran to get on the bus 🏃</p> <p>rushed home 🚗</p> <p>went and played video games 🎮</p> <p>went and got food 😊</p> <p>ran to his car 🏃</p> <p>went home to go to sleep 🛏</p> <p>went to the park to play 🏃</p> <p>how do I do this? 😞</p> <p>what happens when we die? 🤔</p> <p>what happens after death 💀</p> <p>finding spiritual happiness 🧘</p> <p>buy that expensive 💎</p>	<p>I would love it ❤️</p> <p>he 🗑️ 📖 🚗</p> <p>she believed in aliens 🤔 🖐️ 👽</p> <p>that he just got married to a monkey 💍 🐵</p> <p>the tooth fairy was real 🦷 🌸</p> <p>could 🐷 🗨️</p> <p>there was a 👻 that went to the 🪦 yard 🏠 and then saw a 🧛 and gave her a 🧸 and 🧠</p>		

RQ3: What commonalities and contrasts emerge in the data gathered in this study?

Single emoji with words	Multiple emojis with words	Single emoji without words	Multiple emojis without words
<p><i>why are we here?</i> 😊</p> <p><i>what he was going to do after high school</i> 🙋</p> <p><i>what is in</i> 📺?</p> <p><i>what to do after high school</i> 📖</p> <p><i>if he would pass high school with all A's.</i> 📖</p> <p><i>at the gym.</i> 🏋️</p> <p><i>a</i> 🎯</p> <p><i>curled up under a tree with a good book</i> 📖.</p> <p><i>sitting at home doing nothing</i> 🏠.</p> <p><i>in a box</i> 📦.</p> <p><i>in her bathroom</i> 🚻</p> <p><i>the mall</i> 🛍️</p> <p><i>in a book store.</i> 📖</p> <p><i>school</i> 🏫</p>			

RQ3: What commonalities and contrasts emerge in the data gathered in this study?

Single emoji with words	Multiple emojis with words	Single emoji without words	Multiple emojis without words
<p><i>the gym</i> 🏊</p> <p><i>he has school</i> 🎒</p> <p><i>about all the chores he had to do</i> 🧹</p> <p><i>he had an exam</i> 📖</p> <p><i>he had to have company over</i> 😞</p> <p><i>he had to go to school.</i> 😞</p> <p><i>he was late to school</i> ⌚</p> <p><i>how much work he was missing.</i> 📁</p> <p><i>he doesn't have school</i> 😞</p> <p><i>social hour</i> 🥳</p> <p><i>party time</i> 🎉</p> <p><i>she was able to talk to her friends</i> 👧👦</p> <p><i>she only had a few minutes to eat</i> ⌚</p> <p><i>studying for her exam</i> 📖</p>			

RQ3: What commonalities and contrasts emerge in the data gathered in this study?

Single emoji with words	Multiple emojis with words	Single emoji without words	Multiple emojis without words
<p><i>anxiety about getting a test grade back</i> 😬</p> <p><i>sleep time</i> 😊</p> <p><i>smoke break</i> 🚬</p> <p>🍔</p> <p><i>to eat</i> 🍲</p> <p><i>she could eat food</i> 😊</p> <p><i>never gave up on the sport she loved so much</i> 🏆</p> <p><i>was busy studying</i> 🧐</p> <p><i>hates</i> 🥒</p> <p><i>is still my best friend</i> 😊</p> <p><i>finish school and got her degree</i> 🎓</p> <p><i>was proud of her self</i> 😊</p> <p><i>was still sad</i> 😞</p>			

RQ3: What commonalities and contrasts emerge in the data gathered in this study?

Single emoji with words	Multiple emojis with words	Single emoji without words	Multiple emojis without words
<p><i>was proud of her self</i> 😊</p> <p><i>didn't really care what other people thought</i> 🙄</p> <p><i>Nora never cheats on tests</i> 📝</p> <p><i>was still happy</i> 😄</p> <p><i>still went skydiving</i> 🪂</p> <p><i>broke her leg.</i> 🦵</p> <p><i>fell into a cactus</i> 🌵</p> <p><i>spent \$400 on clothes</i> 👕</p> <p><i>broke her leg</i> 🦵</p> <p><i>had a very good day</i> 😄</p> <p><i>was joyful about graduation being near</i> 😄</p> <p><i>forgot to feed her dog</i> 🐕</p> <p><i>was very sad</i> 😞</p>			

RQ3: What commonalities and contrasts emerge in the data gathered in this study?

Single emoji with words	Multiple emojis with words	Single emoji without words	Multiple emojis without words
<p><i>I'm breaking up with you</i> 💔</p> <p><i>your grandma passed away this morning</i> 😭</p> <p><i>I took your answers from the test</i> 📝</p> <p><i>I'm not coming to school</i> 😞</p> <p><i>the camera broke</i> 📷</p> <p><i>we aren't friends anymore</i> 💔</p> <p><i>I can't be your friend anymore</i> 🙄</p> <p><i>make more laws</i> 🗳️</p> <p><i>make school lunches free</i> 😊</p> <p><i>fix prices of things</i> 💰</p> <p><i>I would improve gas prices</i> 📈</p> <p><i>improve school lunch</i> 🍔</p> <p><i>give everyone a car</i> 🚗</p>			

RQ3: What commonalities and contrasts emerge in the data gathered in this study?

Single emoji with words	Multiple emojis with words	Single emoji without words	Multiple emojis without words
<p><i>fix America because the one we have currently is dumber than my dog!!</i> 🙄</p> <p><i>raise minimum wage</i> 🇺🇸</p> <p><i>that he was gay</i> 🏳️‍🌈</p> <p><i>that she was getting married</i> 💍</p> <p><i>that she had forgot the birthday cake</i> 🎂</p> <p><i>she's pregnant</i> 🤰</p> <p><i>he is going to college</i> 🎓</p> <p><i>that she was getting married</i> 💍</p> <p><i>that she was prego...</i> 🤰</p> <p><i>he got her pregnant</i> 🤰</p> <p><i>he was a part of a movie</i> 🎬</p> <p><i>fairytale romance was real</i> 😞</p> <p><i>that finding nemo actually spoke</i> 🐟</p>			

RQ3: What commonalities and contrasts emerge in the data gathered in this study?

Single emoji with words	Multiple emojis with words	Single emoji without words	Multiple emojis without words
<p><i>he was a unicorn</i> 🦄</p> <p><i>Santa was real</i> 📺</p> <p><i>his mower blew up</i> 🚜</p> <p><i>he would be a king and have a beautiful queen by his side</i> 😎</p> <p><i>fairies were real</i> 🧚‍♀️</p> <p><i>he could be a two- pronged leaf</i> 🌿</p>			

Research Question 4 Matrix Assessment

This section considers RQ4 (What insights relevant to multimodal meaning-making can be developed from the data gathered in this study?) in terms of four thematic categories:

- *Relatively more modal synergizing* – The degree to which the multimodal message construction reflected relatively more integration of multiple modes so as to synergize them with each other toward a higher level of meaning – beyond, for example, the minimally synergized construction of an emoji placed at the end of a phrase or sentence without it adding additional meaning to the words.

- *Relatively less modal synergizing* – The degree to which the multimodal message construction reflected relatively less integration of multiple modes that could synergize them with each other toward a higher level of meaning – at or below the minimal level of synergized construction involving an emoji placed at the end of a phrase or sentence without it adding additional meaning to the words.

- *Relatively clear meaning-construction* – Whether a reasonable reader could feel relatively confident that she or he had understood the intended meaning of the multimodal message. (As discussed above, qualitative assessments like these necessarily required the researcher as research instrument to make potentially subjective determinations, similar to the way a classroom teacher would necessarily have to make potentially subjective determinations in assessing some elements of a students' work on some curricular exercises.)

- *Potentially unclear meaning-construction* – Whether a reasonable reader could be relatively unsure that she or he had understood the intended meaning of the multimodal message.

Based on those standards, as the columns of the matrix indicate, roughly half of all the messages constructed were assessed as reflecting relatively more modal synergizing, with the

other half reflecting relatively less modal synergizing. That suggests that overall, this group of student participants were relatively strong at synergizing modes to achieve a higher level of meaning through the multimodal construction. But it also suggests considerable potential remained to work with students to help more of them improve at the synergizing of modes in such a way.

As the other columns of the matrix indicate, close to nine times as many of all the messages constructed were assessed as achieving relatively clear meaning construction as were those assessed as relatively unclear – in terms of whether a reasonable reader could feel relatively confident or unsure that she or he had understood the intended meaning of the multimodal message. In and of itself, that finding can be considered a relatively positive one, in that it suggests the students who participated in this study potentially were skilled at making the meaning of their multimodal messages clear.

However, that must be qualified at least to some extent, given that – as noted above – the student participants were more likely to construct multimodal messages in the first place that were relatively modest in terms of semantic complexity – and thus also potentially less likely to be unclear in their meaning. Nevertheless, when one factors in all the findings indicated by this matrix, on balance the indications are positive regarding students' evident and potential multimodal skills. That is reflected in the fact that, even though roughly half all the messages constructed were assessed as reflecting relatively more modal synergizing than a minimum standard, overall, the messages still achieved relatively clear meaning construction by roughly a nine-to-one ratio. All those messages with a higher level of modal synergizing because of their relatively great complexity theoretically could have pulled down the rate of relatively clear meaning construction.

RQ4: What insights relevant to multimodal meaning-making can be developed from the data gathered in this study?

