

To Grow What You Know, Expand How You Show:

Graduate Students Explore Multigenre

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Abstract

In an effort to impart and demonstrate the importance to my pre-service teachers of creating a curriculum that encourages inquiry, infuses technology, utilizes authentic means of assessment, and pushes for a critical stance, I asked them to construct a multigenre research project. Through this process, students learned specific and transferable skills for creating a classroom environment that leaps past rote memorization of isolated skills and into deep-level, cultural understandings that promote the development of informed and contributive citizens.

Introduction

“Men's fundamental attitudes toward the world are fixed by the scope and qualities of the activities in which they partake” (Dewey, 1916, p.135). In order to promote Dewey’s sentiment, teacher educators must construct assignments that challenge pre-service teachers to engage in authentic and critical tasks within the framework of a citizen-building, democracy-promoting curriculum. Specifically, I want my students to construct a classroom environment that fosters inquiry among students, infuses technology with learning, pushes for a critical stance, and moves from standardized to authentic assessments. In response to this goal, I created a multigenre research project for the pre-service teachers in my graduate-level Constructivist and Developmental Teaching class.

A multigenre research project is what happens when a writer’s contemplations deepen and writing begins to take the form of a dance, choreographed with unique steps that work in conjunction with each other and convey a story to the audience. Romano (2000) explains it this way, “Each genre is a color slide, complete in itself, possessing its own satisfying composition,

but also working in concert with the others to create a single literary experience” (p. 4). Specifically, what is multigenre? First, multigenre has at its foundation a unifying topic: This topic can be content specific such as *Ancient Egypt* or more personal like *My Journey to Africa*. Second, the story of that particular topic (every topic, even the most mundane, has a story) is told not through separate chapters but through genres. For example, *My Journey to Africa* may open with a journal entry that documents my anticipations of travel, followed by a poem written in two voices, juxtaposing my preconceived notions of my host family with their preconceived notions of me, and concluded with a narrative history of my destination village. In this example, each genre has the strength to stand alone but tells a more detailed story when brought together under a unifying theme or topic. Third, each genre is selected not because it is stipulated by the assignment but because it fits with the telling. For example, what better way to introduce the readers to my African travels than a journal entry and how much better to simultaneously compare and contrast cultural perspectives than a poem for two voices? Again, within a multigenre activity, content drives genre selection. Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, multigenre exudes voice, told in ways that tap into the very being of the teller (Cohen, 2004; Moulton, 1999).

This begs the question: Does this tie to the personal distort factual knowledge? My response: Facts are inherently linked to perspectives, and multigenre research rests on the qualitative principle of multiple realities or the belief that facts are birthed from the experiences of the teller and the context of the telling, as is different from the quantitative belief of one divine truth (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). So, does multigenre research possess biases? Of course, so does all research; it just makes these biases transparent and explicit. In summary, a unifying topic, told through various genres, based on content, and exuding personal voice characterizes multigenre research.

In Support of a Citizen-Building, Democracy-Promoting Curriculum

The political climate of today’s schools YELLS, “Teach isolated facts through rote memorization and your students will ‘pass the test’,” but amidst these horrid yells are disconcerting whispers that quietly proclaim what we already know as educators, “Those facts may equal passing test scores, but they will not prepare my students to enter their world as forward thinking, critically reflective, informed citizens who look at their world and demand change. In an effort to move past the yells and into the whispers, I challenge my pre-service teachers to engage in inquiry, to infuse technology, to push for a critical stance, and to assess the success of their process through authentic means, all encapsulated within the framework of a multigenre research project.

Multigenre

Three strapping boys introduced me to a multigenre approach to research. They were pictured on the front cover of Romano’s (1995) *Writing with Passion: Life Stories, Multiple Genres*, a personal recollection of childhood told through words and visuals, told through genres. It was the first time I saw format bring out story as opposed to constructing boundaries. This was Romano’s own story, but he has also written about the process in *Blending Genre, Altering Style* (2000), in which he shared the story of his students moving from grade school through college, studying the relationship between various genres, or ways of telling, and conceiving pieces that

were bold and innovative. He reflected on the importance of going beyond the traditional sharing of words, contending that, “Changing the mode of expression adds richness and complexity to thinking, catapults us and our audience into other ways of knowing” (p. 172).

Allen (2004) also recognized the importance of sharing in new ways. In her work with fifth graders, she noticed that when she and the cooperating teacher required the students to write a traditional research paper as a precursor to their multigenre, students’ voices were lost. Though the topics of the traditional papers and multigenres were the same, the perspectives and attitudes of the children metamorphosed between assignments. The multigenre brought out the personal connections, the power, and the passion the teachers sought. Thus, they changed the approach, allowing the multigenre to grow from its unique beginning and not out of tradition. As Romano (2000) reminds us, “The most significant learning comes when students launch their own dives and teach the teacher” (p. 172). Allen (2001) also discussed the importance of the personal in multigenre. Research is not neutral; it grows out of perspective. A multigenre approach to research makes this perspective direct and driving, calling the reader into the writer’s personal relationship with the topic. For example, one of Allen’s fifth graders chose to study Evita. This young girl was born in Argentina, spoke Spanish, and throughout her childhood, had listened to her father discuss the topic. Her paper was bold and original, different from the contrived pieces of her classmates who lacked intimate ties to their topics.

Pultinas (2001), a high school teacher, found similar results when the personal was made central. For a unit on the Vietnam War, he asked students to construct a multigenre project on a related topic of interest. Kim, one of his students, found this connection when her review of the literature revealed an almost exclusive focus on the role of men. She explained, “It really upset me after some research, that the men were the only ones being represented. I looked in so many books and the story of the women was begging to be told” (p. 3). Kim offered a strong telling of the women’s stories because she personally connected to their silence.

In the end, teachers and researchers alike choose to embark on multigenre research because it allows them to tell stories about people, places, and things that could not have been told with the same passion had they been asked to work within the confines of traditional writing and research. They tell these stories not because they had been assigned but because they are personally significant. This link to the personal gives their multigenres voice and allows them the investment necessary to walk through uncertainty and into new understandings.

A Belief in the Power of Inquiry

As learners, we are naturally inquisitive. I want to know why the war in Iraq started, how to deal with a mother with borderline personality disorder, and what I can do to better prepare my preschooler for kindergarten, and these are just my questions for today; tomorrow will be a new crop. So, imagine what our students would ask when given a whole semester to investigate their wondering, the same wondering that is often squelched by state-mandated curriculum and standardized testing.

According to Fertig (2005), inquiry-centered curriculums challenge students to locate, analyze, and reflect on historical findings and elucidate their interpretations through the creation of historical narratives. These narratives require students to develop historical empathy, or the ability to understand the peculiarity of the past, a necessary skill for contextualizing problems and identifying their relevance in today’s world (Fallace, Biscoe, & Perry, 2007; Fertig, 2005). This inquiry perspective moves students away from a “static formulated version” of the past and

negates the presumption that history is inevitable and therefore not deserving of critical analysis (Fertig, 2005, p. 3). Instead, students start to see history in terms of issues and big ideas, the types of ideas that have shaped our current situations and give insight into future happenings (DeWitt & Freie, 2005). This understanding challenges our students to think and act like historians and civic leaders who want to understand the past, so they can actively direct the future—their future.

The Infusion of Technology

Technology offers social studies classrooms immediate access to primary documents, databases, research articles, and insights into current affairs. These benefits, however, often go unrecognized in local school systems due to classroom teachers' lack of sufficient training along with a minimum comfort level and a limited availability of resources. For example, Bailey, Shaw, and Hollifield (2006) observed that preservice teachers participating in the local school classroom spearheaded the primary integration of technology. In an attempt to bolster this future integration, Lee (2006) asked his preservice teachers to locate, analyze, and write about the types and prevalence of "digital civic resources" (DCR) to include blogs, frequently updated to provide dynamic vehicles for personal and group sharing; websites, partisan, promotional, and single issue electronic venues; and databases, mass collections of categorical information. Lipscomb and Doppen (2005) used the STAIRS framework to guide their secondary preservice teachers' technological skill development. The framework calls for the incorporation of **social studies** content, the training for **technical** skills, the utilization of **authentic assessment**, the **integration** of technology, the use of teacher modeling to develop students' technological **readiness**, and the application of standards as set by the National Council of Social Studies (NCSS) and the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE).