Relatively more modal synergizing	Relatively less modal synergizing	Relatively clear meaning-construction	Potentially unclear meaning-construction
<p>she 🙄👉 her 🛏️ and it ✅ there</p> <p>she froze 😬. Aubrey started to panic 😨.</p> <p>she sighed 😞, "I forgot it again... this is so lame. 😞"</p> <p>👤👤👤</p> <p>basketball 🏀 was better than soccer ⚽</p> <p>he could 🏗️ a 🏠 until 🧑🏠👉🧑🏠</p> <p>😡🧑🎮</p> <p>😬 in 🛏️</p> <p>with her friends 🎨👤👤</p> <p>at the beach 🩴, tanning 🌴</p> <p>out with friends having fun 😄</p> <p>with her friends since she had much more fun with them 😞</p> <p>with her bestfriends 🐱🐱</p>	<p>she freaked out 😨</p> <p>she looked everywhere she had it last and she was happy when she found it 😊.</p> <p>she was sad about it 😞.</p> <p>she freaked out 😨</p> <p>Dang she lost her phone again 😂</p> <p>she began to freak out 😨</p> <p>and she doesn't remember where she put it 😞.</p> <p>she was very mad. 😡</p> <p>she sighed with a passive aggressive tone 😞</p> <p>😡</p> <p>he made a good grade on his test 📄</p> <p>he needed money 💰</p>	<p>she 🙄👉 her 🛏️ and it ✅ there</p> <p>she froze 😬. Aubrey started to panic 😨.</p> <p>she sighed 😞, "I forgot it again... this is so lame. 😞"</p> <p>basketball 🏀 was better than soccer ⚽</p> <p>😬 in 🛏️</p> <p>with her friends 🎨👤👤</p> <p>at the beach 🩴, tanning 🌴</p> <p>out with friends having fun 😄</p> <p>with her friends since she had much more fun with them 😞</p> <p>with her bestfriends 🐱🐱</p> <p>on the lake 😊</p> <p>working out 🏋️</p> <p>alone in her bed 😊</p> <p>at her friend's house 🧑🏠</p>	<p>👤👤👤</p> <p>he could 🏗️ a 🏠 until 🧑🏠👉🧑🏠</p> <p>😡🧑🎮</p> <p>😬 of 📄 🚗 because she ❌🚗</p> <p>🧬🦠</p> <p>a 🍷</p> <p>in a book store. 📖</p> <p>❤️ 🥚</p> <p>🐶</p> <p>🕒 📱</p> <p>🚀 🌑</p> <p>🚲 ❌</p> <p>🏠 😊</p> <p>🍎 🏯 🏠 🚗</p> <p>👤👉🧑🏠👤</p> <p>👤</p> <p>get to know me? 😊</p> <p>👁️</p>

RQ4: What insights relevant to multimodal meaning-making can be developed from the data gathered in this study?

Relatively more modal synergizing	Relatively less modal synergizing	Relatively clear meaning-construction	Potentially unclear meaning-construction
<p>on the lake 😊</p> <p>working out 🏋️</p> <p>alone in her bed 😊</p> <p>at her friend's house 👤</p> <p>with her friends because they made her happy. 😊</p> <p>with her friends 👤</p> <p>read my mind. 📖🧠</p> <p>😞 of 📖🚗 because she ❌🔴</p> <p>understand my humor 😊👤</p> <p>rushed home and jumped into bed 😊</p> <p>was ready to get home 🏠, and play some video games 🎮</p> <p>rushed home 🚗</p> <p>went and got food 😊</p> <p>🏠🏃</p>	<p>to let him go see the movie 🎬</p> <p>working out 🏋️</p> <p>out with friends having fun 😊</p> <p>with her friends since she had much more fun with them 😞</p> <p>with her bestfriends 🐕🐕</p> <p>on the lake 😊</p> <p>get to know me? 🤔</p> <p>👁️</p> <p>be quiet and listen 😊</p> <p>observe how I treat others 😊</p> <p>listen to me talk and be there for me 😊</p> <p>become friends with me 👤👤</p> <p>listen to what I say 🗣️</p>	<p>with her friends because they made her happy. 😊</p> <p>with her friends 👤</p> <p>read my mind. 📖🧠</p> <p>😞 of 📖🚗 because she ❌🔴</p> <p>understand my humor 😊👤</p> <p>rushed home and jumped into bed 😊</p> <p>was ready to get home 🏠, and play some video games 🎮</p> <p>rushed home 🚗</p> <p>went and got food 😊</p> <p>🏠🏃</p> <p>ran home to play games 🏃🎮</p> <p>how do I do this? 😞</p> <p>what happens when we die? 😞</p> <p>what happens after death? 👤</p>	<p>👤</p> <p>🌲</p> <p>🌅</p> <p>🚗</p> <p>🏖️</p> <p>🌐</p> <p>👤</p> <p>🏠</p>

RQ4: What insights relevant to multimodal meaning-making can be developed from the data gathered in this study?

Relatively more modal synergizing	Relatively less modal synergizing	Relatively clear meaning-construction	Potentially unclear meaning-construction
<p>ran home to play games 🏠🎮</p> <p>how do I do this? 😞</p> <p>what happens when we die? 😞</p> <p>what happens after death? 🕒</p> <p>How can I make it a good 😊 one 😞?"</p> <p>finding spiritual happiness 🧘</p> <p>buy that expensive 💎</p> <p>why are we here? 😞</p> <p>what he was going to do after high school 🎓</p> <p>🧬🦠</p> <p>why it's so confusing so he prayed 😞🙏</p> <p>what is in 📺?</p> <p>a 🪄</p>	<p>control my temper 😡</p> <p>took a nap 😴</p> <p>played 🎮</p> <p>went to go get ice cream and shop 🍦</p> <p>went to the park to play 🏃</p> <p>went home to go to sleep 🛏</p> <p>went and played video games 🎮</p> <p>ran to get on the bus 🏃</p> <p>ran to his car 🏃</p> <p>what to do after high school 📚</p> <p>if he would pass high school with all A's. 📚</p> <p>at the gym. 🏋</p> <p>curled up under a tree with a good book 📖.</p>	<p>How can I make it a good 😊 one 😞?"</p> <p>finding spiritual happiness 🧘</p> <p>buy that expensive 💎</p> <p>why are we here? 😞</p> <p>what he was going to do after high school 🎓</p> <p>why it's so confusing so he prayed 😞🙏</p> <p>what is in 📺?</p> <p>the library 📖 because she never liked reading 😞</p> <p>at work. 🧑</p> <p>the blackbird he saw yesterday morning. 🐦</p> <p>and remembered he forgot to do his homework 🙄, he knew he would be in deep trouble for sure 😞</p> <p>remembered he has a funeral to attend 🕯</p>	

RQ4: What insights relevant to multimodal meaning-making can be developed from the data gathered in this study?

Relatively more modal synergizing	Relatively less modal synergizing	Relatively clear meaning-construction	Potentially unclear meaning-construction
<p>the library 📖 because she never liked reading 🙄 in a book store. 😊 at work. 👤 the blackbird he saw yesterday morning. 🐦 ❤️ 🥚 and remembered he forgot to do his homework 🤔, he knew he would be in deep trouble for sure 😞 remembered he has a funeral to attend 🕯️ 🪦 he had to have company over 😞 he had to go to school. 😞 he was late to school 🕒 🐕 how much work he was missing. 📖</p>	<p>sitting at home doing nothing 🏠 at the gym. 🏋️‍♀️ curled up under a tree with a good book 📖. in a box 📦. in her bathroom 🚿 the mall 🛍️ school 🏫 🗺️ 🌲 the gym 🏋️‍♀️ he has school 👤 about all the chores he had to do 🧹 he had an exam 📖 🌅 she was able to talk to her friends 👤 👤 studying for her exam 📖</p>	<p>he had to have company over 😞 he had to go to school. 😞 he was late to school 🕒 how much work he was missing. 📖 he doesn't have school 😞 party time 🎉 🍕 🕒 not only being on her phone 📱 👁️ 👁️, but and have a delicious meal 🍔 🍟 😞 she only had a few minutes to eat 🕒 sleep time 😊 social hour 😊 hates 🥒 never gave up on the sport she loved so much 🏐</p>	

RQ4: What insights relevant to multimodal meaning-making can be developed from the data gathered in this study?

Relatively more modal synergizing	Relatively less modal synergizing	Relatively clear meaning-construction	Potentially unclear meaning-construction
<p>he doesn't have school 😊</p> <p>party time 🎉</p> <p>🍕🕒</p> <p>not only being on her phone 📱👁️, but and have a delicious meal 🍔🍟😋</p> <p>she only had a few minutes to eat 🕒</p> <p>sleep time 😊</p> <p>🕒📱</p> <p>social hour 🥳</p> <p>hates 🍋</p> <p>never gave up on the sport she loved so much 🏀</p> <p>didn't really care what other people thought. 🙄</p> <p>🚀🌕</p> <p>was 🕒 for ⚽</p> <p>broke her leg 🤕</p>	<p>anxiety about getting a test grade back 😞</p> <p>smoke break 🚬</p> <p>🍔</p> <p>to eat 🍲</p> <p>she could eat food 😊</p> <p>🚗</p> <p>was still happy 😊</p> <p>still went skydiving 🪂</p> <p>would always be happy 😊😊</p> <p>finish school and got her degree 🎓</p> <p>was proud of her self 😊</p> <p>was still sad 😞</p> <p>Nora never cheats on tests 📝</p> <p>was busy studying 🧐</p> <p>is still my best friend. 😊</p>	<p>didn't really care what other people thought. 🙄</p> <p>was 🕒 for ⚽</p> <p>broke her leg 🤕</p> <p>laughed at a serious conversation 😂😞</p> <p>broke her leg 🤕</p> <p>made the funniest face 😂, and everyone started to 🤡😂</p> <p>forgot to feed her dog 😞</p> <p>was very sad 😞</p> <p>your jokes are not funny 😞 they are just cringy 😞 and they don't make anyone laugh, but yourself 😞</p> <p>our bird died 🦜💀</p> <p>I'm not coming to school 😞</p> <p>what do you think you are doing wearing that outfit you got on? 😞</p>	

RQ4: What insights relevant to multimodal meaning-making can be developed from the data gathered in this study?