A Move from Standardized to Authentic Assessment

McLuhan's (1964) words "the medium is the message" often imply that the medium, which is "the thing," exerts influence which supersedes the content, or "the action," as opposed to his intended argument that over time, mediums can pack social consequences which are inadvertent and unforeseen in their original introduction (Federman, 2004). The message, according to McLuhan (1964), is "the change of scale or pace or pattern" that a new innovation "introduces into human affairs" (p. 8). For example, the medium of the car, with an intended action to increase the pace and space of human mobility, inadvertently reduced individuals' level of physical activity, resulting in weight gain (Federman, 2004).

From within this framework, it can be said that the No Child Left Behind mandate's omission of social studies as one of the areas for which teachers are to be held accountable has deemphasized, according to Bailey, Shaw, and Hollifield (2006), the schools' role in citizen building and shifted teacher education programs' emphasis to mathematics and literacy. This shift has left preservice teachers with few strategies to draw upon for bucking a politicized climate that values the memorization of isolated and disconnected facts. In an effort to overcome this unintended consequence of sweeping, summative, formalized assessment, we must zoom out of the disconnected and mundane into the real-life connections that promote acts of positive change. To accomplish this lofty goal, a shift to authentic assessment is necessary (DeWitt & Freie, 2005). Forms of authentic assessment include physical tasks, like a reenactments of a Civil

War battle; a set of procedures, such as the analysis of primary documents; and products, like the creation of e-portfolios, which are purposeful collections of student-assessed work, documenting growth over time, and capsulated in an electronic format (Sunal, McCormick, Sunal, & Shwery, 2005).

A Push for a Critical Stance

For preservice teachers to inculcate the importance and power of an inquiry-based curriculum, authentic assessment, and technology in the social studies curriculum, they must develop the skills necessary to critically evaluate and question current curricular content. Guiding questions might include the following:

Are “issued centered” units incorporated? For example, research documents the values of an “issued centered units.” O’Brien and Kohlmeier (2004) challenged their preservice teachers to investigate the pressing issues faced by the Kansas legislature, survey their high school practicum students’ level of interests in each issue, and design a web-based project that allows the high school students to utilize technology as a tool for civic understanding and social justice.

Is “social action” seen as a textbook or put forth and used as an active tool of change? Crocco (2001) advocates engaging students in research units that address complex issues, such as school violence, domestic abuse, and homophobia, incorporating letter-writing campaigns, campus surveys, lobbying efforts, and volunteer services. She warns that, “at a secondary teacher preparation level, the focus is often on creating subject matter specialists rather than teachers concerned with caring for the whole child” (Crocco, 2001, p. 70). Infused in this call to action is a critical evaluation of the value-laden statements put forth in textbooks and carried through the hidden curriculum—statements that silently degrade and marginalize groups and individuals on the basis of race, class, gender, and sexuality, putting them at greater risk for developing psychosocial and physical problems (Crocco, 2001).

Do my student teachers have an opportunity to participate in the types of instruction I hope they will one day incorporate into their own social studies curriculum, or am I simply promoting the linear and exclusive definition of school? This was the critical question I put forth when I designed the multigenre research project as an attempt to establish a belief in inquiry, infuse technology into the curriculum, move from standardized to authentic assessment, and push forward and for a critical stance, and _____?