Relatively more modal synergizing	Relatively less modal synergizing	Relatively clear meaning-construction	Potentially unclear meaning-construction
<p>laughed at a serious conversation 😂😐</p> <p>broke her leg 🏥</p> <p>made the funniest face 😄, and everyone started to 🤡🤔</p> <p>forgot to feed her dog 🐕😞</p> <p>was very sad 😞</p> <p>your jokes are not funny 😞 they are just cringy 🤔 and they don't make anyone laugh, but yourself 😞</p> <p>our bird died 🦜💀</p> <p>I'm not coming to school 😞</p> <p>what do you think you are doing wearing that outfit you got on? 😞</p> <p>🚲❌</p> <p>🏠😞</p> <p>make school lunches free 😄</p>	<p>twisted her ankle and had to go see a doctor 🏥</p> <p>fell into a cactus 🌵</p> <p>spent \$400 on clothes 🛍️</p> <p>🏖️</p> <p>🌐</p> <p>had a very good day 😄</p> <p>was joyful about graduation being near 😄</p> <p>I'm breaking up with you 💔</p> <p>there is 🟢🟡🦀</p> <p>your grandma passed away this morning 😞</p> <p>I took your answers from the test 📝</p> <p>the camera broke 📷</p> <p>he wants to end things with you 💔</p>	<p>make school lunches free 😄</p> <p>ban all homework 🙅📝 and give people free money 🤑👉</p> <p>fix America because the one we have currently is dumber than my dog!! 🐕😞</p> <p>I would love it ❤️</p> <p>he 🏠📄🚗</p> <p>that she was getting married 🤰</p> <p>she believed in aliens 🤖👋👁️</p> <p>that she was getting married 🤰💍</p> <p>that she was prego... 🤰</p> <p>👧👦</p> <p>that he just got married to a monkey 🐒💍</p> <p>the tooth fairy was real 🦷🌸</p>	

RQ4: What insights relevant to multimodal meaning-making can be developed from the data gathered in this study?

Relatively more modal synergizing	Relatively less modal synergizing	Relatively clear meaning-construction	Potentially unclear meaning-construction
<p><i>ban all homework</i> 👉👇📝 and give <i>people free money</i> 😞👉💵💰.</p> <p><i>fix America because</i> <i>the one we have</i> <i>currently is dumber</i> <i>than my dog!!</i> 😞</p> <p>🌐🏠📺📱🔥</p> <p><i>I would love it</i> ❤️</p> <p><i>he</i> 🏠📺📱🔥</p> <p><i>that she was getting</i> <i>married</i> 🍷</p> <p><i>she believed in</i> <i>aliens</i> 😞👉👁️</p> <p><i>that she was getting</i> <i>married</i> 🍷</p> <p><i>that she was</i> <i>prego...</i> 😞</p> <p>👉👇</p> <p><i>that he just got</i> <i>married to a monkey</i> 💍🐵</p> <p><i>the tooth fairy was</i> <i>real</i> 🦷🧚</p>	<p>👉</p> <p><i>we aren't friends</i> <i>anymore</i> ❤️</p> <p><i>I can't be your</i> <i>friend anymore</i> 🤡</p> <p><i>make more laws</i> 📄</p> <p><i>fix prices of things</i> 💵</p> <p><i>I would improve gas</i> <i>prices</i> 📈</p> <p><i>improve school</i> <i>lunch</i> 🍔</p> <p><i>give everyone a car</i> 🚗</p> <p>📄</p> <p><i>raise minimum wage</i> 💵</p> <p><i>that he was gay</i> 🏳️‍🌈</p> <p><i>that she had forgot</i> <i>the birthday cake</i> 🍰</p> <p><i>she's pregnant</i> 🤰</p> <p><i>he is going to</i> <i>college</i> 🎓</p>	<p>🐷 <i>could</i> 🗨️</p> <p><i>fairytale romance was</i> <i>real</i> 😞</p> <p><i>there was a</i> 🧟 <i>that</i> <i>went to the</i> 🏠 <i>yard</i> <i>and then saw a</i> 🧟 <i>and</i> <i>gave her a</i> 🧸 <i>and</i> 🧠</p> <p><i>he would be a king</i> <i>and have a beautiful</i> <i>queen by his side</i> 😎</p> <p><i>she freaked out</i> 😞</p> <p><i>she looked everywhere</i> <i>she had it last and she</i> <i>was happy when she</i> <i>found it</i> 😊.</p> <p><i>she was sad about</i> <i>it</i> 😞.</p> <p><i>she freaked out</i> 😞</p> <p><i>Dang she lost her</i> <i>phone again</i> 😞</p> <p><i>she began to freak</i> <i>out</i> 😞</p> <p><i>and she doesn't</i> <i>remember where she</i> <i>put it</i> 😞.</p>	

she was very mad. 😡

RQ4: What insights relevant to multimodal meaning-making can be developed from the data gathered in this study?

Relatively more modal synergizing	Relatively less modal synergizing	Relatively clear meaning-construction	Potentially unclear meaning-construction
<p>🐷 could 🍃</p> <p><i>fairytale romance was real</i> 😞</p> <p><i>there was a 🧛 that went to the 🏠 yard and then saw a 🧛 and gave her a 🧛 and 🧠</i></p> <p><i>he would be a king and have a beautiful queen by his side</i> 😎</p> <p>👁️ 🗑️ 🦖</p> <p>👑</p>	<p><i>he got her pregnant</i> 🧑</p> <p><i>that finding nemo actually spoke</i> 🐟</p> <p><i>he was a unicorn</i> 🦄</p> <p><i>Santa was real</i> 📺</p> <p><i>his mower blew up</i> 🚲</p> <p><i>fairies were real</i> 🧚</p> <p><i>he was a part of a movie</i> 🎬</p> <p><i>he could be a two-pronged leaf</i> 🌱</p>	<p><i>she sighed with a passive aggressive tone</i> 😞</p> <p>📺</p> <p><i>he made a good grade on his test</i> 📄</p> <p><i>he needed money</i> 💰</p> <p><i>to let him go see the movie</i> 🎬</p> <p><i>working out</i> 🏋️</p> <p><i>out with friends having fun</i> 😄</p> <p><i>with her friends since she had much more fun with them</i> 😞</p> <p><i>with her bestfriends</i> 🧑</p> <p><i>on the lake</i> 😊</p> <p><i>be quiet and listen</i> 🙊</p> <p><i>observe how I treat others</i> 😊</p> <p><i>listen to me talk and be there for me</i> 😊</p> <p><i>become friends with me</i> 🧑</p>	

RQ4: What insights relevant to multimodal meaning-making can be developed from the data gathered in this study?

Relatively more modal synergizing	Relatively less modal synergizing	Relatively clear meaning-construction	Potentially unclear meaning-construction
		<p><i>listen to what I say</i> 🗨️</p> <p><i>control my temper</i> 😡</p> <p><i>took a nap</i> 😴</p> <p><i>played</i> 🎮</p> <p><i>went to go get ice cream and shop</i> 🍦</p> <p><i>went to the park to play</i> 🏞️</p> <p><i>went home to go to sleep</i> 🛏️</p> <p><i>went and played video games</i> 🎮</p> <p><i>ran to get on the bus</i> 🏃</p> <p><i>ran to his car</i> 🏃</p> <p><i>what to do after high school</i> 📚</p> <p><i>if he would pass high school with all A's.</i> 📚</p> <p><i>at the gym.</i> 🏋️</p> <p><i>curled up under a tree with a good book</i> 📖.</p> <p><i>sitting at home doing nothing</i> 🏠</p>	


RQ4: What insights relevant to multimodal meaning-making can be developed from the data gathered in this study?

Relatively more modal synergizing	Relatively less modal synergizing	Relatively clear meaning-construction	Potentially unclear meaning-construction
		<p>at the gym. 🏋️</p> <p>curled up under a tree with a good book 📖.</p> <p>in a box 📦.</p> <p>in her bathroom 🚻</p> <p>the mall 🛍️</p> <p>school 🏫</p> <p>the gym 🏋️</p> <p>he has school 🧑</p> <p>about all the chores he had to do 🧹</p> <p>he had an exam 📖</p> <p>she was able to talk to her friends 👧👧</p> <p>studying for her exam 📖</p> <p>anxiety about getting a test grade back 😬</p> <p>studying for her exam 📖</p> <p>smoke break 🚬</p> <p>🍔</p>	


RQ4: What insights relevant to multimodal meaning-making can be developed from the data gathered in this study?

Relatively more modal synergizing	Relatively less modal synergizing	Relatively clear meaning-construction	Potentially unclear meaning-construction
		<p><i>to eat</i> 🍽️</p> <p><i>she could eat food</i> 😊</p> <p><i>was still happy</i> 😄</p> <p><i>still went skydiving</i> 🪂</p> <p><i>would always be happy</i> 😄 😊</p> <p><i>finish school and got her degree</i> 🎓</p> <p><i>was proud of her self</i> 😊</p> <p><i>was still sad</i> 😞</p> <p><i>Nora never cheats on tests</i> 📝</p> <p><i>was busy studying</i> 📖</p> <p><i>is still my best friend.</i> 😊</p> <p><i>twisted her ankle and had to go see a doctor</i> 🩺</p> <p><i>fell into a cactus</i> 🌵</p> <p><i>spent \$400 on clothes</i> 👕</p> <p><i>had a very good day</i> 😄</p>	

RQ4: What insights relevant to multimodal meaning-making can be developed from the data gathered in this study?

Relatively more modal synergizing	Relatively less modal synergizing	Relatively clear meaning-construction	Potentially unclear meaning-construction
		<p><i>was joyful about graduation being near</i> </p> <p><i>I'm breaking up with you</i> </p> <p><i>there is</i>   </p> <p><i>your grandma passed away this morning</i> </p> <p><i>I took your answers from the test</i> </p> <p><i>the camera broke</i> </p> <p><i>he wants to end things with you</i> </p> <p><i>we aren't friends anymore</i> </p> <p><i>I can't be your friend anymore</i> </p> <p><i>make more laws</i> </p> <p><i>fix prices of things</i> </p> <p><i>I would improve gas prices</i> </p> <p><i>improve school lunch</i> </p> <p><i>give everyone a car</i> </p>	

RQ4: What insights relevant to multimodal meaning-making can be developed from the data gathered in this study?

Relatively more modal synergizing	Relatively less modal synergizing	Relatively clear meaning-construction	Potentially unclear meaning-construction
		<p><i>raise minimum wage</i> </p> <p><i>that he was gay</i> </p> <p><i>that she had forgot the birthday cake</i> </p> <p><i>she's pregnant</i> </p> <p><i>he is going to college</i> </p> <p><i>he got her pregnant</i> </p> <p><i>that finding nemo actually spoke</i> </p> <p><i>he was a unicorn</i> </p> <p><i>Santa was real</i> </p> <p><i>his mower blew up</i> </p> <p><i>fairies were real</i> </p> <p><i>he was a part of a movie</i> </p> <p><i>he could be a two-pronged leaf</i> </p>	

Summary

This chapter employed an analytic approach utilizing thematic matrices, in order to organize and assess the study's data more clearly in terms of useful categories, themes, patterns, commonalities, and insights, guided by the research questions.

As will be focused upon at more length in the discussion of findings in Chapter Seven, this chapter's analysis has helped provide a more systematic assessment of theoretical propositions of multimodal semiotics, as asserted by the school of thought most associated with linguist and semiotician Gunther Kress. As emphasized throughout this dissertation, in theory, semiotic multimodality “deals with all the means we have for making meanings – the *modes* of representation” (Kress, 2004, p. 110), through a “division of semiotic labor” in which “writing and image and color lend themselves to doing different kinds of semiotic work; each has its distinct potentials for meaning” (Kress, 2010, p. 1). However, in practice, as the discussion in this chapter has further indicated, increased use of semiotic multimodal elements like emojis does not necessarily equate to increased uses that are consistently as complex as theory might suggest.

As discussed and shown in the respective matrix-structured analyses in this chapter, while there were findings that could be considered to match assumptions of the school of thought that society is well into a transition from the dominance of words to the dominance of images and multimodal communication, other findings quite arguably were not what expectations of those assumptions might project. Such contradictory findings arguably would include, for example, the significant portion of multimodal messages constructed for this study that did not utilize modal synergizing to achieve a higher level of meaning. Another such example could be

seen in how common it was for the multimodal constructions to be relatively modest in terms of semantic complexity. All those findings will be discussed more fully in Chapter Seven.

The next chapter will focus on fuller discussion and perspective that places the findings from analysis of the data generated by this study's student participants more substantially in context of the theoretical propositions of multimodal semiotics associated most prominently with Kress and the school of thought his work and other scholars has advanced in recent years. It will also discuss in detail what the findings of this study suggest in terms of its proposed response to the way analysis of multimodality in the classroom has been characterized as inherently and structurally challenging by Kress, and regarding guidance for optimizing implementation of multimodal exercises in language-arts classrooms. It concludes with perspective on the impact of this study and its classroom multimodal exercises from the student participants in the classroom where the study was completed.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION

Assessment of Findings

Taken as a whole, this study provides considerable encouragement that the sorts of exercises administered with the study participants can potentially help other students enhance their writing multimodally – by utilizing words and emojis in exercises aimed at heightening their consciousness of multimodal communication and its role in potentially developing more effective traditional language skills. That suggests the design of this study – developed in response to the way analysis of multimodality in the classroom has been characterized as inherently and structurally challenging (Kress, Jewitt, et al., 2001, p. 17) proved effective in reducing the gap between the everyday realities of classroom interactions and efforts to explain them in terms of the conceptual framework of multimodality.

As discussed in preceding chapters, that was advanced through a narrowed focus utilizing emoji in structured writing assignments. By having the student participants in this study generate small, discrete units of multimodal narrative (as opposed to lengthy, complex, open-ended narratives), it generated compact units for analysis instead of the overwhelmingly dense “myriad of complex social decisions” that have tended to characterize classroom studies of multimodality. That inherent tendency concerned Kress because it “does not reflect the ease with which the majority of people engage in the everyday task of speaking” (Kress, Jewitt, et al., 2001, p. 17). Instead, this study design focused on producing a data set of multimodal messages

constructed by all the participants utilizing the same finite body of familiar, standardized, and easily accessed form of multimodal communication that emoji by definition are. The approach utilized in this study also generated relevant data for considering insights into how students compose multimodally utilizing the semiotic communication tools that emoji represent and the degree to which students may already be in a process of becoming multimodally strategic in their use of emojis.

More broadly, as elaborated upon at more length in the early chapters of this dissertation, the approach taken by this study was shaped by the conceptual school of thought that society is in the process of a watershed transition in terms of the dominant forms of meaning-making. As one of that school's most influential scholars, Gunther Kress (2004) has argued that transition involves a historic movement beyond the way alphabetic Western cultures have been dominated for the past 300 years or so by the "*mode of writing*" and the "*medium of book and page*" (p. 113). The theoretical contention is that, with that move away "from the dominance of *writing* as the main or at times sole carrier of meaning to an increasing reliance on *image*" (Kress, 2010, p. 46), multimodality should be understood as "the normal state of human communication" (Kress, 2010, p. 1). In that understanding, multimodality "deals with all the means we have for making meanings – the *modes* of representation – and considers their specific way of configuring the world" (Kress, 2004, p. 110). When multiple modes are employed in human communication, "image *shows* what takes too long to *read*, and writing *names* what would be difficult to *show*. Color is used to *highlight* specific aspects of the overall message" (Kress, 2010, p. 1).

So, this study contributes to Kress's related call for "a thoroughgoing review of what the features of this new world are likely to be and what curricular and pedagogic responses are likely to be possible and most useful" (Kress, 2000, p. 140). It was grounded in the way that research

has shown multimodal projects can create semiotic opportunities for adolescents to more compellingly express their identities and interests (Jewitt, 2008). The study utilized messaging involving emojis and words because of the way such messaging consists of what Kress called the crucial “division of semiotic labor,” without which, “the sign, quite simply would not work,” as “writing and image and color lend themselves to doing different kinds of semiotic work; each has its distinct potentials for meaning” (Kress, 2010, p. 1). Hence, messaging that combines words and emojis represents signs that utilize writing, image, and color in exactly the way Kress conceptualized it.

In that school of thought for which Kress is known so prominently, there is emphasis on developing instructional efforts that emphasize communication processes involving work with “already shaped material (as ‘semiotic modes’ with grammars: writing, image, gesture, speech, music)” as well as working with such materials in ways that “constantly reshape them, remake them, in line with the characteristics of our designs” (Kress, 2000, p. 142). His understanding of design reflects an approach to the making of meaning in which individuals “design” their communication through the use of multimodal participation in the shaping of the social and semiotic world (Kress, 2010, pp. 6-14). That reflects his argument that in “an economy of information and services . . . meaning is no longer confined or confinable to ‘texts’ in a traditional sense” (Kress, 2000, p. 145). He dismissed what he characterized as the antiquated “still existing common sense” notion “that meaning in language is clear and reliable by contrast, with image or instance, which, in that same commonsense, is not solid or clear” (Kress, 2005, p. 8). In such an understanding, “words are (relatively) empty entities – in a semiotic account they are signifiers to be filled with meaning rather than signs full of meaning” (p. 7). Therefore, “the task of the reader is to fill these relatively vacant entities with her or his meaning” which is “the

task we call interpretation, namely interpreting what sign the writer may have intended to make with this signifier” (p. 7).

To that end, Jewitt and Kress (2003) have proposed that schools should no longer ask, “‘How does what is here match what a teacher *expected and wanted* to be there?’ But rather, ‘How does what is here give a teacher insight into the *interests of the maker* of what is here?’” (p. 12). Through such a dramatically revised approach to assessment, educators “could see the sign as a clue about the learning engaged in by the maker-of-the-sign-as-learner,” and “a teacher could focus on how the interests of her or his students have engaged with the teacher’s interest as expressed through the (curricular materials that they have presented in lessons)” (p. 12).

In seeking to answer questions such as “What broad patterns of meaning emerge recurringly in the data gathered in this study?” this study sought insights “into the *interests of the maker* of what is here” (Jewett & Kress, 2003, p. 12) in the participants’ work on the multimodal exercises they completed for this study. As has been discussed in Chapters Four, Five, and Six, and will be discussed further in this chapter, rich understanding of those interests can be found in the data generated by their completion of those exercises and other components of the multi-part lesson plan. In some ways, the findings support elements of theoretical assertions that society is actively moving away from the dominance of writing toward an age dominated more by image and multimodal communication. In other ways, they question some of those assertions.

Clearly, the findings point to considerable potential meaning enhancement through multimodal composing. However, they offered less support for multimodal messaging involving images as necessarily superior to words-only messaging in effectively conveying meaning, as some literature on the subject suggests. (Such suggestions regularly appear in the work of Kress, for example, such as the assertion that “words are (relatively) vague, often nearly empty of

meanings; by contrast images are full, ‘plain’ with meaning” (Kress, 2004, p. 112).) Further, while the findings indicated students today frequently were able to construct multimodal messages capable of effectively conveying meaning, they also almost as frequently demonstrated deficiencies in doing so. Also, one of the strongest indicators reflected in the student participants’ work on the study’s multimodal exercises was how often the multimodal messages left questions for readers that were in almost every instance clarified by their translation into words-only. So, while there were indeed findings that could be considered to match assumptions of the school of thought that society is well into a transition from the dominance of words to the dominance of images and multimodal communication, other findings quite arguably were not what that school would have expected to be there.

As further example of that, the findings showed about half the messages constructed by the student participants utilized modal synergizing to achieve a higher level of meaning – while half did not. On the other hand, the findings reflected relatively high levels of shared meaning and clarity of meaning in the multimodal message construction – but also multimodal construction that was quite often relatively modest in terms of semantic complexity. So, if society is theoretically moving toward a greater dominance of multimodal communication, the findings of this study suggest that progression still has considerably further to go in realizing the fuller potential that may be possible through multimodalism.