The Class, the Students, and the Project

During the course of my research, I taught two sections of a graduate course entitled, Constructivist and Developmental Teaching; both sections were comprised predominately of Caucasian females—in section one, 18 women and 1 male were enrolled, while section two contained 21 women and 3 males. The preservice teachers in my class had all earned either a Bachelor’s of Arts or Science degree during the previous spring semester and had returned the following fall to complete the fifth-year Master’s of Science in Elementary Education program. They spent the fall semester taking graduate courses which included their practicum placement, and the spring semester, they were involved in student teaching on a full-time basis. Upon graduation, most secured a full-time elementary school teacher position in the public schools.

The primary assignment for my Constructivist and Developmental Teaching course was to create a multigenre research project that documented inquiry, utilized technology (in both

research and presentation), and included evidence of thoughtful and critical reflection on the process and level of learning. In order to assess this project together, we developed a rubric that left room for innovation while identifying important criteria as determined by the entire class.

Student Inquiry

We began as Ray (1999) and Zinsser (1988) suggested—through inquiry. We discussed the types of genres we wanted to use and studied the authors who were masters of these crafts. For example, Fleischman’s (1988) *Joyful Noises: Poems for Two Voices* and Hall and Moser’s (1994) *I am the Dog, I am the Cat* taught us how to juxtapose two perspectives in order to create a poetic dialogue. Lyon’s (1999) poem *Where I Come From* taught us the importance of personal voice while sharing individual experiences. We also looked at magazines to see how editors brought topics together in themed issues and how authors of children and adult literature structured text and played with words (Ray, 1999). We then turned to those who had embarked on similar journeys, such as Allen’s (2001) university students who worked with upper-elementary school children as they constructed their own multigenre research projects and Cate’s (2000) ninth-grade students who found they did not need a list of specific topics because they could easily create their own. Drawing upon the expertise of our mentors, we inquired into ways to approach our own multigenre research. In the following section, I discuss the major student questions that arose and the decisions we made TOGETHER to address each challenge.

These were the students’ questions that directed the class. I neither began nor ended with concrete answers, just an appreciation for the craft and the journey.

1. How do we select a topic? There are a variety of ways to address the issue of topic selection. We agreed immediately not to have one narrowly defined class topic like *Influential Civil Rights Supreme Court Cases*. So what were the options? We debated two possibilities: (a) We should come up with one broad topic such as “Civil Rights” and explore this topic according to our own experiences, or (b) each person should investigate a unique and unrelated topic of cultural significance. We chose option two. The reason for this selection rested in our purpose—exploring multigenre as opposed to covering specified curricula content. However, we discussed that, as future elementary school teachers, we should challenge our students to use multigenre as an avenue for studying a broad but specified topic like the Civil War or Ancient Egypt. Some of the topics investigated include the following: The Boeing Stearman Aircraft, Buddhism, China, and the Genocide in Rwanda.

2. What genres do we use? In response to my students’ question, “Will you give us a list of genres we can use?” I abruptly said, “No,” startling even myself. Then I thought through what my intuition already knew: There are many genres—ones that go beyond the traditional poetry and historical fiction—and I feared a list would limit my students’ conceptions, and it was important to stress that multigenre work is about thinking large. Instead, we examined the genres we saw in books, magazines, and the environment, and we discussed how to integrate them into our own research. The list that follows represents some of the genres students utilized, and though I am hesitant to include it for the reasons cited above, I feel it speaks to their expansive thought.

- 3D Models
- A Day in the Life
- Advertisements
- Artifacts
- Audiotapes
- Book Reviews
- Brochures
- Calendars
- Case Studies
- Children’s Stories
- Children’s Work Samples

- Collages
- Commercials
- Diary Entries
- Dances
- Demonstrations
- Dioramas
- Drawings
- Field-Notes
- Food Products: Cakes, Cadbury Eggs, Etc.
- Glossaries
- FBI Case Files
- Histories
- Interviews
- Invitations
- Journal Entries
- Letters
- Magazines
- Maps
- Masks
- Menus
- Music
- Narratives
- Newspaper Articles
- Obituaries
- Paintings
- Papier-Mâché Sculptures
- Personal Narratives
- Photographic Essays
- Photographs
- Plays
- Poetry (Shape, Acrostic, and Traditional)
- PowerPoints
- Propaganda
- Readers Theater
- Recipes
- Reflections
- Sculptures
- Scrapbooks
- Self-Assessments
- Sewing Patterns
- Streams of Consciousness
- Table of Contents
- Ceramic Tiles
- Webpages
- Videos