The findings suggest that rather than that process unfolding as part of a natural progression, indeed it may only most robustly do so through instructional efforts designed to help students develop greater understanding and skills at constructing complex multimodal messages, as well as such messages that are more consistently grounded in forms of meaning-making likely to be shared by readers. Such instructional efforts quite arguably should

incorporate more curricular efforts that specifically focus on concepts and skills associated with multimodal communication, semiotics, and related concepts. At least in the multimodal work and in the reflective comments of the participants in this study, it does not seem that a societal move toward a greater dominance of multimodal communication is playing out naturally on its own. To the degree that this study provides insights into the interests of the high-school-age makers of messaging who participated in this study, educators will still have a significant role to play in just how successful the multimodal transition may be ultimately. For now, as will also be elaborated upon more in the latter part of this chapter, the student participants in this study see a strong degree of communicative potential in multimodal elements such as emojis. But they are not yet convinced – and in some cases remain rather skeptical – that such elements can consistently achieve greater communicative effectiveness than words.

Toward A More Effective Multimodal Curriculum

Through the insights discussed in Chapter Six regarding assessment of the data in terms of the thematic matrices, as well as the analysis of selected focal narrative texts in Chapter Four and the narrative fracturing assessment in Chapter Five, this study has provided tangible guidance on how exercises like these could be even more usefully implemented in language-arts classrooms. The core conceptual structure of the exercises involves students creating relatively short, prompted multimodal messages, and then going back and translating those multimodal messages into words-only messages. Such exercises offer language-arts classroom teachers a means to tap into students' potential for successful meaning enhancement through multimodal composing – by exploring both the shared meaning associated with visual elements like emojis, as well as to consider when such elements are associated with multiple meanings by writers and readers.

As discussed in Chapter Six and earlier in this chapter, the considerable data formatted into the categorizing columns of the thematic matrices provide a number of encouraging insights as to the potential that exercises like those in this study may have for helping heighten students' consciousness of multimodal communication and its role in potentially developing more effective traditional language skills. For example, one of the findings highlighted by the thematic matrices indicated that when the student participants in this study translated their multimodal messages into words-only, it was slightly more common for the meaning conveyed multimodally by each message to convey approximately the same meaning as when it was translated into words-only. That indicates both the potential for multimodal messages to enhance successful communication, as well as the caution that such messages involving images cannot be automatically considered to be superior to words-only messages, as suggested in some literature on the subject.

And most important for the purposes of this study, it represents one of the positive indications that exercises like the ones utilized in this study have practical pedagogical potential for use in the classroom: Students today have considerable capacity to construct multimodal messages capable of conveying meaning with similar effectiveness as words-only messages – but there is also considerable opportunity for their teachers to help them focus on more consistently maximizing the effectiveness of their multimodal messaging.

Other findings highlighted by the thematic matrices provide similar encouragement. It was somewhat more likely for participants to utilize emojis that could be categorized as conveying feelings or metaphoric/figurative meaning than literal meaning – emojis representing objects or other relatively literal depictions of other elements from the natural world. That suggests that in implementing exercises like these in the classroom another teaching objective

should be helping students more consciously consider the way that multimodal messages, like words-only messages, can deal in literal narratives as well as metaphorical narratives.

Particularly encouraging was the indication highlighted by the thematic matrices that more than ten times as many of the student-participant's words-only translations of multimodal messages could be considered to clarify potential readers' questions as there were instances when such questions regarding multimodal messages were not clarified by the words-only translation. Given how important it was in the pedagogical design of that exercise to engage students in the cognitive process of translating their multimodal messages into words-only messages, that finding supports the teaching potential in such exercise to help students think through the language skills involved in multimodal communication. That can be an emphasized component of classroom implementation of exercises like these, working with students to actively focus on consciously identifying questions that may be raised as to the meaning of multimodal messages.

Another area in which opportunities for teachers to focus on when working with students on exercises like these would be the findings indicated by the thematic matrices that regarding the degree of modal synergizing reflected in the student-participant's work for this study – with roughly half of all the messages utilizing such synergizing to achieve a higher level of meaning. So, in the classroom, students could benefit from teaching focused on working with students to consider how they can consciously utilize the multiple modes of multimodal message construction in ways that tap into the communication-enhancement potential that represents.

Related insights were produced by the findings from the thematic matrices that indicated a relatively high level of both shared meaning and clarity of meaning construction. The analysis suggested both of those findings – as indicated by the findings on modal synergizing – were at

least partly influenced by the tendency for many of the student participants to construct multimodal messages in the first place that were relatively modest in terms of semantic complexity. That, for example would contribute to the messages being potentially less likely to be unclear in their meaning. However, given how many positive indications there were regarding the student participants' evident and potential multimodal skills, it suggests a capacity exists for instruction focused on encouraging more complex multimodal message construction to be successful in producing desired results.

Specific Insights for Optimizing These Multimodal Exercises

Beyond the findings derived through the respective forms of analysis and the overall experiences of the researcher offer additional guidance regarding ways to optimize exercises like these in the classroom. One that recurred to me was how a teacher implementing such exercises in her own classroom would have potentially more time to devote to administering them, as well as working with students individually on most effectively completing the exercises and getting the most out of them. In a teachers' own classroom, they would also have the advantage of having gotten to know the students better over the course of the school year, growing more familiar with respective students' strengths, weaknesses, tendencies, motivational particulars, etc. In addition to how that would help in a broad sense, other specific enhancements I would recommend could include:

- For the teacher to actively monitor the students' work as they complete it and make suggestions in cases in which students seem to be, for whatever reason, not truly doing what the exercise asked for. In this study, since it was not my class, I realize now that I held back more than I would have when I was teaching my own students in the classroom, but in working through the analysis, I see that providing students' real-time, one-on-one guidance could have

helped ensure a higher percentage of them providing responses compatible with the instructions on the exercises – which would not only have generated better overall data for the study, it would have engaged the students pedagogically more fully in the ways the exercises were intended. One example of that would be the way not all students in the study completed the translation into words-only of their multimodal messages, so the teacher could emphasize moving about the room encouraging and assisting all students in completing that part of the exercise.

- For the teacher to work with students closely in the early stages of the unit to help them consider how they can construct more complex multimodal messages – and then later similarly more actively to help them consider how they could explore possible questions their messages might have for readers.

- For the teacher to have students not only create multimodal messages but also to then interpret and assess the meanings of the multimodal messages created by their classmates. Their interpretations could be contrasted with the teacher’s own, to help raise awareness of how qualitative assessment of meaning can vary among different readers with different backgrounds, from different demographics, etc.

- For the instructions to the multimodal composition exercise to be revised to ask the students to “Complete the prompts below by adding a combination of multiple words and multiple emojis for each one,” rather than “Complete the prompts below by adding a combination of words and emojis for each one.” That should have the benefit of encouraging students to produce potentially relatively more complex and meaning-rich multimodal messages.

- For the instructions to the multimodal composition exercise to include a sliding scale of points, or perhaps a formula of bonus points, based on how many emojis were utilized in each multimodal message. In some cases, that could produce less effective or coherent multimodal

messages – with students who just tried to earn more points simply by arbitrarily inserting as many emojis into a group of words as possible, without making the effort to achieve comprehensible messaging. However, it could also incentivize many students to produce effective messaging constructed with greater numbers of emojis.

- For the teacher to plan the implementation of these exercises so that the students would complete the multimodal exercise and the related exercise that followed it on the same day, perhaps in the morning and afternoon (instead of on separate days, as in this study). When I designed this lesson plan, I envisioned that it could help the students to have more time between those two exercises, and thus come at the second one in a relatively fresh way that might avoid them just rushing through it because it could seem too similar to the first one. In practice, I see now that there would probably be more advantages to having the students complete both on the same day, ideally in the morning and afternoon. That would still leave some space and time between the two, but it would likely increase the percentage of students completing both exercises, if some students are not present in school for both days.

- For the teacher to go back after the class completed the exercises and provide the opportunity for any students who missed either exercise (or both) to complete them both. That is something else that would be relatively more feasible for a teacher to do in her own classroom than it was for me to do as a visiting researcher in someone else’s classroom.

- For the teacher to develop at least a short, basic segment for discussion specifically on the concept of multimodal communication, semiotics, and related concepts. All that would require a certain amount of explanation, as well as some effort and thinking through how to break it down to an age-appropriate level of understanding for students who likely have no background in the subject. That would be at minimum – ideally, my thinking after completing

this study is that there should be increased time devoted to units on semiotics and multimodal communication in K-12 education.

- For the teacher to develop a project for the class to participate in developing its own dictionary of emoji meanings. Groups could be assigned a set of specific emojis for them to negotiate an agreed-upon definition for each emoji. Then each group could present their definitions to the class, with time allowed for feedback and discussion among the class. The objective would be to help students think through their assumed meanings for various emojis.

- For the teacher to develop a project for the class to utilize ChatGPT or other artificial-intelligence applications in constructing multimodal messages. There will be many possibilities for curricular activities involving A.I., one idea along the lines of this study could be to involve the students in using an A.I. application to construct specific forms of content and then analyze the results, focusing the degree to which they can be considered effective or ineffective at successfully communicating specific intended meanings.

- For the teacher to have students explain their multimodal messages in other ways, in addition to translation through writing, such as in interviews or perhaps using other semiotic resources. Other modes could provide additional insights and complexities.

Concluding Perspective on Impact of Study from Student Participants

This dissertation now concludes with the perspective that ultimately matters the most in considering the impact of a study like this and classroom multimodal exercises like these – that of the student participants from the classroom where the study was completed. The essays that they wrote after completing the exercises and our discussions on emojis provided another rich source of data for insights into the study. In this chapter, that raw body of data has been rearranged with a focus on “categories that facilitate comparison between things in the same

category” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 107). Connecting strategies have also been employed to help identify relationships among elements of the data “that connect statements and events within a context into a coherent whole” (Maxwell, 2013, pp. 112-113). Organized in that way, it provides concluding perspective on the impact that the exercises administered in this study had upon the students who in their role as participants also represent the potential beneficiaries of multimodal exercises like these being implemented in other classrooms – as this study asserts could have considerable educational value.

What the students wrote in the essays varied in length and degree of effort, but almost all reflected a tone of elevated interest that seemed to derive partly from the fact that a graduate student from UGA had come to spend time with them exploring the subject of emoji usage, but also partly from the revelation that a graduate student from UGA was researching and writing a doctoral dissertation on the subject of emoji usage. That came across in many of their comments in the essays and in our discussions. I don’t mean that every one of the students involved in the study was engrossed by those factors. But those factors did seem to help heighten the students’ interest and level of engagement with the work I asked them to do.

For example, one student wrote, “I love how Plato’s quote sparked that interest in you,” calling it “really cool” and wishing me “good luck with your dissertation!!!!” That was a reference to how it came up in one of our sessions the way a reading in my first semester in graduate school discussing Plato’s argument that one could know only what one could critically and reflectively defend in face-to-face dialogue, and that “what writing cannot do is defend itself. It cannot stand up to questioning” (Gee, 2015, 69). As discussed in Chapter One, that started some of my earliest thinking on the way images such as emojis could represent a way to help writing in some senses “defend itself” by enhancing writing with supporting cues. Little did I

know that some four years later I would be recounting that experience to high school students in northern Georgia, or that it would help them consider how potentially meaningful a subject emojis could be for exploring in relation to language arts.

That same student wrote, “Overall I found this to be very interesting and something I never would have known before if it were not for you coming in and talking to us about it.” Another wrote that, “Before listening to and talking to Megan Lawson, I never thought emojis had such a meaning,” and “Really getting into, and thinking about what she said will blow you away.” Another wrote, “Having this conversation with Megan, back and forth for 3 days, was an eye opener.” And another wrote: “Wow, I find it so interesting that you are writing your dissertation on emojis. I find that so fascinating. I feel like I have learned a lot about emojis more than I would have if you would not have come to our class and talked about it. I think that I have learned a lot more ways that emojis can be used, not just for understanding tone.”

Another put it: “Megan had such great questions and even better points. We learned a lot from her, as well she learned a lot from us.” I found that all to be true, because even though the students as a group did not seem, before my time with them, ever to have given much thought to emojis as a subject for deeper reflection, once they recognized that it could be, they gave it serious consideration and went on to articulate a great many insights relevant to multimodal meaning-making. Many of those insights were indeed learning experiences for me, and even their classroom teacher expressed surprise upon learning about many things that came up in the discussions on emojis. So, one lesson I took away from that part of the study – as a classroom teacher before I became a doctoral student who remembers how challenging it sometimes can be to get students involved in class discussions – emojis seem to offer a thought-provoking

opportunity to draw students into discussions with the potential to explore language arts and related matters.

One reason for that may well be that the subject has potential for students to feel that they are cluing in older people to important information that students know much more about. For example, one student used specific examples to highlight the generation gap: “Emojis like the vampire emoji or the random purple and blue emojis with the signs in them – nobody actually uses those, and if you do you’re viewed as different from everybody else. Almost like it gives you a certain image. The younger generation has picked up on this, yet the older generation is absolutely clueless.” That essay went on to observe: “The way [the student’s teacher] and Mrs. Lawson were so interested in what we had to say, and shocked when they realized what certain emojis meant and were viewed as, was crazy to me. I knew that the older generations were clueless about technology but I never realized how clueless.”

Another noted: “I think that sometimes when you text like your grandparents it is definitely harder to use emojis because sometimes they just do not understand what they are or they’re purpose in the text message. But with your friends it is much easier to send them ones. It’s almost like second nature when sending a text now.” Another used specific examples to make more substantial points: “Most age groups have different meanings behind the emojis they use. Many people above the age of 25 use emojis a lot less than the younger generations. When older people want to ‘send love’ they’ll usually send the red heart emoji and that’s it.” The same student added, “The younger generations may send a purple, a blue, a light blue or pink heart. When younger people send hearts back and forth it’s not just one heart, usually. Usually they’ll send 2-3 in a row.” That assertion concluded: “Many people don’t realize the difference between

different generations using different emojis but it is by far two different languages. The difference is phenomenal, if you actually care enough to pay attention.”

The essay data also suggested that, even if many students have not consciously given thought to the subject of emojis, it is a subject that they tend to have many insightful thoughts about when prompted: “Emojis have become a huge part of our digital communication, and they have changed the way we express ourselves. They provide us with a new way to convey emotions and ideas, and they can be used to create a sense of community and connection,” one student in this study wrote. “Emojis have changed the way we communicate in profound ways. They allow us to emotion more effectively, provide us with a new way to express ideas, and can be used to customize our digital communication experience.” The same student added: “Whether we are using emojis to express love, show sarcasm or humor, or represent different interaction with our friends, they have become an essential part of our digital communication,” another observed.

Another emphasized the way that emojis have become commonly used by social media such as Snapchat to induce a sense of greater bonding among users: “Emojis can also be used to customize our digital communication experience. For example, Snapchat allows users to customize their friend emojis, which appear next to their name. Users can choose from a range of emojis to represent their interactions with their friends. A yellow heart can represent a friend while a fire emoji can represent a Snapstreak.” A Snapstreak is a feature the social-media site utilizes to recognize and highlight any time that one person has sent and received a Snap message from another for three consecutive days, and it continues for every additional consecutive day that those exchanges continue. In essence, it is an example of a social-media site using an emoji as positive reinforcement for users who are active on the site in that way. Another

student highlighted the potential for emojis to provide a bonding function in a very different but impactful way: “One thing that I find engrossing is that emojis have trends just like on Tik Tok. It’s like they go through their own trends just like clothing, sayings, and dances. Like, for example, with the BLM [Black Lives Matter movement] going on in 2020, people did Blackout Tuesday and with that would usually be an emoji fist and it would be black.” That student added, “It was a way for people to unite against police brutality and the discrimination of people of color. I find it so crazy that one emoji could help with such a huge issue.”

Some students expressed a relatively subdued sense of the communicative potential of emojis: “I believe that emojis and words display the same meaning. For example, most people would type in a text and describe their mood with the emojis afterwards. Texting the same emoji is also a big hit among people these days.” Further, “They can text the same emoji to display the emotions that they are currently feeling along with the sentence they typed in. Most people use emojis to describe what they already texted.” Another wrote: “I learned that emojis have some use for making statements seem a certain way. Our teacher talked about how she uses emojis in some of her university emails to make it clear to her students that she isn’t upset. I guess I didn’t really expect that it would be needed but she has to use them because if she doesn’t her students think that she’s upset or being rude.”

Highlighting the Potential of Emojis for Language Arts

Assertions like that to me help highlight the great potential that exists with the subject of emojis and language arts to help students consider such a great deal more in terms of the way emojis can function to enhance and clarify meaning-making processes in so many ways. I see that potential even more greatly now than I did before engaging with students in the way that I

did for this study – in part precisely because of how they, in so many ways, expressed their heightened awareness of it.

“Emojis that are used in texts clarify a lot of emotions and they can help understand the tone if the person receiving the message knows what the emoji means. A person can type a message that is of a certain tone and the person who receives it could take it the wrong way. In texts people take the tone differently, every person is different and views stories differently,” one wrote, for example. “Words only express to a certain extent, they can only take you part of the way with the written word. Yes many written words and texts can be very emotional and sentimental but some people may not see it that way,” another wrote. “Emojis if used properly can clarify the tone and sum up any confusion the reader may have. They add more emotion into the message that words may not be able to express.” Still another observed: “Emojis can be used in reference to have different meanings, such as the crying one can mean sadness, or laughing until you cry. The meanings of using both words and emojis together help to express your emotion – either you may seem rude without any emojis, or how adding one can change another’s thought about how it came off.” Such comments offered additional insights into the degree to which students seem to be well into a process of becoming multimodally strategic in their use of emoji. Another example of such strategic thinking at work was reflected in the assertion: “The emojis I use everyday, I know the meaning behind and I know other people get it as well. The emojis I don’t use, I don’t use them for a reason. Either they are weird or they can be viewed as sexual (even when there is context to show it’s not), or they aren’t used enough as a society to be using them.”

In discussing what they felt they had learned from participating in the exercises and discussions of this study, students in many cases provided nuanced comparisons of the respective

functions of emojis versus words, suggesting the sort of heightening of their consciousness of multimodal communication and its role in developing more effective language skills that, as has been noted, was an aim of the discussions and exercises developed for this study. “I also learned what words can do and what emojis can. Words are formal and accepted for every conversation. Words are even accepted in silly texts with your friends. Emojis are not accepted in serious conversation regardless of the person. If you do use emojis when you're not supposed to, you are considered non-professional,” one student participant wrote. “When it comes to using emojis, I feel as if they can definitely add a layer of meaning and emotions to our messages online that words alone cannot convey. However, I also think it is important to be mindful of the context and audience when using emojis. For example, if you are sending a professional email, you may not want to include a lot of emojis as it could come across as unprofessional. On the other hand, if you are chatting with friends or family, emojis can be a fun and playful way to express yourself. Another example of how emojis are used is when you can't necessarily express your feelings with just the words you are using. Sometimes you have to express yourself with emojis when words just can't provide that for you.”

“Emojis can make messages more clear and make messages not seem serious. They can also portray emotion in a message that words can't and that can help people not feel like a message is meant to be rude or angry,” another student declared, adding, “I still prefer just words to get a message across but I can see why someone would want to use emojis instead or with words.” The capacity of emojis to avoid misunderstandings specifically involving unintended anger was noted by more than one student: “Sometimes the way we text without emojis makes people think we're mad at them or not in the mood to talk, which could be the complete opposite.” That student also added: “While words can actually have meanings and help a person

understand what you're trying to say and emojis can't, it does work better with emojis than you think. Emojis give us better ways to express the emotions we can't fully explain over text, which is why it has more meaning to add emojis rather than not use any at all."

As another student participant put it: "Words can better help you imagine what's happening in the essay, paragraph, or story. Words being written on a page can give you more to think about in what is being written, they have a voice when expressions cannot show it. Emojis can give more of an image in your head to help you to better understand what you are writing or what emotion is being conveyed in said written works." The essays indicated a pattern of heightened awareness of respective roles for words and emojis: "I feel like what I've learned overall from hearing the discussions is that they can be used in all different kinds of ways to use them in literature. Emojis can be used to help display certain emotions in writing or maybe to help with the tone of the paragraph and/or essay."