For example, Joanne used multiple genres to tell the story of the genocide in Rwanda, including a radio announcement to bring her audience close to the pain of the Rwandan people. This genre would likely not have been included on a traditional list and the project would have lost power and impact without it.

Joanne’s Radio Announcement. We must rise. We must rise. We must rise to fight the Hutus. The Hutus are coming to take our land and return Rwanda to Feudalism. The Hutus are coming to kill us and to reclaim their dominant role in society. The Hutu people are killing our land. We, as the Tutsi people, cannot allow this to happen. We must defend our rights and fight those that want to oppress us. The Hutu people are lying to our faces. We cannot stand for this injustice. How much longer should we wait around for the Hutu people to kill us?

3. How many and what categories of genres should we include? This two-prong question arose repeatedly throughout the semester, and the answers evolved as each student delved into his or her own project. Initially, we agreed that each project should include a minimum of five genres, but several students protested, explaining that the uniqueness of the multigenre approach required substantial flexibility since some “stories” could sufficiently be told through three genres while others required ten or twelve; therefore, neither minimums nor maximums were established. We then debated as to whether each project should utilize broad categories of genres, such as poetic, visual, or narrative, but again, the concluding decision was that different topics called for different emphasis so that restrictions should not be made, rather a concerted effort should be given to use genre variation in order to widen the teller’s perspective and audience understanding.

4. How do we ensure that a sufficient level of factual knowledge is shared, and how do we delineate the source of reference? As students explored examples of multigenre research, they noticed several instances which relied heavily on personal perspective with few references to peer-reviewed research. The class agreed that while it was important to keep the personal voice of the teller, it was imperative to present each topic’s historical evidence and perspective.

To accomplish this goal, they stressed that each genre must cite the primary source of information, following the American Psychological Association format (APA), in order to clearly delineate between factual accounts and artistic license. In the end, each student situated his or her topic in its historic context, provided facts necessary for understanding, and included perspectives and interpretations that spoke to the personal. The manner in which each student accomplished this goal varied.

5. *How can we honor each genre's separateness and also elicit meaningful connections when they are viewed together as a whole?* Each genre is selected because it naturally melds with the content. In this sense, each piece is designed for a specific purpose unique to the information being shared. However, in multigenre research, each genre is unified through a common topic; therefore, an inherent connection exists, and this connection should be clear. How do we define connection? As one student explained, "I know it when I see it." In order to hone their "seeing" skills, the students reviewed examples of multigenre projects and discussed the nature of each project's flow or lack of and brainstormed suggestions for improvement. Through our investigation, we found examples of projects that progressed as a chronological telling of events, ones that fought each other through counterarguments, and others that opened in the general and then deconstructed the pieces. We learned that content should direct the approach but the framework should be evident.

6. *How should we demonstrate our knowledge when some experiences are too large and vibrant to be captured with pen and paper?* This question arose toward the end of the journey and was packaged in panic. With the freedom to explore various genres came the benefit and sometimes hindrance of a variety of forms, many which leapt over the page. For example, Paul's project on the Stearman Aircraft took him on an actual flying lesson, which he documented through videotape, and Renee explained the anatomy of the human body and its cultural relationship to dance, using a self-constructed wooden model. We learned from each other that genre selection and presentation should be mind broadening, and the necessity of not foregoing an experience because we were unsure of how to convey the exploration. Instead, we devoted ten minutes of each class period to sharing students' research endeavors and receiving peer feedback on various possibilities for documentation.

7. *How do we house our projects when some of the genres leap past the boundaries of the page?* Students tackled this issue in a variety of ways. Some were able to simply put their multigenre research projects in a three-ring binder while others went beyond the traditional. For example, Hannah explored the cultural tradition of basket making and contained her genres in a carefully crafted book made to look like a basket. Karen explored quilting and secured her genres in a hope chest, including the culminating genre—the class quilt. Today, the quilt hangs on my office wall. Over time, the students' once overwhelming questions became self-directive, and roadblocks occurred only when they forgot to think past the page. Once open to new ways of knowing the packaging was clear, it was an outgrowth not an appendage of their research.



Figure 1. Hannah shares her basket book.



Figure 2. Karen shows her hope chest.

The Incorporation of Technology Encourages Critical Reflection

The students in my class were adept in their knowledge and application of technology. They talked about how databases, websites, blogs, and political chat rooms could offer information in regards to their specific topic. With technology comes the embedded question of whose voices are loud, degraded, or left out of the conversation. To this concern, students spoke in excitement about how these different voices posed possibilities not problems, because viewed in their entirety, through contrasting and multiple sites, they presented topics like *The War in Iraq* and *Single Sex Parenting* in a circular format, coming from different perspectives and audiences, and when seen in their entirety, offered the reader more complex and thoughtful ways to know the world. After all, this is what social studies is about: thoughtful, objective, and

critical analysis of mass and diverse content material in order to solidify, update, and change personal and historical perspective.

A Call for Authentic Assessment

The approach to gathering, learning, and sharing information should direct the ways in which the gathering, learning, and sharing is assessed. One of the strength of a multigenre approach to research is that it allows the writer freedom in exploration and documentation. This freedom should direct the assessment process. Since this particular multigenre endeavor was designed in collaboration with my students, it made sense that the assessment should also be in partnership. As a class, we decided to use two forms of authentic assessment. First, the class constructed a rubric to guide the evaluative process, because it provided them (as the students) and me (as the professor) the opportunity to specify what we valued and the freedom to leave those specifications broad in an effort to honor each researcher's unique approach. Second, each student wrote a personal reflection, documenting his or her learning and critiquing personal growth.

Class constructed rubric. Our first step was to make a list that encapsulated these values (Hansen, 1998). The list included topics covered in the above questions, such as a variety of genres explored, sufficient level of factual knowledge represented, and the source of information clearly delineated. I translated the information the class had shared into a rubric form and presented drafts at the next two class meetings. During those periods, we examined the content, edited the wording, and added and deleted certain criterion. For example, the students suggested that we include: "Level of creativity or willingness of the author to stretch and explore." This suggestion was incorporated into my third and final draft of the rubric, which received unanimous class approval. It was my intention to use this rubric in conjunction with a peer review process in which each student would assess the projects of two classmates; however, this suggestion was met with heated debate, and succumbing to class demands, I withdrew the request. In hindsight, I wish I had made a more concerted effort to sway public opinion, for I think it would have been a valuable experience for the students and could have served as a model of strong and cooperative classroom practice for their future elementary school classroom.

Multi-Genre Research Rubric			
	Possible Points	Points Earned	
1	5		Introduction gets the reader ready for the reading
2	10		Sufficient level of factual knowledge represented
3	10		Variety of genres explored
4	10		Each genre selected naturally fits the information being shared
5	15		Quality of each genre presented
6	5		Each genre clearly delineates its source of information
7	10		Overall presentation of genres follow a logical and cohesive organizational framework
8	15		Written reflection documenting the learning process and experience using a multi-genre format
9	10		Level of creativity or willingness of the author to stretch and explore
10	5		Variety of sources used to gather information

11	5		Bibliography in APA format
	Possible Total: 100	Earned Total:	

Figure 4. Class-constructed multigenre rubric.

Personal reflection. Each student, as part of his or her multigenre experience, was asked to write a personal reflection on the process; though most selected narrative forms, some stepped outside of tradition. Their ingenuity excited me. One student composed a poem; another constructed a KWL chart; one drew a visual learning equation, and others used guiding metaphors. Four themes emerged within and across students' reflections. Two involved topic selection; one addressed the use of different genres, and the last reflected upon the applicability of this project to classroom teaching in elementary schools.