A pattern of sharp awareness of emojis being inappropriate and potentially offensive in some settings was also reflected in the student-participant essays: "Emojis can help in some ways when you are writing an essay, paragraph, or narrative, but it would make it less professional," one essay observed, as well as, "Emojis would help some readers see the emotions written, but for people to like to be more imaginative, they would not like the thought of having them using emojis. The thought of them being used would be a very interesting experience when being used in literature." That student also added: "As far as using them in serious conversations, they are not recommended because there is a place and time to use them but say you are in a serious conversation or talking with a new boss, you would not use emojis." Another weighed the respective values of words and emojis carefully: "Words are powerful tools that allow for detailed and precise expression of ideas, emotions, and concepts. Words can describe complex

thoughts and convey ideas that may be difficult to express with only emojis.” That student participant also said, “Additionally, words can be used to provide context and clarity to a message, which can help prevent misunderstandings. On the other hand, emojis can add emotional context to a message that may be difficult to convey with words alone.” As an example, that student offered: “A simple smiley face emoji can communicate friendliness and warmth to someone, even if the message itself is short and to the point. Emojis can also add a playful or lighthearted tone to a message, which can help make it more approachable and engaging.” All that said, the essay added a note of caution: “Because emojis are relatively new to written communication, their meanings and interpretations are still evolving. As such, people may need to consider how their use of an emoji might be interpreted by others, and whether it accurately conveys the intended emotion or tone.”

The essays strongly suggested that the exercises either helped the students heighten their understanding of the respective contributions and limitations of words and emojis in potential enhancement of writing, or at the least brought into focus for them more clearly understandings they may have less consciously already developed. As one essay articulated, “Words can convey complex ideas and emotion that emojis can’t. For example, it’s difficult to convey sarcasm or irony with an emoji. Words can also be more precise than emojis. If you want to communicate a specific idea, its often easier to do it with words than emojis.” It continued: “However emojis can add humor to a message that words cant. For example, the message “I’m running late” can be made more lighthearted with the running emoji.” Or as another put it, perhaps even more expressively, “Emojis are a wonder to the world and are great, especially helping understand, however emojis can’t talk or allow the reader to understand exactly what you’re thinking. Words are also just as great as emojis, however just as emojis can’t talk, words can’t help whomever

you're talking to understand the emotions that are flowing through your body while you're texting them.”

The students in their essays demonstrated how the discussions and exercises of the study helped them to express more deeply their thinking in terms of insights relevant to multimodal meaning-making and how the semiotic communication tools that visual elements like emoji represent may be more effectively utilized multimodally. Indeed, one essay laid out fundamental questions involved in those matters: “Emojis are a popular part of modern communication. They can be found in text messages, social media posts, and even professional emails. Emojis allow us to add emotion and personality to our messages in a way that words alone cannot. But how do emojis change the way we make meanings when we use both words and emojis together? What do words do that emojis can't? What do emojis do that words can't?” In attempting to provide answers, the essay proposed: “When we use both words and emojis together, it can change the meaning of the message and make it more expressive. For example, the message, ‘I'm so excited to see you!’ can be more enthusiastic with heart-eyed emoji. The heart-eyed emoji adds a level of excitement that words alone cannot convey.” That essay continued: “Similarly, a message that says ‘I'm sorry’ can be made more sincere with the addition of a sad face emoji. The sad face emoji adds a layer of empathy and regret that the words alone may not convey.”

Another student observed in these essays: “There are many ways it helps to change the meanings in conversations when you use both emojis and words as opposed to just one or the other. The way they can be used is to help show more emotion or tone in what you are writing. It can help to place an image in your head to go along with the words that are being stated.” As an example, that student suggested: “Say if you are trying to have a humorous paragraph or a joyful one emojis could be used to help convey that if the words are not working.” But of the two

modes, respectively, the essay found: “Just using the emojis could get confusing when too many are being used it will just eventually become a picture blob and you won’t know what’s going on. Just using words is going to be easier than just using emojis because you can convey a lot of emotion through your words rather than just using pictures or faces.”

In considering the way that these essays provided data potentially relevant to all of this study’s research questions – in terms of broad patterns of meaning, evidence of shared meaning, commonalities, and insights relevant to multimodal meaning-making that emerged – a particularly clear focal point was the emphasis on emojis’ particular capacity to convey emotion in different and potentially more compelling ways than words alone.

“One of the most significant ways that emojis change the way we communicate is by allowing us to convey emotions more effectively. Emojis can be used to express a wide range of emotions, from joy and excitement to sadness and anger,” one essay declared, also observing, “For example, a heart emoji can be used to express love, while crying emojis can be used to express sadness. Emojis can also be used to express irony and sarcasm, which can be difficult to express with words.” Another observed: “Using emojis and words together can help to emphasize your tone and emotions in a more expressive way. Words can convey complex ideas and express more nuanced emotions than emojis alone. Emojis can help convey tone and emotions in a more concise and visual way than words alone.” The same essay declared, “Yes, I think that emojis can add a lot of meaning to a message and help to convey the tone and emotions behind the words,” another observed.

On that same theme, another student-participant wrote: “As for using both words and emojis together, I think it can be a really effective way to communicate. Sometimes words alone can be misinterpreted or lacking in emotions, but using emojis can help clarify the overall tone

and meaning of the message.” The same student continued, “However, it is important to remember that not everyone may understand the meaning behind certain emojis, so it is always a good idea to use them in moderation and make sure they are appropriate for the situations you use them in.” Another wrote: “The use of both words and emojis together can enhance communication by adding visual elements and emotional context to textual messages. When words and emojis are used in combination, it allows for a more nuanced expression of thoughts and emotions. Emojis can convey tone, mood, and facial expressions, which can complement or even alter the meaning of the words they accompany.” Adding further to that theme, another observed: “Using both words and emojis together changes the way meanings are constructed in a text. Emojis provide an additional layer of meaning beyond the literal interpretation of the words. They can help clarify intent, sarcasm, or humor that might be difficult to convey through words alone. Combining words and emojis creates a richer communication experience by providing visual cues that enhance understanding.” The same essay continued: “While words are essential for conveying precise information and complex ideas, emojis excel at conveying emotions and nonverbal cues. Emojis can add a sense of warmth, humor, or empathy to a message that might be difficult to capture with words alone.” Further, “They can also help bridge the gap between written communication and face-to-face interaction by infusing a sense of personal expression.”

Considering Others’ Perspective When Utilizing Emojis

Thinking through these dynamics led students to the subject of how important it is with multimodal communication involving emojis to carefully weigh the meaning of the emojis for others. “Emojis are a fun and expressive way to add emotion and personality to our message. When we use both it can change the meaning of the message and make it more expressive. Words can convey complex ideas and emotions that emojis can’t, but emojis can add humor to a

message that words can't," wrote one student-participant, continuing, "When we use emojis, we often think about what they add to the message and how they might be interpreted by the person we're sending it to, which makes communication more nuanced and complex than using words alone." Another wrote: "In a lot of ways, yes, you would most likely stop to think about what emojis can be used to help what emotion you are trying to express when using them. To everyone, different emojis have different meanings to them and you have to think about how it is being used and how it would help you express it," continuing, "You are constantly having to think about what words would be used to better express what you are saying in an essay, paragraph, or narrative, it is no different when you use emojis to do so," wrote another.

Indeed, many of the essays emphasized awareness of a relatively high degree of responsibility involved in utilizing emojis in their messaging. "Overall, I think emojis have become an important part of our digital communication and have added a new dimension to the way we express ourselves. However, it is very important to use thoughtfully and considerately to ensure that our messages are more clear and effective to read," one said. "I think that at first I felt like you had to use emojis with your words to make your tone more clear, which is true but I think also when you use emojis alone depending on who you are talking to can mean different things," another observed, continuing, "I think that words can help describe what you are doing and your feeling, but you cannot determine someone's tone over text message, so with using emojis, it helps better understand the tone you are trying to get across, as long as the other person understands it as well." Explained still another: "I learned how a single emoji has multiple different meanings depending on how people view it. For example, the upside-down emoji can mean that someone is either flirting or happy. The skeleton emoji is also a polysemic term. The emoji can mean that something is funny, embarrassing, or even bad." (NOTE: It surprised me

somewhat that a student used an uncommon term such as “polysemic” in a way that was contextually so precise and accurate (referencing the coexistence of many possible meanings for a word or phrase), since I cannot recall the term ever coming up in any of my discussions with them. Nevertheless, it was gratifying to see it used so perfectly to make a most relevant point.)

Regarding the potential of emojis to enhance multimodal messaging emotionally, one student-participant placed that in an even richer context of related capacities of emojis: “One of the unique aspects of emojis is their ability to transcend language barriers. Emojis are universally recognized and understood to some extent, allowing for more inclusive and cross-cultural communication. They can help mitigate the limitations of language by providing visual representations that are readily interpretable across different cultures and backgrounds.” Further, that student observed, “When using emojis, individuals may naturally think more about the meanings they add to a message. Emojis require users to consider which emoji best aligns with their intended expression or emotion. Emojis can serve as a prompt for deeper reflection on the emotional impact and interpretation of a message.” That led into: “In conclusion, combining words and emojis in communication can enhance expression, add emotional context, and improve cross-cultural understanding. Words provide precision and complexity, while emojis bring visual and emotional elements to textual communication. The use of both mediums together can create a more vibrant and nuanced form of expression.”

Along with the discussion above, three other observations from these student-participant essays particularly help highlight the insights relevant to multimodal meaning-making that can be developed from the body of data the essays represent:

- “I will say that after learning about what emojis do, what and how they are supposed to be viewed, . . . now when I text an emoji I look at it as if has a deeper hidden meaning that you wouldn’t typically see unless you started to think about it. Even now when I use

a simple heart emoji I think about it and the deeper meaning side to it, same as I would do with a bunch of emojis.

- “To summarize what I think about emojis and how my view on emojis have changed, emojis have a deeper meaning and I now know it, I view each emoji differently as if it was its own person with its own emotion.”
- “To conclude, emojis and words are used together to get ideas and messages to someone in many ways. The emoji generation is evolving and it is important to use them in today’s age.”

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APPENDIX A

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM: Considering Student Emoji Usage in Narrative Meaning-Making

You are being asked to allow your child take part in a research study. The information in this form will help you decide if you want your child to be in the study. Please ask the researcher(s) below if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

Principal Investigator: Dr. Kevin Burke, Language & Literacy Education Department, burkekq@uga.edu; Study team member: Megan Lawson, Language & Literacy Education Department, *mlawson@uga.edu*, 580-370-5768

Your child is invited to be in this research study because he/she is in a class where the teacher has agreed to allow students to participate voluntarily. This study will be exploring how students make meaning through their use of emojis.

During the spring semester, for an approximately one-week period, students in this study will be part of (1) an introductory lesson in which information will be shared with students on the growing use and importance of emoji in modern communication process and they are encouraged to spontaneously discuss how they think about emoji, (2) a short survey exploring students' use and basic understandings of emoji, (3) a short writing assignment in which students are asked to combine narrative writing with emoji in short responses to prompts, (4) a short writing assignment in which students are asked to go back through the previous assignment and express how they would translate the emoji they used in it into words, phrases, and/or sentences, (5) a short reflective essay on what they have learned about the use of emoji and their thoughts on how emoji can be helpful in making written communication more effective, and (6) a short follow-up survey aimed at assessing changes in students' understandings of emoji. These steps may include audio recordings of related comments students make during the study.

With your permission, we will collect and analyze the results for a doctoral dissertation.

Participation is voluntary. Anyone can stop at any time without penalty. While the class activities will continue, we will not collect information from or about your child to use in our research if you or your child want us to stop. The decision to take part or not to take part in the study will not affect your child's grades in school.

We will take steps to protect your child’s privacy by replacing your child’s name with a code. We will keep the list that links the code to your child’s name in a separate place. We may publish articles and present the research at conferences, but we will not publicly identify your child. We do not plan to share identifiable information with anyone who is not connected to this research study. We will keep the list with names and any audio recordings only until data analysis is complete, and then all will be destroyed. Once the list with names and audio recordings are destroyed, we will not use or share the de-identified data for future research. Also, we will uphold the same obligations as other educators in the classroom to report information that State or Federal law requires to be reported to other officials (e.g., child or elder abuse) or ethically might require action by the research (e.g., suicidal ideation, intent to hurt self or others).

If you have any questions about the study, contact Dr. Kevin Burke, burkekq@uga.edu or Megan Lawson, mlawson@uga.edu, 580-370-5768. If you have any complaints or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at IRB@uga.edu or 706-542-3199.

If you agree to allow your child to participate in this research study, please sign below:

_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date

Name of Child		
_____	_____	_____
Name of Parent/Guardian	Signature	Date

Please keep one copy and return the signed copy to the researcher.

**Assent Form for Participation in Research
“A Proposal for Considering Student Emoji Usage in Narrative Meaning-Making”**

We are doing a research study on how young people like you think about emojis and their use. We are asking you to be in the study because you are in an English class whose teacher has agreed to allow you to participate if you wish. If you agree to be in the study, you will participate in short discussions, short surveys, and short writing on emojis. Those steps may include audio recordings of your related comments during this study. All the activities will focus on your thoughts on emojis, so all responses are acceptable, and none will be considered “incorrect” answers. The potential benefits involve contributing to better understanding of emoji usage for educators and for you.

You do not have to say “yes” if you don’t want to. No one, including your parents, will be mad at you if you say “no” now or if you change your mind later. We have also asked your parent’s permission to do this. Even if your parent says “yes,” you can still say “no.” Remember, you can ask us to stop at any time. Your grades in school will not be affected whether you say “yes” or “no.”

The information gathered in this study will be used for a graduate dissertation and possible scholarly journal article. Nowhere will your name be used at any point for any reason. We will use only a number in any references to individual students, so other people would not be able to tell who you are. We will keep the list with names and any audio recordings only until data analysis is complete, and then all will be destroyed. Once the list with names and audio recordings are destroyed, we will not use or share the de-identified data for future research. Also, we will uphold the same obligations as other educators in the classroom to report information that State or Federal law requires to be reported to other officials (e.g., child or elder abuse) or ethically might require action by the research (e.g., suicidal ideation, intent to hurt self or others).

You can ask any questions that you have about this study at any time. If you have a question later that you didn’t think of now, you can contact Principal Investigator Dr. Kevin Burke (burkekq@uga.edu) or study team member Megan Lawson (mlawson@uga.edu).

Name of Child: _____ **Parental Permission on File:** Yes
 No

(For Written Assent) Signing here means that you have read this paper or had it read to you and that you are willing to be in this study. If you don’t want to be in the study, don’t sign.

Signature of Child: _____ **Date:** _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ **Date:** _____

APPENDIX B

Basic Outline of Multi-Part Lesson Plan

(1A) FOR THE FIRST SESSION, BEGIN BY ASKING:

- Have you ever heard of something called World Emoji Day?
- Do you think that is something real or something I made up?
- Well, it actually is real – it’s every July 17. So we can’t really celebrate it now, but in a few moments I will tell you more of what World Emoji Day is about.
- But first, I wanted to see if you can help share what you think about emojis.

(1B) THEN ADMINISTERING THIS SURVEY:

INSTRUCTIONS: Please respond to the questions on this survey with your thoughts on each of these points.

1. How many times a day would you estimate you use emojis?
2. What would you say are the three emojis you use the most?
3. How would you describe in words what those three emojis mean?
4. What would you say are reasons why you use emojis?
5. Would you say you think of emojis as just for fun – or can they help with communication?
6. Would you say you use emojis more with writing, or by themselves?
7. When you use emojis with writing, what would you say your purpose is in doing that?
8. How useful do you think emoji are in written communication?
9. Are there times when you think emojis should not be used?
10. Do you think there are ways that using emojis in school work could help with learning?
11. Do you believe combining emojis with written communication makes the message clearer or more confusing?
12. What would you say is the reason you believe what you answered for the previous question?

(2) AFTER THE SURVEY:

- So now let me show you how World Emoji Day is real – and a pretty big deal.
- *GO TO THE WEBSITE for World Emoji Day (<https://worldemojiday.com>) SCROLL DOWN THROUGH IT AS GO THROUGH THESE POINTS*
- So every July 17, people celebrate World Emoji Day. Do you know why they picked that date?
– Because that is the date that is on the Calendar emoji!
- So they celebrate on Twitter and Instagram and TikTok and Facebook and more.
- Here is a little of what I mean. *PLAY THE VIDEO ON How are people celebrating World Emoji Day?*

- They also have the World Emoji Awards, and each year they crown the Most Popular New Emoji, the Most Anticipated Emoji and the Most 2022 Emoji – or whatever that year is. This year they will crown new ones for all those.
- There are lots of ways to participate in World Emoji Day.
- World Emoji Day has its own anthem. *PLAY THE VIDEO FOR THAT.*
- Some famous people have birthdays on World Emoji Day. Is July 17 any of your birthdays?
- People have World Emoji Day parties and dress up as their favorite emojis. Which one would you dress up as?
- *SCROLL ON DOWN – NOTING OTHER ITEMS IF TIME.*
- *AT THE BOTTOM:* And it is all brought to us by Emojipedia. Did you know emojis have their own encyclopedia?
- You can see all kinds of things there – like their definitions of emojis. And the Latest Approved Emojis. And the Latest Draft Emojis. *CAN GO TO THE LINKS FOR THOSE.*
- Which brings up something else – who decides what becomes an emoji?
- Well, it is called Unicode, which is part of the Unicode Consortium. It is about 25 years old and is involved in many aspects of emojis, especially in deciding which ones become officially approved. *CAN GO TO THE LINKS FOR THAT.*
- OK, well, we will have some other ways for you to learn more about emojis soon, and especially ways for you to think about how you use emojis with writing.

(3) ADMINISTER THIS MULTIMODAL WRITING ASSIGNMENT:

INSTRUCTIONS: Complete the prompts below by adding a combination of words and emojis for each one.

1. When Aubrey realized she had lost her phone again, _____
_____.
2. Liam could never convince his parents that _____
_____.
3. Madison preferred to spend weekends _____
_____.
4. The best way to understand me, Malique always said, is to _____
_____.
5. The minute school was over for the day, Noah _____
_____.
6. For Aiden, the big question about life was _____
_____.

7. The last place anyone would ever find Claire was _____
_____.
8. As the morning sun rose, Jacob opened his eyes and remembered _____
_____.
9. Once again for Aaliyah, the break for lunch meant _____
_____.
10. No matter what anyone said, Nora _____
_____.
11. There was this one day when Kaylee _____
_____.
12. I hate to tell you this, Jordan said, but _____
_____.
13. I should be President, Alexis thought, and first of all I would _____
_____.
14. No one expected Ezra to walk in the house and announce _____
_____.
15. Logan believed that once upon a time _____
_____.

(4) ADMINISTER THIS MULTIMODAL WRITING ASSIGNMENT as a followup to the one just above:

INSTRUCTIONS: In this copy of your previous writing with words and emojis, go back and this time replace the emojis with words, phrases, or sentences that best represent the meaning of the emojis translated into words.

<<For this one, the students will be provided with digital copies of their work on the previous multimodal writing assignment, so that they can complete this exercise with it.>>

(5) ADMINISTER THIS REFLECTIVE ESSAY on what students feel they have learned about the use of emoji and their thoughts on how emoji can be helpful in making written communication more effective:

INSTRUCTIONS: Now that we have spent time talking and thinking about using emojis in writing, please put a few of your thoughts on paper in a reflective essay. Write about what you feel you have learned overall. Some other points to reflect upon can include: How does it change the way you make meanings when you use both words and emojis together – compared to just using one or the other? What do words do that emojis can't? What do emojis do that words can't? Do you feel you think more about what meanings emojis add when you use them?