First, students believed that investment in topic was crucial. The freedom to choose provided their buy-in to the process, as Noah explains:

A great strength of the project was that it granted me the flexibility to move my project from an analytic experience to a more personal endeavor. In addition, it offered me the opportunity to try some new techniques... I used video editing equipment, interviewed a professional,.... and more.

Second, students found that freedom in topic selection allowed them to forge a personal connection to their research; for example, Paul reflects upon his newly gained familial insight:

Through this experience...I felt a certain connection with my grandfather, who flew these kinds of planes many years ago,...this experience reinforces my belief that it is not possible to fully appreciate what an experience means if one cannot internalize what has occurred, reflect, and then finally connect.

Third, students thought that working across different genres allowed them the freedom to think large as Renee imparts, "Dance is the embodiment of creativity, and what better way to present information relevant to a dancer than through creative means?" Fourth, students spoke about the applicability of their multigenre project to elementary school teaching as Ashlie conferred, "I hope to use multigenre exploration in my own classroom, so that my students will be able to explore many different avenues to becoming familiar with a topic and thus let their strengths and interests shine through," and Layton shared, "I think it's a great way for students to express their individuality and make something that could be very boring, like a research paper, come to life and be fun!" Together, we discovered the personal empowerment embedded within choice of topic selection and how incorporating multiple genres encouraged expansion of thought and served as a model of creativity for future classroom teaching.

Today's History: The Genocide in Rwanda

To provide the reader with an example of the depth of thought and variety of presentation required by this assignment, I have included excerpts from Joanne's multigenre research on the

genocide in Rwanda. She presented her project to the class in the form of a WebQuest. This multigenre, like many, is distorted when presented in the linear, but it still provides the reader with a jumping-off point for understanding. In the following section, I include four genres from her research: a memoir, a stream of consciousness, a graphic depiction, and a poem.

Memoir

Thinking of times that are gone
Remembering times that have passed on
Remembering the good
Recalling the bad
Some are joyous, but some are sad
Trying to recollect the ones that are close
Realizing some have slipped away
Some act as if they are a shadow
It follows you around and festers inside
Others are like an ephemeral storm
It comes for a little period of time and then drifts away fast
Hoping ones in the future are not like ones in the past.

Thoughts before Dying: Stream of Consciousness

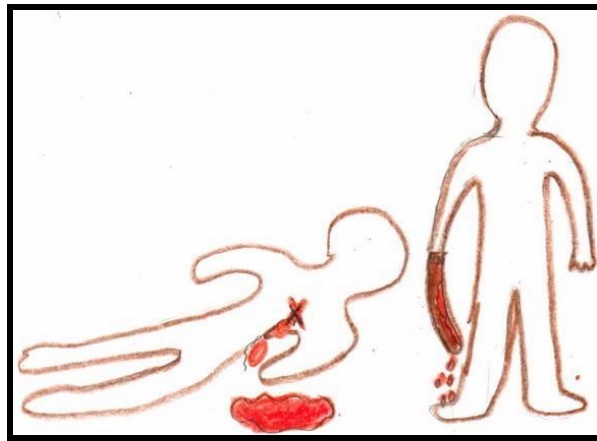
Please... Please... Please! I am only seventeen years old. I have my whole life ahead of me. I want to see and explore the world. I want to live life to its fullest. I have so many thoughts running through my head. The thought of dying this moment is shaking me to its core. I cannot believe that this is it. I cannot believe that this is the last time that I will see life for what it is. It is the last time that I will take a breath and see my family. In my mind at this moment, moments before I am going to slip away, I have these thoughts. Thoughts of how do I escape? Escape, Escape...this man, who is going to kill me. If I live or die, it is in his hands. Oh my God! Sounds, sounds, and more sounds they are coming from everywhere. Screams of the dying. I cannot take it. I will never understand. I just don't understand. Why? Why? How can people be filled with so much hatred? Why are people that look just like me saved, while I hover and dart and try to escape the inescapable?

I cannot believe that this is it. My life will be over and no longer will I be consumed with anger and fear. Okay...hold yourself together. Stop crying and accept the fact that I am going to die. No...I will not accept the fact that I am going to die. People always say that dying is a part of life and that it happens to everyone. I do not believe that. Life is not supposed to be taken from you. It is not supposed to be that one day you wake up and that night you go to sleep forever.

I feel that I have now prepared myself for dying. Wait...no I have not prepared myself for dying. How do you prepare yourself for dying? The moment this man swings that machete I am gone. How do you prepare for that? I never got to say goodbye to my family or friends. This is it. This is my whole life that is now over in just a matter of

minutes. He will swing that machete and I will lean over and slowly have the blood drain out of my body. I will die never saying goodbye. I will die leaving many circles unfinished and many moments untouched.

I guess my tears will not stop this killer. My body is becoming so numb both physically and mentally. Well...I guess this is it. He is swinging. Oh my God... this it. I will be gone soon. Please... Please... don't let me go. Life is so precious that every moment must truly be blessed. You never know what tomorrow will bring, but you can hold on to today. I never want to let go, but I just feel like I am slipping away. The trust that I once had in life and spent so long building will be a distant memory of the past soon. Goodbye Mom. Goodbye Dad. I don't have to suffer anymore. Goodbye All!



Where I'm From: Past and Present

Past

I once was from savanna grasslands, from black coffee and smelly pyrethrum
 I once was from the dirt of the fields (brown. smelling like cattle)
 I once was from Lake Kivu, the lake of life whose precious water feeds the fertile fields.

I once was from bitter tilapia and sweet wat, from Great Rift Valley and Virunga Volcano
 I once was from the green "land of a thousand hills," whose endless beauty gave me
 salvation

I once was from loud colorful festivals and ceremonies, that were filled with rhythms of
 passion.

I once was from Tutsi tradition, flavorful tea and infinite demanding agriculture work
 From the soothing sounds of the language of Kinyarwanda and the joys of being with
 mom and dad
 From my mind's detaching memories, of hope, dreams, and the life of beyond.

Memories that are fading...

Memories that are becoming tainted, filled with desperation and destruction.

Present

I am from jagged machetes, from dried blood and sour sweat
I am from burning flesh (black, smelling like rotten meat)
I am from the refugee village, the place of long faces whose people just want to give up.

I'm from rape and salty tears, from drunken Hutu killers
I'm from a child of exile, whose been left to find a path
I'm from breathing and running, from hiding and escaping death.

I'm from trying to hold my head above water
I'm from skin and bones from seeing my people be mercifully cut like paper dolls.

I'm from a shattered culture, from hanging limbs
From my mom's cries at night and holding my dad as he falls into a deep sleep forever
From hearing screams of the devil as I fall asleep.

I'm from an aged life whose cherished memories of the past are now forgotten
I'm from a life of bewilderment, black holes, and hopelessness, who wishes that no one
witnesses what I have.

--Structure of poem taken from George Ella Lyon

Final Thoughts

As I embarked on our multigenre research project, I learned important lessons as they relate to the *practice* rather than the *theory* of constructivism. First, learning involves all facets of the mind and body as Patrick exemplified when he meditated each day for his research on *The History of Buddhism*. Second, real learning involves authentic tasks as Tiffany realized when she studied the cultural significance and process of *Mosaic Tiling*, in part by constructing her own artistic representation. Third, knowledge can be represented in variety of ways as Laura conveyed when she used sign language to share her research on *Cultural Communicative Tools*. Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, when students are given freedom of topic, approach, and presentation, they enthusiastically embark on self-directive quests that lead them to explore various sources of information to include written, visual, and digital text that present multiple perspectives and beg the analysis of a critical and questioning eye, demanding it to share the inherent biases and silenced voices often overshadowed and whitened-out of our social studies textbooks.

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